

6<sup>th</sup> July 2020

## GUIDANCE FOR RE-OPENING OF CHURCHES OR PLACES OF WORSHIP

### INTRODUCTION

These guidelines are provided to support the safe conduct of religious proceedings and services and apply to all faith-based organisations however denominated.

All places of worship are required to implement the following guidelines which are aimed to prevent the spread of SARS CoV-2 in the British Virgin Islands.

**Religious Leaders/Church management are responsible for the strict implementation of the following guidelines:**

### LEADERS

1. All leaders must wash or sanitise their hands just before or upon entering the Place of Worship.
2. Pastors and praise or worship leaders must maintain a distance of at least 6 feet from all the congregants whilst conducting services.
3. There should be no avoidable physical contact between worshippers and officiants.
4. Religious leaders are encouraged to periodically remind officiants and congregants of these guidelines.

### MEMBERS

1. Congregants of the same household may sit together.
2. A distance of six feet must be maintained between members of different households.
3. All congregants shall wear a face mask or face covering (e.g. face shield) while entering and within the facility.
  - o Face shields are recommended for persons with cardiovascular or respiratory conditions.
  - o Children under 2 years of age should not wear masks.
4. Hand washing or sanitising of hands must be done before entering and upon leaving the facility as per the guidelines presented by the Ministry of Health and Social Development.

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## OPERATIONS

1. Separate entrances and exits are recommended as ideal, however in the absence of this, movement of congregants in and out of the facility should be controlled and staggered.
2. Hand hygiene/sanitisation stations must be placed at the entrances and exits of every meeting place and such stations shall be operated by ushers or other persons who are administering sanitiser to the hands of congregants and officiants where automatic dispensers are not available.
3. Signage must be placed in conspicuous locations outside and within every church or place of worship. Religious services, funerals and weddings, should be held with the adherence to appropriate social and physical distancing of no less than six feet. Maximum number to be in attendance is 100 persons.
4. Where choir ministry is required during service or choir practice in preparation for service, all measures such as social distancing and wearing of face shields must be employed to prevent the transmission of the virus.
5. Ushers should be available to provide direction and to ensure that social distancing is maintained.
6. There should be no passing along of collection and tithe offering baskets, plates, bowls from one congregant to the next.
  - o A designated usher or staff should be responsible for collecting the tithe/offering or
  - o Collection baskets should be placed at specific collection points (e.g. the front of the church) for followers to place their tithes/offering in.
7. The Church facility must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected prior to opening and must be disinfected before and after each use.
  - o Please use disinfectants from the Environmental Health Division approved list. (See Appendix A) Ongoing cleaning and disinfecting of washroom facilities must be carried out.
8. All surfaces such as musical instruments, tools and furnishings should be frequently cleaned and disinfected.
  - o Focus on high touch or commonly touched areas such as railings, handles, pulpits, chairs, door knobs and light switches.
9. Temperatures may be taken using a contactless thermometer such as an infrared thermometer or a wall mounted thermometer scanner. Where a person's temperature exceeds 38° C (100.4° F) they shall not be allowed to enter the place of worship, the temperature should be recorded and the medical hotline contacted (852-7650).
  - o Ushers may be trained in the taking of temperatures using an infrared thermometer by the Ministry of Health and Social Development.

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Medical Hotline: 852-7650 (8:30a.m. - 4:30p.m.) | COVID-19 Information Call: 468-2274

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10. Persons who are coughing repeatedly, sneezing or exhibit any flu-like symptoms should not be allowed to enter the place of worship and should be held in a separate area of the facility and the medical hotline contacted.
11. Any person who becomes ill during the service must immediately be moved to a separate area from other worshippers and the medical hotline (852-7650) contacted immediately.
  - o Areas used by any person who became ill must be closed for use for a minimum of 24 hours and thoroughly sanitised before being opened for use.
12. The use of water fountains must be discontinued until further notice. Bottled water should be provided instead.
13. The duration of services should take into consideration the space availability and ventilation capacity to allow for public health measures to be practiced.
14. Where air conditioning is used, all public health measures must be strictly observed and practiced to prevent the transmission of the virus.
  - o Some windows and doors may be kept open to allow the exchange of air where possible.
15. Windows and doors should be kept open for ventilation.
  - o Air intake or extractor systems may be used where practicable
16. Microphones and cameras shall be operated by designated persons and disinfected after use.
17. The distribution of hymnals, bibles, leaflets or other materials is discouraged; however, if required, bibles, hymnals, etc. should be sanitised before and after use. Members should be encouraged to walk with their own materials.
18. Where mats are used, worshippers may take their own prayer mats to service.
19. All bathrooms must be equipped with sufficient liquid soap and paper towels or contactless hand dryers. Ideally, garbage bins with foot pedals should be used to collect used napkins or other garbage.
20. There must be no congregating of members inside or outside of the church or place of worship, before or after service.
21. A record shall be kept of all persons who attend every service and shall be available for inspection by Public Health Officials.
  - o Each church should have a representative seating chart and/or a log book organised by section/column and rows to record members. This should be made available to Public Health Officers upon request if needed for contact tracing.

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22. Church offices may open to facilitate the work of the church. Air conditioning can be used. Every effort shall be made to limit the amount of persons present in the office at any one time.
  - o Masks or face coverings should be worn as appropriate, and social distancing measures observed.

## CEREMONIES/SPECIAL EVENTS

1. Where multiple services are held on the same day, at least one hour shall be allowed between services for a full cleaning and disinfection sanitisation of the interior of the Place of Worship (including all internal and external bathrooms, fixtures and equipment).
2. Special services for persons 70 years of age or older and persons with chronic conditions are encouraged. All measures should be observed such as wearing of face masks or shields.
3. Communion services must be safely administered with strict food hygiene and Public Health measures being employed in the preparation and administering of the emblems.
4. Where doctrine allows, the minister may take communion on behalf of the worshippers or the emblem can be served with food serving tongs.
  - o Churches may also consider pre-packaged communion packets; which can be served using food serving tongs.
5. Where rituals and sacraments (e.g. baptism) are practiced, hygiene protocols must be strictly adhered to with minimum physical contact.
  - o Consider the use of beaches for baptisms.
6. All public measures such as hand sanitising, social distancing and wearing of face masks should be strictly observed and practiced during face-to-face meetings.

## TRANSPORTATION

1. Places of worship that utilise buses to mass transport attendees must restrict ridership to ensure that persons from different households maintain a distance of six (6) feet from each other.
2. Transportation Service Providers must adopt thorough and frequent cleaning routines to disinfect their vehicles.
3. Buses should be cleaned and disinfected before and after each trip.
4. Buses must also be outfitted with or provide hand sanitiser for use upon entry and exit of the vehicle.

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