

INTERFAITH PROTOCOL

FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP IN QUEBEC

March 25, 2021¹

Context and guidelines

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic that has been affecting Quebec since March 2020, representatives of various religious communities have formed a consensus-building table to develop a common protocol to ensure the protection of their members' health during religious services.

In the current context of active community transmission of the virus in the province, any gathering of people can represent a significant risk of outbreak in a group or transmission between individuals. This document is intended to support those responsible for places of worship and members of faith communities in taking the necessary actions to prevent infection in places of worship. It also provides an opportunity to actively contribute to the response of public health authorities in the event of an outbreak to limit the spread of the virus.

Members of the various communities are invited to follow these guidelines in order to adapt their religious services, in accordance with their rites and in relation to their particular realities (e.g. type and capacity of the premises, conduct of the various services, characteristics of the community members).

This protocol complies with the texts of the decrees and orders of the Government of Quebec on the date of its last update. It follows the orientations of Public Health. Other updates may be necessary depending on the evolution of the epidemiological situation and the instructions of the government authorities for the different levels of alert.

Religious leaders are invited to consult the various Quebec information sites on COVID-19 in order to learn about the evolution of the instructions and the epidemiological situation.

The document presents :

1. The general instructions that must be applied in all places of worship and various general principles to inform the adaptation of the various religious practices.
2. The layout of the site
3. Access management
4. The course of events

¹ Updated from May 8, 2020 (revised June 4 and August 27, 2020). The changes include comments from the MSSSQ dated June 3, 2020, comments from the CNESST and the MSSS dated July 31, 2020, health standards dated August 3, 2020 and a note from the Ministry of the Executive Council dated September 8, 2020. This document was updated on 8 September 2020 and 25 March 2021.

1. Main instructions

Those in charge of the various communities have a leading role to play in setting an example and encouraging compliance with health regulations. They can use different communication channels to regularly remind people of the importance of respecting the measures for the health of the communities.

All paid staff and volunteers involved in the organisation of religious services, hereinafter referred to as those responsible for places of worship, must follow the instructions of the [Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail](#) (CNESST). Various documents are available on the Commission's [website](#), such as questionnaires, checklists, posters, etc.

The decrees and orders of the Government of Quebec, information and instructions for the population and specific measures concerning places of worship can be found at www.quebec.ca. The instructions are presented according to the different alert levels.

A minimum distance of two metres must be maintained between participants in a religious service, even when they remain in their places and are not moving around, unless they are occupants of the same private residence or its equivalent.

A distance of two metres between speakers and participants should be maintained as far as possible at all times

Inside a place of worship, each person must wear a face covering or a procedure mask according to the instructions for the alert level (see Annex 1) except in the following situations:

- The person declares that their medical condition prevents them from doing so
- The person is under the age of 10
- The person removes their procedure mask or their face covering momentarily for identification purposes

Celebrants, employees and volunteers must wear the procedure mask according to CNESST standards.

The maximum number of people allowed in places of worship :

- Is different depending on the type of religious ritual, e.g. weekly service, wedding or funeral
- Is set depending on the alert level of the region where the place of worship is located (see www.quebec.ca).
- Applies to participants only. Persons required to hold the event are not counted in this limit. The total number of these should be limited to the minimum necessary
- Applies to the whole place of worship. If the place of worship occupies an entire building, the limit applies to the building.
- In halls, the number of eligible persons will be adjusted downwards to respect the two-metre distance

- The layout of the premises must respect fire prevention measures as well as municipal and building regulations

The curfew in effect in the area where the place of worship is located must be respected. The schedule of activities in places of worship must allow for a minimum of a thirty minute window between the end of the activities and the beginning of the curfew to allow time for the return to the place of residence.

The current limits for different events and curfew times for different alert levels are shown in Appendix 1.

Where an attendance register is required (see Annex 1):

- The organiser is required to record in the register the names, telephone numbers and, where applicable, e-mail addresses of any participant
- Each participant is required to disclose to the organiser the information necessary for the keeping of this register
- The information recorded in this register may only be disclosed to a public health authority or a person authorised to act on its behalf for the purpose of conducting an epidemiological investigation and may not be used by anyone else for any other purpose
- This information must be destroyed 30 days after it is recorded

It is strongly recommended that a general list of people who attend the place of worship and the necessary contact information be compiled (e.g. an e-mail distribution list). This will enable members of the community to be contacted quickly to advise them of a potential exposure.

There is a diversity of religious practices in places of worship. The leaders of the various places of worship are invited to adapt their practices, while respecting their religion, according to the following principles

- Where possible, plan the timing of activities and the logistics so that participants arrive and then settle in the place of worship while minimising the risk of crowding and respecting physical distance
- Avoid queuing and favour outdoor queuing where possible
- As far as possible, participants should arrive at the venue, settle into their places and not move around during the event. They may change position while on their places (e.g. stand, sit, kneel).
- When necessary, a minimum number of celebrants and volunteers move around the venue. In this case, the layout of the venue can be adapted as follows
 - One-way movement in a defined corridor
 - Placement of participants allows celebrants to move between them while maintaining a distance of two metres
 - Minimise the movement of celebrants and volunteers during the service
- Avoid physical contact
- Avoid any sharing of objects
- Avoid having several people touch the same object
- Preferably, well-trained teams should carry out the tasks necessary for the religious service

- Avoid distribution of objects. If distribution is necessary :
 - Use single-use objects
 - Assign responsibility for the preparation of objects to one person to avoid multiple handling
 - Do not pass items from hand to hand. For example, place single-use documents on a table, ask participants to take one copy per person, not to share it or give it to another person, and to take it with them when they leave the premises
- No food, drink or alcohol may be served before or after services (e.g. meals, coffee, snacks)
- The preparation, handling and distribution of any food or drink required as part of religious practice must comply with standard food safety measures.
 - Several people may not drink from the same container
 - Several people may not eat from the same container
- Keep the duration of the gathering to the minimum necessary by reducing ceremonies to the essential.
- Where possible, provide services electronically for people who cannot participate in person

For weddings and funerals :

- Respect the specific limit on number of people for this type of ritual according to the alert level (see Annex 1)
- Apply all protocol measures
- Services of the same type (e.g. baptism, first communion, circumcision ceremony) must respect the maximum number of people indicated for weddings and funerals

Activities of a community nature such as classes, discussion groups, food banks or other community support activities should follow the health guidelines according to the sector or type of activity and the alert level in effect. This information can be found at www.quebec.ca

Social or event activities should be cancelled or postponed at the red and orange levels and follow the guidelines for this type of activity at the yellow and green levels

2. Organization of places of worship

Prior preparation of the premises will allow the various instructions to be respected, especially those concerning the maximum number of people and physical distance.

- Post a notice at the access points of the place of worship indicating the maximum authorised capacity, the obligation to wear a face covering or a procedure mask according to the instructions for the alert level (see Annex 1), the conditions of access, the sanitary rules in force, as well as the prevention recommendations issued by public health. Sample posters are available on the CNESST website.
- Make sure that the place of worship is well cleaned between each use and that it is properly ventilated. The following documents contain current recommendations:
 - [AIDE-MÉMOIRE POUR TOUS LES SECTEURS —Salubrité de l'environnement](#)

- (CNESST)
 - [COVID-19 : Nettoyage et désinfection de surfaces \(INSPQ\)](#)
 - [Hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers \(Health-Canada\)](#)
- Provide a hand hygiene station at each access point to the place of worship and the various rooms
- Provide measures to manage traffic and congestion outside and inside the premises, for example
 - Posting signs in the parking lot
 - Delineate one-way traffic lanes using ropes or ground markings
 - Define by marking, separated by two metres, the different places for participants inside the rooms
 - Clearly identify the places that must remain free
 - Block access to unused sections of the rooms
- Provide strategies for managing coats, shoes, etc. to avoid crowding at access points. For example, ask participants to bring a bag to keep their items with them at all times.
- Remove all shared items such as deliveries and use screens or other solutions that do not require the sharing of physical documents.

3. Access to the place of worship

- Use several communication strategies (before the events, through posters at the venue, through messages from the celebrants, etc.):
 - To inform participants of the rules in force
 - To remind participants of the importance of not attending places of worship if they
 - Have symptoms
 - Think they have had risky contact
 - Are waiting for a test result
 - Have been contacted by public health in connection with a case of infection
 - Have travelled in the last 14 days
- Take steps to avoid crowding at access points.
- Have staff or volunteers at each access point of each venue during events:
 - To inform participants and answer questions
 - To ensure that the main instructions are applied:
 - Wearing a face covering or a procedure mask according to the instructions for the alert level (see Annex 1)
 - Hand hygiene
 - Respect for physical distance
- Deny access to people with symptoms or who refuse to follow instructions
- Have staff or volunteers in the rooms at all times during events to ensure that the guidelines are followed:
 - Wearing a face covering or a procedure mask according to the instructions for the alert level (see Annex 1)
 - Respecting physical distancing

- Limit movement
- Ask people who do not respect the instructions to leave the venue immediately
- For events or places with a large number of people :
 - Ensure strict enforcement of the limit on the number of people
 - Implement crowd management strategies such as a pre-registration or reservation system.
 - Provide an option to participate virtually

4. Rules inside the place of worship

- Participants should keep their face covering or mask according to the instructions for the alert level except in the particular cases listed the main instructions.
- Participants are encouraged not to speak where possible and to whisper their prayers
- For all rituals, there can be no sharing of objects or physical contact between participants at any time. Single-use objects should be used and physical distance should be respected.
- For offerings or collections, monetary exchanges should be avoided and alternative means (e.g. electronic donation platforms) should be used. A deposit basket could be provided at the exit and participants invited to put their offerings in it.
- The officiant or a volunteer is not required to wear a mask when speaking if he or she is **more** than two metres away from other people or if he or she is behind a barrier
- It is strictly forbidden to have a choral ensemble intervene under any circumstances or to have the participants sing. If necessary, one or two singers should intervene at a distance of more than two metres between them as well as between them and the audience.
- The use of a Plexiglas barrier in front of the celebrants or singers is encouraged
- Use a sound system with a microphone to prevent the celebrants and singers from projecting their voices

Conclusion

By strictly observing these measures, prayer gatherings and religious services can be conducted more safely in places of worship, providing psychological and spiritual support to members of faith communities in these difficult times as they continue to contribute to the common good of all society.

Annex 1

Level 1 - Vigilance (green) calls for the constant vigilance that is required in the context of the COVID19 pandemic. It corresponds to low transmission in the community, and requires compliance with the basic measures in place in all settings (physical distancing, respiratory etiquette, hand hygiene, etc.). Specific measures may also apply to certain activities or settings.

- No curfew
- Maximum number of 250 participants in a place of worship. It is strongly recommended that a general list of people who attend the place of worship and the necessary contact information be compiled
- A minimum distance of two metres is maintained between persons in the place, even when they remain in their place and do not move about, unless they are occupants of the same private residence or its equivalent
- Wearing of a face covering or procedure mask
- Ability to remove face covering or procedure mask when the person is in their place, remains silent or speaks only in a low voice

Level 2 - Early Warning (yellow) introduces measures targeting certain sectors of activity and settings at risk of transmission. These sectors are selectively restricted or prohibited.

- No curfew
- Maximum number of 250 participants in a place of worship. If the place of worship occupies an entire building, the limit applies to the building. It is strongly recommended that a general list of people who attend the place of worship and the necessary contact information be compiled
- A minimum distance of two metres is maintained between persons in the place of worship, even when they remain in their place and do not move about, unless they are occupants of the same private residence or what is in lieu of it
- Wearing of a face covering or procedure mask
- Possibility of removing the face covering or procedure mask when the person is in his or her place, remains silent or speaks only in a low voice
- Maximum number of 50 people for funerals and weddings, an attendance register is required

Level 3 - Alert (orange) introduces additional measures by targeting certain sectors of activity and settings where the risk of transmission is considered higher. These areas are selectively restricted, prohibited or closed.

- Curfew between 9.30pm and 5am.
- Maximum number of 250 participants in a place of worship. If the place of worship occupies an entire building, the limit applies to the building. It is strongly recommended that a general list of people who attend the place of worship and the necessary contact information be compiled
- A minimum distance of two metres is maintained between people in the building, even when they remain in their place and do not move about, unless they are occupants of the same private residence or its equivalent
- Wearing a procedure mask, at all times, except for persons who momentarily remove their procedure mask to eat or drink
- Maximum number of 25 persons for funerals and weddings, an attendance register is required

Level 4 - Maximum (red) alert applies more restrictive measures in a targeted manner, including the cessation of non-essential activities where the risk cannot be sufficiently controlled, avoiding as far as possible widespread containment as during the first wave of the pandemic.

- Curfew between 9.30pm and 5am.
- Maximum number of 250 participants in a place of worship. If the place of worship occupies an entire building, the limit applies to the building. It is strongly recommended that a general list of people who attend the place of worship and the necessary contact information be compiled
- A minimum distance of two metres shall be maintained between persons in the place of worship, even when they remain in their place and are not moving about, unless they are occupants of the same private residence or what stands in for it
- Wearing a procedure mask at all times except for persons who momentarily remove their procedure mask for drinking or eating
- Maximum number of 25 persons for funerals and weddings, an attendance register is required