

Understanding COVID-19 Restrictions – Places of Worship

Diocese of Broken Bay Fact Sheet

What's new from 1 July 2020?

Under the Public Health Order (No 4) 2020, effective from 1 July 2020 the following restrictions have been revised:

- The number of people allowed inside indoor venues (including places of worship) will be determined by the 'one person per 4 square metre' rule, with no upper limit. All activity must be seated only.
- Occupiers of the premises must develop and comply with a COVID-19 Safety Plan. A copy of the plan must be kept on the premises and made available for inspection by an authorised officer as requested.

All other restrictions including 20 guests inside the home and 20 for outside gatherings remain the same.

Parish Priests are required to allow employees to work from home if reasonably practicable in the context of the operational needs of the Parish.

What does this mean for places of worship?

- The number of people in a public place of worship must not exceed one person per 4 square metres.
- When calculating the number of people permissible in the church for a religious service, the Celebrant, concelebrants, Deacon, server and other essential ministers are excluded from the head count. All members of the congregation should be counted, including children.
- The calculation must be made by measuring the floor space of the areas open to the public. For our Churches, this means the sanctuary, sacristy, or other areas where people would not congregate are not included in the calculations. The maximum number of people allowed in the church should be displayed on all entry points to the church.
- Physical Distancing - people from the same household do not need to be physically distanced in the church. Couples and families can be seated together. The social distancing should occur between family groups.
- People attending a religious service will be required to provide their name and contact details (phone or email) when they enter so that they can be used for contact tracing. The details of one adult member per household is sufficient. It is important that in collecting these details there is a clear sign to say if the recorded details are to be used in any other way than for the purposes of COVID-19 contact tracing (e.g. adding to parish database, or parish mailout). An easy 'opt out' option must be made available, so the validity of the intended purpose of collecting details is not compromised. These details must be retained for 4 weeks, prior to destruction.
- [NSW\[AS1\]](#) Government expects that places of worship will comply with COVID-19 Safety Plan requirements to keep staff, volunteers and visitors safe. Every church is now required to have a COVID Safety Plan on the premises such that it is available for inspection by an authorised officer as requested.

Specific Details from the Public Health Order (No 4):

Funerals

- The maximum number of people who may attend a funeral is the maximum number of people allowed on the premises, which is one person per 4 square metres.
- Places of public worship, funeral homes or crematoriums can have up to 50 attendees (without the 4 square metre rule) provided non-household contacts can maintain 1.5 metres of physical distance.
- Funerals at a place of residence can have the greater of 50 people or one person per 4 square metres of space.

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Weddings

- The maximum number of people who may attend a wedding is the maximum number of people allowed on the premises, which is one person per 4 square metres.
- Wedding services are no longer subject to separate limits, with the exception of a wedding at a place of residence, which can have the greater of 20 people or one person per 4 square metres of space.

Outdoor Public Gatherings

- No more than 20 people are allowed to gather outside in a public place
- This clause does not apply to a gathering for a wedding, a funeral, a memorial service or a religious service or a gathering immediately after a wedding, a funeral, a memorial service or a religious service.

Specific Details from the COVID-19 Safety Plan for Places of Worship

The updated COVID19 Safety Plan for Places of Public Worship, effective 1 July 2020 can be located at www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-07/covid-19-safety-plan-places-of-worship.pdf. Please note the following:

- Take measures to ensure drivers of courtesy vehicles minimise close contact with passengers where possible. We advise that courtesy buses in parishes continue to be discouraged.
- Reduce crowding wherever possible and promote physical distancing.
- Have strategies in place to manage gatherings that may occur immediately outside the premises, such as at the conclusion of services.
- High energy dance, as well as singing and wind instruments, can spread COVID-19 if a participant is infected. Additional planning around these activities should be undertaken from a work health and safety perspective, including ensuring 3 metres distance from the audience. Group singing, or chanting is particularly high risk and so should continue to be avoided.
- Consider modifying religious rites or rituals to avoid direct contact where practical. Where this is not practical, ensure hands are washed before and after each interaction with soap and water or hand sanitiser.
- Avoid sharing books, drinking cups or other shared objects used during the service such as collection plates. Also consider putting barriers around frequently touched objects of worship, such as shrines, relics or fonts, to prevent people frequently touching these.

Guidelines from Bishop Anthony for the Celebration of Mass

- **Singing and Music**
 - Congregational singing or chanting and use of wind instruments needs to be considered carefully. Though the Government discourages choral singing as such, the size of the church may allow for congregational singing and participation.
 - Data projection of the words rather than the use of hymn books should be used in this event.
 - The cantor should maintain at least 3 metres physical distance from other people.
- **Processions from the assembly** - continue to be discouraged at this time.
- **Bread for Consecration** - that is to be distributed to the Faithful should be on a paten separate from that on which is the Host used by the Celebrant so as not to be affected by proximity to his breath.
- **The Sign of Peace** - should be omitted. Certainly, there should be no handshake.
- **Precious Blood** - The Chalice is reserved for the Celebrant and concelebrants. Concelebrants should receive the Precious Blood by intinction.
- **Sanitation** - The Celebrant should use sanitiser both immediately before and after the distribution of Communion.

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Some Particular Pastoral Matters for Consideration

- **School Masses** – If they take place in the church, they are bound by the provisions detailed above as a place of worship. If they occur on a school premises, then they are bound by the guidelines determined by schools. Please consult with your school principal about what is permissible from term 3 onwards.
- **Parish group meetings** – it is recommended that they continue to be limited to 20 people, while applying the principle of 1 person per 4 square meters.
- **Sacramental Programs for children** – as an education program, we are to follow the principles of the *NSW Government Guidelines on Schools and Childcare* <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/education/schools-and-childcare>. Although these guidelines state that students do not need to follow strict social distancing, it does state that during term 3 the activities that the following activities are among those to **remain on hold**;
 - parent attendance at assemblies or other events,
 - large gatherings of adults, including at parent information nights.

Subsequently, this would mean that a public gathering for a parent information session, for our Sacramental Preparation Programs **would not be permissible**. This of course would be possible online.

Children's groups could be allowed in small gatherings no larger than 20, inclusive of adult participation, though these may be difficult practically given the number of enrolments in the programme.

One solution to consider is that smaller groups of parents, socially distanced, are brought together for induction in the Sacramental programme so that the preparation becomes primarily home-based for the remainder of this year. This need not preclude the designation of certain parish Masses to which the families are specially invited as part of the programme, though of course the total number of people allowed in the church needs to be considered in respect to this.

During this period of restricted movement, isolation and COVID 19 Public Health Orders, it is of vital importance that Parishes maintain contact the parish community, especially those who are vulnerable or isolated. It is also vitally important that while doing so, we comply with the COVID 19 Public Orders. It is important that we work together to safely support the Bishop and his mission during this challenging time.