

Step 3 Q&A – June 10, 2021

Checklist for Communities of Faith in Living Skies Regional Council

Communities of Faith within Living Skies Regional Council are responsible for decision-making and policy-development within the particular context of their ministry. While the Regional Council Executive and staff can offer assistance with interpretation, it is the authority of each community of faith to discern appropriately their own recommendations for the safety and comfort of in-person worship and the use of your buildings. Keep in mind that these recommendations must be within the requirements of the provincial health authority and the provincial government.

All restrictions, with the exception of masking and maximum capacity, will be removed three weeks after 70 per cent of people aged 18 and older have received their first vaccine dose, with at least three weeks having passed since Step Two. If the provincial vaccination rate continues to rise, this means that the majority of restrictions will be lifted as early as July 11. Gathering size and indoor masking will not be lifted until 70 per cent of people 12 years and older have received their first vaccine dose. These two vaccination percentages may or may not happen at the same time. Please keep this in mind while discerning the next steps your congregation will be taking. Here are the relevant sections from the plan: ¹

Masking

Although masking will no longer be required under the public health order once we reach final stage of Step 3 (70% of people 12+), some people may still wish to wear masks based on their own risk assessment and comfort level depending on the circumstances.

Gatherings/Events

Although physical distancing will no longer be required (again, once we reach the final stage of Step 3), consider spacing and separation for those attending. All washrooms and commonly touched surfaces should continue to receive enhanced cleaning and disinfection. Staff and volunteers should be aware of public health prevention practices, such as proper sanitization, interaction etiquette and emergency response protocol.

Here is a list of considerations to include in your decision-making:

1. What is the vaccination rate in your community?

- Experts suggest that a vaccination rate of 75% is ideal to help contain the spread. While we cannot require people to be vaccinated before coming to worship, we can extrapolate that the number of people who have received both doses of the vaccine in the community will be roughly the same in our communities of faith. Compare the demographics of your community of faith to the statistics to ensure you are reading the right numbers – e.g. if the

¹ See Re-Open Roadmap - <https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/health-care-administration-and-provider-resources/treatment-procedures-and-guidelines/emerging-public-health-issues/2019-novel-coronavirus/saskatchewans-re-opening-roadmap#step-3>

average age in your community of faith is 50, ensure that 75% of the people over the age of 50 in your community have been vaccinated. Continue to be vaccine enthusiasts.

2. Is there a high number of vulnerable people in your community of faith?

- People with other health issues that might contribute to a higher risk for contracting the virus, as well as those who are unable or have chosen not to be vaccinated, will be reluctant to return to in-person worship. Make a special effort to welcome them.

3. Are there user groups in your building who may contribute to or be fearful of an increased risk of spread?

- The number of different groups of people using the building will have an impact on your cleaning protocol. Re-visit the re-opening guidelines written last fall to ensure commonly touched surfaces are cleaned properly. Develop or share protocols for user groups/ rentals so that expectations are clear both for user groups and community of faith members.

4. How will we include the people who do not feel safe enough to return to in-person worship at this time?

- Communities of faith have navigated this pandemic in a variety of ways. You will likely want to continue offering an alternative for people who are fearful of a 4th wave, who are unable or choose not to get the vaccine, or who feel uncomfortable returning to a space with other people. Remember that this will add an additional burden on ministry staff and worship leadership so be sure to support one another.

5. How will we include the people who want to return to in-person worship but want to continue to observe the public health guidelines for physical distancing and mask-wearing?

- It will have been 8 months with the mask mandate in place, and 16 months since social distancing was recommended. It will take an abundance of grace and compassion to ensure everyone feels safe.

6. Can we do the things we love, like singing, having communion, passing the peace, sharing a meal?

- Technically, yes. Proceed with caution. There are risks associated with each of these activities and so you may wish to begin slowly. The virus has not been eliminated from our province; the spread has been slowed. Pay attention to the current Provincial health guidelines as you make decisions as they continue to shift with the shifting vaccination rates and active case rates. You may want to ease into these rituals and sacraments. Start slowly: give the peace sign during passing the peace; start with coffee time before heading straight into sharing a potluck meal. Take time to reintroduce the things that have been missing and can be a source of anxiety for some.

7. How do we ensure that our ministry personnel and volunteers are safe and supported?

- Your minister and the lay leaders in your community of faith have offered leadership in ways and styles that were un-imaginable 18 months ago. It is recommended that there be a period of transition between the current level of restrictions and the lifting of restrictions in order to rest, prepare, and re-launch. You cannot be held liable if someone contracts COVID while attending an event or worship in your building if you have developed and are following a plan that is consistent with the current provincial health guidelines.

8. What do we do if there is a positive COVID case within the congregation? What do we do about contact tracing?

- At this point, there is no answer for this question. The Business Response team is in conversation with the Health Authority and this will be one of the pieces in that discussion. If there is a positive case in the congregation, please remember to protect the privacy of the COVID-positive person. Act with compassion. Consider sending a message to the congregation that explains that there was a case, and that all who attended the meeting or worship on that particular day should monitor for symptoms. It is unclear if self-isolation will be required of those considered close contacts and if that would include people who attended worship together. Again, please continue to check the SHA guidelines that will be released after we reach Step 3. They will give general ideas as to how to proceed.

If you have further questions or concerns, please contact Tricia Gerhard, our representative to the Faith Leaders consulting the Business Response team at lsrcexecutive@gmail.com or Tracy Murton, Pastoral Relations Minister tmurton@united-church.ca.