



COVID-19 instructions for organising public church services and other public religious services, and for participation in those services

- COVID-19 is an infectious respiratory disease which is caused by coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus). It spreads from person to person by means of the projection of aerosols, mainly though coming into close contacts with infectious persons.*
- The SARS-CoV-2 virus can get airborne through sneezing, coughing, intensive breathing speaking, or singing, as a few examples. Various surfaces at home, at work, at school, or elsewhere in public spaces may also be contaminated with the virus. It is possible to become infected by touching contaminated objects and then touching one's mouth, eyes, or nose. The virus may also spread via contact with individuals who exhibit very mild symptoms or no symptoms at all.
- If conditions are favourable, the virus can survive on contaminated surfaces for up to three days, but it can be destroyed through wet-cleaning and disinfection.
- The risk of the spread of SARS-CoV-2 is higher in enclosed, crowded, and poorly ventilated rooms.
- The incubation period for the virus ranges from two to fourteen days, averaging at five days. Most adults are infectious from two days before they develop any symptoms and up to ten days after they fall ill (or after they test positive).
- The purpose of the instructions is to provide guidelines for the organisers of public church services and other public religious services (hereinafter referred to as public church service), and for the participants of those services under the conditions of the spread of COVID-19.
- In the event of public church services being organised and the process of anyone taking part in such services, government order No 305 must always be observed: 'Measures and restrictions for the prevention of the spread of COVID-19' (which is published in the State Gazette).

Premises being used for church services

- Subsection 305 (10) 5) of government order No 305 establishes the requirements for public church services and other public religious services.
- If the organiser of church services does not check the vaccination or recovery certificates of each participant at any public church service or religious service which is being held in indoor conditions, up to fifty people may take part in such a service, or the organiser must ensure that premises are not filled to more than 50% of their total capacity.
- The party who is responsible for conducting a public church service (the organiser) must ensure the following:
 1. that all participants properly observe social distancing
 2. mask-wearing during the service
 3. access to hand sanitisers
 4. the observance of sanitising requirements pursuant to the Health Board's instructions.
- Frequently-used objects and surfaces (including door handles, etc) must be cleaned every two to four hours.

[The advice of the Health Board in terms of cleaning and disinfection](#) should be followed.



- If the organiser of any public church service does indeed check the vaccination and recovery certificates of all participants at the service, it is not necessary to observe the requirement that the premises is not filled to more than 50% of its total capacity.
- If the organiser of a public church service or religious service which is being held in a restricted outdoor area does not check the vaccination and recovery certificates of all participants, up to a hundred people may take part in the event. If certificates are checked, up to two thousand people may participate.

Attending a church service

- If there is any reason to suspect that you may have been infected, please postpone your church visit and stay home to protect other people.
- Wear a medical mask or a mask of a higher class of protection.
- Your mask must be worn for the entire duration of the church service, or while you remain on the premises.
- Sanitise your hands.
- When using a hand sanitiser, spread the recommended amount of the liquid which has been applied to your hands all over your hands (by using the same technique as that which should be used when washing one's hands). Allow the liquid to absorb into your skin and to dry. The sanitiser will lose its effect if you wipe it off your hands.
- Sit in your designated seat.
 - Volunteers who have been recruited by the congregation can help you find your seat.
- If possible, please avoid using shared hymnals and prayer books. Bring your own book if necessary. Avoid intensive singing.
- Minimise close contact with the clerics and other people who are present at the service (including shaking hands, hugging, kissing the cleric's hand, etc).
- Avoid touching religious relics, such as crosses, icons, etc, with your hands or lips even if it would be customary to do so in normal circumstances. The infection also spreads via surfaces.
- When exiting the church after the public service, observe social distancing rules and stay at a reasonable distance from other church-goers.
 - Volunteers from the congregation can assist people in exiting the premises or the building in which the church service was held. Larger gatherings at the door, for example (forming bottlenecks) must be avoided.
 - If possible, the organiser of the church service should provide instructions for the participants in terms of their safely being able to leave the premises after the service has concluded.

The clerics

- Religious associations must ensure that all clerics and people who are recruited by congregations are aware of the main [measures](#) which remain in place for the prevention of respiratory diseases.



- If there is any reason to suspect that they have been infected, clerics must abstain from organising church services and taking part in those services.
 - Congregation members must be notified to ensure that they do not take part in church services if they have fallen ill or if they have come into close contact with individuals who have been infected with coronavirus.
- During public church services, physical contact between clerics, congregation members, and those people who have been recruited by the congregation must all be minimised. Personal protective equipment, such as masks and visors, must be used.
- Shared items for holding holy communion should not be used. Disposable items should be used as for holding holy communion where that service comes into contact with food.
- Those items which are used in religious services and which do not come into contact with food must be sanitised.
 - Sanitisers are chemicals. They must be used by observing the instructions which are provided on the packaging. Direct contact with the skin and mucosae of people in terms of supplies which are used for disinfection should be prevented if possible, as the supplies should in this case be sanitised after each use and this is not something which is compliant with the intended use of such supplies.
- All clerics and those people who are recruited by the congregation should use the [HOIA](#) smartphone app, which provides a notification for any close contact with individuals who have tested positive for coronavirus (which is calculated as being at least fifteen minutes in duration and within a distance of two metres of such an infected person).

Other instructions for holding church services

Advice for the Christmas Day church service:

- Hold more than one church service in order to enable participants to observe social distancing rules and avoid the church being filled to over 50% of its full capacity if the organiser of the service is not checking participant COVID-19 vaccination and recovery certificates.
- Organise a pre-registration process for taking part in a public church service in order to enable participants to properly observe social distancing rules and to avoid the church being filled to over 50% of its full capacity if the organiser of the service is not checking participant COVID-19 vaccination and recovery certificates.
- If possible, organise a public church service in an unrestricted outdoor area.
- Organise video coverage of church services.
- Use song sheets instead of hymnals which can be taken home by all church-goers.

General recommendations:

- If there is a reason to believe that the number of those people who are interested in taking part in a church service exceeds the maximum number of participants who may be permitted to attend such a service according to the specific nature of the available space at each church venue (such as during Christmas, for example, and the likelihood of an increased attendance), then more services should be held in order to prevent the potential spread of the virus.



- Pre-registration for participants in the service is a step which should be considered. This will allow the organisers of the service to ensure that the number of people who enter the church premises does not exceed the permitted maximum number of attendees.
- Remind people that it would be reasonable for them to remain at home in the case of there being any reason for them to suspect that they may have been infected in order to protect other people.
- Remind people of the need to get themselves vaccinated and to take advantage of the booster shot when they are eligible to take it.
- The number of clerics who are holding church services should be as low as possible.
- If possible, church services should be held outside.
- Choir singing and the use of wind instruments should be avoided. Since the risk of the spread of COVID-19 is higher amongst children, the use of children's choirs in church services should be avoided.
 - If the use of a choir in a church service is unavoidable, members of the choir should be placed as far as possible from one another and the number of singers should be limited to the minimum possible (two or three singers if possible).
 - Also if possible, soloists should be used instead of choirs. Sing-alongs should be avoided. Masks must be worn during sing-alongs.

Guidelines and advice are available at:

[The Health Board's COVID-19-related publications and instructions](#)