

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR CONGREGATIONS – 24 November

(Information quoted in *italics* was last checked week commencing 23 November)

Can we gather in worship?

As of 11.59pm Sunday 22 November a further easing of restrictions was announced

Up to 150 can gather indoors for worship subject to the density quotient of 1 person per 4sq metres. Ceremonial participants other than faith leaders are included in the capacity limits

Up to 300 can gather outdoors for worship subject to the density quotient of 1 person per 4sq metres. Ceremonial participants other than faith leaders are included in the capacity limits

A venue can only have one religious gathering at a time, whether indoor or outdoor and ceremonial participants other than faith leaders are included in the capacity limits.

People must be at least five metres away from the faith leader, reader, or prayer leader who has their mask off.

From a phone call to the DHHS COVID hotline: Members of the same household may sit together but at a distance of 1.5 metres from the next individual or family group [DHHS Job ID 289389]

A **COVID safe plan** must be in place. (See more on COVIDsafe plans later in this document)

Do I need to wear a mask to worship?

Face coverings remain mandatory indoors under the current restrictions except where a legal exemption applies. Information on wearing a face mask and legal exemptions can be found [HERE](#)

Can we worship across two spaces?

From a phone call this week with the DHHS COVID hotline: If a congregation has two separate rooms that do not overlap they can host up to 150 people across the two rooms so long as the density quotient condition of 1 person per 4sq metres is met and the overall number of people gathering is capped at 150. [DHHS Job ID 286319].

Can we participate in Holy Communion?

According to the Chief Health Officers advice dated 27 October (28 October for Regional Victoria) conducting a Eucharist service is permitted noting no sharing of crockery, utensil, vessels or other equipment is allowed.

In addition a phone call to DHHS this week advised that the pastor can move from one room to the other for the purpose of Communion Distribution [DHHS Job ID 289058]

Can I sing at a place of worship?

The DHHS COVID hotline provided the following information this week

Indoors small choirs or singers should only perform in well ventilated settings and must be limited to a maximum of 5 singers or wind instrument players. Performers must be 2 meters apart and 5 meters from the [congregation]. Singing outdoors is strongly recommended.

(It was noted that ventilation in the context of singing refers to open doors or windows. Use of fans is not advised in the context of singing in public indoors [DHHS Job ID 289058])

Can we recommence hospitality at worship?

At this stage tea and coffee and other hospitality should not be provided [DHHS Job ID 288629]

Can a pastor visit a person in their home for pastoral care and/or home communion?

The Victorian Government website provides the following information

'Faith leaders (in our context, pastors) can visit homes to provide religious guidance, to perform rituals or for care and compassionate reasons.'

While record keeping is usually in the context of the workplace building environment, because a pastoral visit is in the context of a workplace, record keeping for 28 days should still be maintained – for instance in a work diary or calendar for contact tracing purposes if needed. Physical distancing should still be maintained as far as is practicable with a person who is possibly mobility challenged.

Can lay workers or a pastoral care team visit a person in their home?

The Victorian Government website provides the following information

Up to 15 people may visit a home per day. Children are included in the visitor limit, but babies under the age of 12 months are not included in the visitor limit.

When you are preparing meals or caring for an elderly person you should be aware of the risks of transmitting coronavirus (COVID-19). Older people are especially vulnerable to coronavirus (COVID-19), so it is important you take extra steps to keep them safe. You should wear a face mask, maintain physical distancing and wash your hands regularly while visiting.

If you are delivering meals, think about leaving a package on their doorstep without making physical contact. If you are doing cleaning chores or other housework, have them sit somewhere comfortable away from you while you work, so you are not in close contact.

Make sure they are feeling well and ask them if they have enough of their regular medications whenever you visit. You should keep at least 1.5 metres distance between yourself and others wherever possible. You should wash your hands often.

While record keeping is usually in the context of the workplace building environment, because a pastoral visit is in the context of a workplace, record keeping for 28 days should still be maintained – for instance in a work diary or calendar for contact tracing purposes if needed.

Can we hold a prayer group or small group?

The Victorian Government website provides the following information:

Outdoor religious gatherings can be held near a place of worship with up to 300 people plus a faith leader. There are no group limits. While attending a religious gathering there are steps you need to take to keep yourself and others safe including not sharing food, drink or other items.

Indoor religious gatherings or prayer groups can be held with up to 150 people per facility. There are no group limits.

Religious gatherings and prayer groups held at a private residence are subject to the private gathering limit. This means the household itself plus up to 15 visitors per day (excluding any infants under 12 months old).

While attending a religious gathering there are steps you need to take to keep yourself and others safe including not sharing food, drink or other items.

Can we hold meetings for the business of the congregation?

This has not yet been addressed specifically

With regard to staff, ministry team or Church Council meetings [based on workplace restrictions]: It appears that small (10 or fewer) in-person meetings could now take place for organisations with less than 40 staff within the density requirements of 1 person per 4 square metres at a Church or Hall and individuals 1.5 meters apart. Face masks, hand sanitising, adequate cleaning and record keeping would be required given these are formal church meetings not social gatherings. An LCA sign in sheet template is available on the LCA and District website or [HERE](#) or a slightly modified version [HERE](#)

With regard to an AGM or SGM: at this stage the provisions for 'business' do not provide for an AGM to take place in person. The DCC approved guidelines for congregational AGMs and SGMs can be found [HERE](#).

Is travel limited?

*From 11.59pm 21 November, permits are required for everyone arriving in Victoria who lives in or has travelled through **South Australia**.*

As of 11.59pm Sunday 08 November there is no longer any restriction on travel within Victoria. The permitted worker scheme is no longer active.

What about funerals and weddings?

The Victorian Government website provides the following information

Weddings are limited to 150 attendees including the couple. The celebrant, photographer and other workers such as catering staff are not included in the 150-person cap.

Funerals are allowed with up to 150 people whether held indoors or outdoors. This limit doesn't include babies under 12 months of age, or the people required to conduct the funeral.

A wedding or funeral held in a private residence is limited to the members of the household and up to 15 visitors, plus the people required to conduct the ceremony.

What should be included in the Parish/Congregation COVIDsafe plan?

The COVIDsafe plan details the following:

- Ensure physical distancing and density limits (1 person per 4 square metres indoors)
- Wear a face mask
- Practise good hygiene
- Keep records and act quickly
- Avoid interactions in enclosed spaces
- Create workforce bubbles (will relate to volunteers also)

Click the [link](#) or go to <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/covidsafe-plan>

Information about the 4-metre square rule can be found [HERE](#)
<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/four-square-metre-rule-covid-19#what-is-the-four-square-metre-rule>

Please also use the District Communication Plan in case of a suspected or confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in your workplace. Download [HERE](#)

Staying Safe general guidelines

- Stay safe by washing your hands regularly,
- wearing a face mask when you leave home,
- coughing and sneezing into your elbow, and
- Keeping at least 1.5 metres from others.
- Keep your friends and family safe by meeting outdoors. There is a lower risk of spreading coronavirus (COVID-19) between people if you are outdoors.
- Face masks must be worn by all Victorians when they leave home, unless they have a lawful reason not to.
- If you have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) get tested and stay home. Stay at home if you feel unwell.

For more information on the easing of restrictions for Religion and Ceremony click the link [HERE](#) or go to <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/religion-and-ceremony-victoria-last-step>