

Health and Safety Guidelines as COVID 19 Restrictions Ease 2nd July Update

In response to the Federal Government's 3 Step Plan to ease COVID 19 restrictions the Premier has outlined what that means for WA in the coming weeks. For our Synod, Presbytery and Congregations it means that after June 6 groups of 100 attendees plus the 10 who lead the service/activities can once again attend indoor church services (with the ability to increase this number by splitting over numerous rooms), meetings and other activities however must observe the COVID 19 restrictions and manage infection control.

While we acknowledge that Church Councils will be feeling a strong pressure to return to familiar patterns of gathering, we wish to also affirm the sterling efforts that have been made to meet the needs of Congregations in this current space. Church Councils are encouraged to continue to exercise a high level of diligence and care in making their decisions, in the knowledge of the trust that has been placed in us all by God, and also to consider how smaller gatherings may be used in this time.

Church Councils are also reminded that the manner in which they continue to provide worship is one that is up to them, and that they hold a responsibility to ensure that any activity run by their Congregation is done in a safe manner. This Health and Safety Planning Guide and attached Safety Checklist* is designed to assist you in identifying, planning and effectively managing the risks and the realities of what is possible and what not in this current COVID 19 space. This tool, like the one provided by the government is for self-assessment. If the Church Council is satisfied that these conditions are met, they are to sign the document and retain it in their records. These documents are useful for training, and it is important to review such documents regularly with experience.

Some general considerations to assist your Council in making such decisions include:

- **personal hygiene practices**

Encourage good personal hygiene by setting up a hand sanitising station at the entry
Display signs reminding members and visitors about good personal hygiene practices (that is wash hands often with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser for at least 20 seconds and cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or use your elbow) and also to encourage people who have a fever or feel unwell to stay home. A version of such a sign has being developed and can be found here ([insert hyperlink](#)), with room for a contact to be given in order to support those who have chosen to self-isolate.

Supply of hand sanitiser/soap and disposable hand towels in the toilets

- **environmental cleaning/sanitising**

Ensure that environmental cleaning/sanitising of all surfaces is carried out before and after each gathering – refer to this really clear and helpful WA Health Department Environmental Cleaning Guide for homes and workplaces [here](#)

Set up a cleaning roster to cover each scheduled activity and display a list of all areas to be cleaned each time

Supply the correct cleaning equipment, the appropriate cleaning products and instructions on how and where to use them

- **social distancing, venue/premises capacity and number control**

Mark out a suitably spaced floor plan and place furniture to direct the flow of traffic when entering and leaving the premises to help attendees maintain the social distancing measure of 1.5 metres or two arms lengths from each other

Remember groups are limited to up to 100 people (with the option of an additional allocation of up to 10 people actively involved in leading worship and transmitting it) or fewer depending on the capacity of the venue and how many it can hold to maintain the 2 square metre distancing requirement per person

Smaller rooms where people gather will also need to have their capacities set and compliance monitored

Use ushers/greeters at the door who can confidently assist attendees so they know where to go and how to safely follow the COVID 19 infection control measures

Consider how to sensitively turn away attendees if the number limit is reached or set up other ways to manage/know how many people will be attending beforehand – not an easy challenge to handle

- **good record keeping**

It is important to have an attendance register for every activity held on the Church premises to ensure quick and accurate contact tracing can occur in the (unlikely) event a Church attendee has the COVID 19 virus or has been in contact with a person with the virus

For privacy purposes these registers and any other personal information collected about attendees must be stored in a securely locked cabinet in the church office

- **we need to refrain from some usual church member practices which are no longer safe**

Physically greeting each other with handshakes, hugs and cheek kissing will not only be a potential source of spread but also deeply uncomfortable for many in an environment where the awareness for the need for infection control is high– leaders need to model the alternative ways attendees can greet each other;

Passing the peace – the worship leader to give clear instructions at the start of this part in the service about how participants can safely do this

- **vulnerable members, participants/visitors and/or ministry agents/members in risk categories**

We are especially keen to ensure vulnerable persons/those in risk categories, whether ministry agents, members, or participants/visitors who we know are more vulnerable to the virus, feel safe, comfortable and confident to participate in church activities while maintaining personal safety, and that those who may be feeling symptoms of infection may be confident to withdraw from physical presence without feeling excluded from the life of our Church.

This means that, even when we are able to return to physically gathered worship, we will need to maintain the focus we have had on making sure that all of our people have access to worship and other activities via alternative means – for example live streaming, phone/Facebook prayer sessions, hard copy materials and/or pastoral visits.

Congregations may also have to consider providing transport for those who rely on public transport to get to services.

- **food service requirements**

Providing refreshments is difficult to manage safely so we are strongly discouraging this practice in the current restrictions. If any congregation is planning to provide refreshments or food provision as part of their ministry, this will need to occur under the direction and supervision of an appropriately trained and certified person through the Government recommended course (<https://hospitalityhygiene.com/>)

- **other special church activities**

For other special church activities affected by the easing of COVID 19 restrictions - weddings and funerals – check for extra/special measures required to carry out the activities safely by visiting these State Government websites: [WA Health Department](#) or the [Department of Premier and Cabinet](#)

- **arrangements for external or associated users of facilities**

Many congregations have external users of their facilities. As these are separate community groups or companies, these will be responsible for preparing their own COVID safety plans and implementing them

As the owner of the building, Church Councils will need to be assured that each group leaving the premises has left the building in a safe situation for the subsequent group or groups using the facility. For groups hiring the premises it would help to develop instruction sheets outlining infection control and social distancing/number control measures and request/require that they clean the premises at the end of each hire period as per the instructions.

Holy Communion

The sharing of communion in conjunction with a live streamed service is still allowed at this time, but the sharing of this sacrament in face to face services would need to be treated as an activity with shared food under the guidelines above.

General Precautions

In general people are now being encouraged to:

- start going back to work, education, food and retail businesses
- continue going out for personal exercise including now in gyms
- practise social distancing (keep at least 1.5 metres or two arms lengths from each other)
- attending medical appointments and compassionate visits.
- practise good personal hygiene (wash hands often with soap and water, or hand sanitiser and cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or use your elbow)
- stay at home as much as you can if you are in any of the vulnerable categories

COVID-19 Case in your Church

In the unlikely event a member of or visitor to your congregation contracts COVID-19 and has been attending activities at your church the following steps could be taken:

- cease physical face to face activities again and close the building immediately
- undertake thorough cleaning throughout the building
- identify anyone who has been in close contact with the person - these people will need to be notified and are required to self-isolate for a period of fourteen days.

COVID 19 Risk Management/Safety Plan

A [COVID 19 risk management/safety plan](#) is required for helping your congregation safely returning to much less restricted church activities. You can contact Uniting Church Insurance Services, the Culture of Safety team and /or the Presbytery Resource Team members for assistance with this Plan.

*See attached safety checklist

Appendix 1

COVID 19 Safety Plan Checklist May 2020

Action	Details	Response
Managing Personal Hygiene	<p>Do you have a hand sanitising station set up at the entrance to your church/premises/venue?</p> <p>Do you have hand sanitiser pump/wipes and disposable hand towel in all toilets? Bins around to dispose of used tissues?</p> <p>Signs displayed at the entrance - about good hand and respiratory hygiene practices and also about staying home if you have a fever, sneezing and coughing or feel unwell or are in a high risk category? (List the risk categories)</p>	<p>Yes or Need to follow up</p> <p>Yes or Need to follow up</p> <p>Yes or Need to follow up</p>
Cleaning/Sanitising Premises	<p>Have you developed a clear and detailed set of cleaning instructions based on the WA Health Dept Environmental Cleaning Guidelines?</p> <p>Have you considered and included <i>all</i> the surfaces/areas that require this specialised cleaning regime in your premises?</p> <p>Have you identified enough volunteers who can carry out this rigorous, continual cleaning regime for as long as required?</p> <p>Have they been briefed, handed a set of instructions and/or are experienced in this type of forensic cleaning?</p> <p>Do you have the required cleaning equipment and products required for the job and data management sheets for any harsh chemicals?</p>	<p>Yes or Need to follow up</p>
Social Distancing/ Premises Capacity/ and Numbers of Attendees	<p>Have you developed a suitably spaced floor plan inc placement of furniture to direct the flow of traffic during the activity and when entering and leaving the premises?</p> <p>Have you determined the number of attendees your premises can hold (up to 100 per room) based on the 2sq mtr social distancing rule?</p> <p>Have you identified and briefed enough ushers/greeters who can welcome and confidently explain the procedures to attendees?</p> <p>Have you developed a plan to manage the numbers of attendees who can join your activities in the premises?</p> <p>What is your sensitive plan to handle extras who turn up unannounced?</p>	<p>Yes or Need to follow up</p>

Good Record Keeping	Do you have an attendance register for every activity held on the Church premises detailing the attendees name/contact details?	Yes or Need to follow up
	Do you have a plan in place to store these records safely and securely?	Yes or Need to follow up
Other Special Church Activities	Do you have a plan/s for getting a request for a marriage or funeral service at your premises?	Yes or Need to follow up
	Have all the COVID 19 measures been covered in these plans?	Yes or Need to follow up
Managing Unsafe Church Practices	Have you identified and planned how you will help your members refrain from the various unsafe practices which they previously carried out during activities at your church?	Yes or Need to follow up
	Have you included actions like greeting each other physically, passing the peace, and sitting/standing close to each other?	Yes or Need to follow up
	Have you carefully considered whether you will provide refreshments or Communion elements and if so checked out and/or attended the Health Dept's Hospitality Hygiene information and course?	Yes or Need to follow up
	What about people management around the refreshment table/drinks servery? Cleaning regime for kitchen, serving ware etc?	Yes or Need to follow up
Catering for All Vulnerable/At Risk Groups Attending	Have you a plan to identify, notify and sensitively care/cater for the vulnerable and at risk groups/attendees who might want to join in your activities?	Yes or Need to follow up
	Do you have a plan to ensure sure that all of your people have access to worship and other activities via alternative means?	Yes or Need to follow up
	Have you worked out what these alternatives will be?	
Arrangements for External or Associated Users of Facilities	Have you developed instruction sheets outlining infection control and social distancing/number control measures for your external hirers and user groups?	Yes or Need to follow up
	Have you considered requesting/requiring each group to clean the premises at the end of each hire period as per the instructions or will you retain responsibility for cleaning?	Yes or Need to follow up
COVID-19 Case in your Church	Do you have a plan for this unlikely eventuality and have considered what actions you will take?	Yes or Need to follow up