

Understanding COVID-19 Restrictions – Places of Worship

Diocese of Broken Bay Fact Sheet No. 2 – 24 July 2020

What's new from 24 July 2020?

Under the Public Health (COVID-19 Restrictions on Gathering and Movement) Order (No 4) Amendment Order (No 2) 2020, effective from 24 July 2020 the following restrictions have been revised:

- The number of people allowed inside a place of public worship will be determined by the lesser of 'one person per 4 square metre' rule or 100 persons,
- Occupiers of the premises must develop and comply with an approved and up to date 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.
- The Place of Worship must also register as a COVID Safe Business via the NSW Government website.

All other restrictions including 20 guests inside the home and 20 for outside gatherings remain the same, however further caution is emphasized to reduce the spread of COVID-19 through mingling.

What does this mean for places of worship?

- The number of people in a public place of worship must not exceed the lesser of 100 people or 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 (including a Wedding or funeral) 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. These details must include the time and date they visited. 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 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-19 Safety Plan on the premises such that it is available for inspection by an authorised officer as requested AND register as a COVID Safe Business.

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Specific Details from the Public Health Order (No 4) Amendment (No.2):

Funerals

- The maximum number of people who may attend a funeral must not exceed the lesser of 100 people or one person per 4 square metres.

Weddings

- The maximum number of people who may attend a wedding must not exceed the lesser of 150 people or one person per 4 square metres.

Outdoor Public Gatherings

- No more than 20 people are allowed to gather outside in a public place.
- Although, 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, places of public worship are asked to develop strategies to manage gatherings that may occur immediately outside the premises, such as at the conclusion of services. This may involve suspending or adjusting the practice of greeting congregants as they arrive or depart to ensure appropriate physical distancing.

Specific Details from the COVID-19 Safety Plan for Places of Worship – 24/7/2020

The updated COVID-19 Safety Plan for Places of Public Worship, effective 24 July 2020 can be located at https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-07/covid-19-safety-plan-places-of-worship_1.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.
- Develop strategies to manage gatherings that may occur immediately outside the premises, such as at the conclusion of services. This may involve suspending or adjusting the practice of greeting congregants as they arrive or depart to ensure appropriate physical distancing.
- 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** - Music is permissible if conducted safely. Musicians should be distanced 1.5 meters. Woodwind instruments should be discouraged. Singers should maintain at least 3 meters of physical distancing.
- **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 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 larger public gathering for a parent information session, for our Sacramental Preparation Programs **would not be permissible**. This of course would be possible if conducted in smaller groups of no more than 20 people or 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, physical distancing and COVID-19 Public Health Orders, it is of vital importance that Parishes maintain contact with 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 Health Orders. It is essential that we work together to safely support the Bishop and his mission during this challenging time.