

# NYCBC In-Person Worship and Meeting Health and Safety Recommendations, last revised 2022-10-18

Last updated October 18, 2022

## Summary of Updates:

- While masking is still strongly recommended, each congregation / ministry group may discern for themselves whether masking should be mandatory for their worship service or meeting.
- While masking is no longer mandated, Toronto Public Health states: “Wear a high quality, well-fitting mask, especially indoors, and based on the setting and situation. Masks are strongly recommended in indoor public settings and especially if you are around people who are at higher risk or have a health condition”.
- As of October 9, 2022, Pastoral staff have decided that masks are strongly recommended during indoor meetings, but no longer mandatory for ESC worship services and activities.
- As of October 9, 2022, Pastoral Staff have decided that masks remain mandatory for CSC worship, MSC worship, Children’s Sunday School, and Community Service Activities.
- Pew Bibles, hymn books, pens may be reinstated
- Passing of offering bags and Lord’s Supper elements can be reinstated.
- Everyone should self-screen for COVID symptoms and contacts
  - **If symptomatic**, s/he should **refrain from attending in-person, notify close contacts, get tested, and stay home until symptoms have been improving for at least 24 hours (48 hours for symptoms of nausea / vomiting / diarrhea) with no new symptoms**. After this, as per Toronto Public Health, one should wear a well-fitted mask in all public settings for 10 days after the start of symptoms, and avoid non-essential activities in public where one has to remove the mask.
  - If asymptomatic but tested positive for COVID, wear a well-fitted mask for 10 days after the testing date.
  - If one is a close contact of someone with COVID-19 (close contact is defined as anyone you live with, or anyone who was within 6 feet of you for a cumulative 15 minutes or longer without a well-fitted mask, or anyone you had close, physical contact with without a well-fitted mask), one should self-monitor for symptoms for a total of 10 days from the last day of

exposure, and wear a well-fitted mask when in all public settings. As per Toronto Public Health, close contacts no longer need to stay home to self-isolate unless one develops symptoms.

- COVID +ve cases / exposures will no longer be announced publicly, but it is strongly recommended that the leader or coordinator of the in-person function notify all in-person attendees in a timely manner to prevent the spread of infection, while protecting the privacy of the individuals.
- If an outbreak is identified, Church leadership may decide to request that all individuals in the cluster where the outbreak originated to refrain from attending in-person for a period of 10 days from time of exposure.
- Going forward, the Health and Safety Team will no longer be actively functioning. Each group is encouraged to discern for themselves the health and safety protocols to implement, using the posted recommendations, as well as Toronto Public Health's latest guidance and mandates (if any).

## **Detailed Recommendations:**

### **1. Face Masks/Coverings:**

- While masking is still strongly recommended, each congregation / ministry group may decide / discern for themselves whether masking should be mandatory for their worship service or ministry group / function.
- While masking is no longer mandated, Toronto Public Health states: "Wear a high quality, well-fitting mask, especially indoors, and based on the setting and situation. Masks are strongly recommended in indoor public settings and especially if you are around people who are at higher risk or have a health condition".
- As of October 9, 2022, Pastoral Staff have decided that masks are strongly recommended during indoor meetings, but no longer mandatory for ESC worship services and activities.
- As of October 9, 2022, Pastoral Staff have decided that masks remain mandatory for CSC worship, MSC worship, Children's Sunday School, and Community Service Activities.

## **2. Self-Screening for Symptoms or Exposures, and Isolation:**

- Everyone should screen themselves before coming to in-person events. The latest Toronto Public Health COVID-19 Screening Questionnaire and Self-Isolation Guideline, <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/974a-General-Screening-Business-Questionnaire-March-29-2022.pdf> will be posted on the church website, for your reference.
- **If sick or symptomatic**, s/he should **refrain from attending in-person, notify close contacts, get tested, and stay home until symptoms have been improving for at least 24 hours (48 hours for symptoms of nausea / vomiting / diarrhea) with no new symptoms.**
- If **symptomatic**, as per Toronto Public Health, one should **wear a well-fitted mask** in all public settings for **10 days** after the start of symptoms, and avoid non-essential activities in public where one has to remove the mask. One should do the same if s/he is asymptomatic but tested positive, and the 10 days start after the testing date.
- If one is a **close contact** of someone with COVID-19 (close contact is defined as anyone you live with, or anyone who was within 6 feet of you for a cumulative 15 minutes or longer without a well-fitted mask, or anyone you had close, physical contact with without a well-fitted mask), one should **self-monitor** for symptoms for a total of **10 days** from the last day of exposure, and **wear a well-fitted mask when in all public settings**. As per Toronto Public Health, close contacts no longer need to stay home to self-isolate unless one develops symptoms.

## **3. COVID-19 Vaccination:**

- While COVID19 vaccination is not mandatory to attend NYCBC worship and related activities, everyone is strongly encouraged to get fully vaccinated and boosted to minimize the risk of being infected with COVID19, developing severe COVID19 illness, or passing COVID19 on to other people. It also helps protect people who are elderly, have weak immune systems and those that cannot be vaccinated, such as infants and young children.

## **4. Adhere to Entry and Departure Times:**

- ESC Worship Service 9:15 am - 10:45 am at 685 sanctuary.
- CSC Worship Service 11:15 am - 12:45 pm at 685 sanctuary.

- MSC Worship Service 11:15 am - 12:45 pm at 675 sanctuary.

## **5. While You are Here--Physical Distancing and Infection Control Measures:**

- There are no physical gathering capacity limits (other than existing fire code limits). However, we should try to avoid overcrowding.
- Pew Bibles, pens, hymn books, and bulletins can be reinstated.
- Singing and reading scripture aloud is permitted.
- Microphones can be shared.
- We can resume passing the offering bag if deemed appropriate by Pastoral leaders.
- Pre-packaged Lord's Supper elements will continue to be used.
- Hand sanitizer will be provided at the main entrance and at high traffic locations.
- Disinfection: COVID is thought to be mostly transmitted through respiratory droplets, not contact.
  - Custodial staff should spray and wipe pews with Bioesque every 2-4 weeks for general disinfection and sanitization.
  - Ensure easy access to hand washing and hand sanitizers.
  - High touch surfaces should be cleaned and disinfected by custodial staff according to their regular schedule.
- Capacity limits: We no longer have capacity limits.

## **6. Worship Team/Preacher Guidelines:**

- Rapid antigen testing is no longer required, but please use as needed if there is a possible exposure.
- Pianists should wash/disinfect their hands before and after playing piano. Hand sanitizer should be placed at the piano. We would AVOID applying disinfection products to the piano so that the keys are not damaged.
- Microphones can be shared, but good hand hygiene between use is strongly recommended.
- There is no maximum number of singers.
- Plexiglass barriers can be used at one's discretion for added layer of protection.
- No need to use separate sides of the stage for different congregations.

## **7. Ventilation and HVAC Systems:**

- During worship service, the side door and 3 back doors will be kept open to maximize ventilation
- Pew seating in front of air vents should be blocked off.
- HVAC system has been adjusted to maximize outdoor air ratio.
- The relative humidity will be maintained at 40-60%, which appears to decrease the spread of respiratory infections.

## **8. Baptism:**

- Persons getting baptized will RAT-test morning of baptism.
- Masking for the pastor and the baptism candidates are at their discretion.
- We ask persons getting baptized to try not to exhale or swallow water for the brief time of immersion, and to avoid wiping their face with hands or spitting when coming out of immersion, but instead use their own towel located close to them to dry their face.
- If anyone has concerns about sharing baptistery water with others, then that person can go first or second in order of Baptismal Service.

## **10. Room Bookings:**

### **Plan events to avoid overcrowding.**

Capacity limits: We will no longer have formal capacity limits.

- Try to use the largest room with respect to the group size to maximize physical distancing

### **Use of outdoor church premises should be prioritized.**

- Whenever possible, we should encourage use of outdoor terraces / space, such as the terrace behind the nursery, 675 parking lot (when it is outside of tenants' hours of use), or terrace outside 3rd Floor Clubhouse, due to improved ventilation. If a venue is uncertain due to weather, consider an alternative indoor space to be offered to the group which can be confirmed and booked once the weather forecast is known.

### **Eating and drinking:**

- Limit the number of people one interacts with while unmasked.
- Maximize use of outdoor spaces such as terrace (weather-permitting),

Basement covered outdoor parking level (if on weekends or after-hours).as much as possible for better ventilation.

- Pre-packaged foods / individual lunch boxes with individual utensils are still better and more hygienic than shared foods. If it is a buffet style, have designated people behind food trays serving, and everyone lining up for food or serving should be masked (recommended but not mandatory).
- Have hand sanitizers readily available at strategic locations.

### **Sports and recreation:**

- Indoors: Indoor recreational activities can resume. Masks are strongly recommended but not mandatory.
- Outdoors: Close contact sports such as basketball, soccer, floor hockey, can be resumed outdoors.

### **Self-screening**

- Similar to in-person worship, encourage attendees to screen themselves for COVID-like symptoms or potential exposures, and not come if they do not meet screening criteria.
- Pre-registration is no longer required.

## **11. Nursery / Toddler Room Use Guidelines:**

Worship service will be televised in the nursery rooms.

### **Use of Masks:**

- Strongly encouraged but not mandatory for both children and caregivers.

### **Other Health & Safety Measures:**

- Post posters in rooms to increase awareness about health and safety measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as Physical Distancing; Protect Yourself; Wash your Hands; Cover your Cough.
- Remove all soft plush toys which cannot be cleaned / disinfected easily, as well as any small toys which can be mouthed and passed/shared.
- Discourage sharing of personal toys or personal items.
- Practise proper hand hygiene by encouraging children to wash hands or use hand sanitizer.

## **12. Sunday School:**

- **Schedule:**
  - CSC Adult Sunday School ~9:30 – ~10:45..
  - ESC Adult Sunday School 11:30 – 12:30.
  - MSC Sunday School may schedule as they see fit.
- **Room Choice:**
  - 685 Gym for CSC/ESC adults.
  - MSC Sunday School: 675 basement or gym.
  - Family Ministry's Children and Youth Ministry Sunday School may use rooms on the 3rd floor.

## **13. High Risk Groups:**

Individuals in the following “vulnerable or higher risk” categories may want to exercise extra caution when coming to inperson worship. Getting fully vaccinated for COVID19 if you are able, masking, and physical distancing are steps you can take to reduce your risks. We are still requiring everyone to wear masks while indoors on church premises at this time. Please discuss with your healthcare provider for individualized advice for your situation.

High risk groups might include :

- Someone whose immune system is compromised (e.g. transplant recipient, active malignancy or autoimmune disease on immune-suppressing medication)
- Someone with a severe chronic health condition (e.g. lung disease, heart disease)
- Someone going to a hospital or health care setting for treatment (e.g. dialysis, cancer, surgery)

## **14. Mitigation Strategies In Case of Outbreak**

If an **outbreak** is identified amongst our church community:

- If the cluster is in an identifiable group, then everyone in that group should carefully consider the screening criteria and **monitor for symptoms** and refrain from attending in-person activities both in the church and outside the church if they fail the screening criteria.
- Church leadership may decide to request that all individuals in the cluster where the outbreak originated to refrain from attending in-person for a period of 10 days from time of exposure.

- Anyone who is symptomatic should get tested for COVID.
- We encourage transparency with all congregations in reporting outbreaks and highlighting actions taken to mitigate risk in order to maintain trust.
- It is important and more effective for the coordinator / leader of the ministry group event / function to inform all attendees of the event of the exposure in a timely manner in order to stop / mitigate the spread of infection, while protecting the privacy / name of the +ve individual (unless s/he consents to release of his/her identity).