

PCV COVIDSafe practice - advice 9 April 2021

Sourced from the Chief Health Officer's Directions, dated 9 April 2021:

- Workplace Directions (No 24)
- Restricted Activity Directions (Victoria) (No 12)
- Stay Safe Directions (Victoria) (No 19)

From the government's point of view, places of worship are considered 'Work Premises' (footnote 55, Workplace Directions). Our response as churches must fall into line with all relevant workplace premises directions.

1. Face coverings

- all 'workers', i.e. attendees, are required to carry a face covering with them, so that they can wear them if for an unforeseen reason the 1.5m separation requirement cannot be met.

2. Session approved COVIDSafe Plan

- places of worship must have a COVIDSafe Plan in place, agreed to by Session – an agreement to record-keeping, regular cleaning of items and areas used by attendees, protocol regarding physical distancing and the processes to put in place should any suspected case or confirmed case of COVID-19 be reported.

3. Record keeping

- places of worship (churches) are considered workplaces and it is now mandatory to keep records electronically*
 - all churches must either use:
 - a government provided digital system – which means applying for a government-linked QR code rather than using your own local code – the QR code and PDF to print can be applied for easily through the following website: <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/victorian-government-qr-code-service> **OR**
 - a third-party recording app linked to the Government API – details of compatible systems are here: <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/visitation-api-connected-third-parties>
- to record each time the name, contact phone number, date and time of every attendee who attends an area of the church premises for longer than 15 minutes.

* **NB** there are provisions made for attendees who do not possess a mobile phone, or in cases where there is a power or internet outage, namely:

"A venue must continue to keep records even when they are unable to collect records electronically (e.g. as there is no internet or mobile phone data coverage). This can be done through a non-electronic back-up if it is not possible to connect to a compliant service at that time.

A business must make reasonable efforts to ensure that customers can use a compliant record keeping system even in cases where a customer cannot access the system on their own device for some reason (e.g. they do not have a mobile phone). Note: this should include making a terminal (e.g. an iPad) available for customers to sign in, or staff assisting the customer to sign in. In exceptional circumstances where such an approach is not practicable, an alternative record keeping approach (including a non-electronic approach) can be used as a back-up."

4. Signage

- every publicly accessible space within your church premises must have a display sign at each entry point indicating the maximum number of members of the public that may be present in the space at any one time (see point 7 below).

5. Cleaning

- all reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that shared spaces in your church premises which people have accessed are disinfectant-cleaned on a regular basis, including:
 - frequently touched surfaces;
 - toilets;
 - cleaning between services / meetings.

6. Response to a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19

- there are very specific processes to be followed in either case and these are clearly set out in clauses 7 and 8 of the Chief Health Officer's Workplace Directions.

7. Finally, there are specific requirements for places of worship:

- the maximum number of persons permitted in each indoor space (not counting infants under one year of age) is limited to the number calculated by dividing the total area of the indoor space or outdoor space accessible to attendees (measured in square metres) by 2; the usual 1.5m social distancing between people not of the same family group must also be maintained;
- the 4 sq.m. rule no longer applies to churches;
- there is no cap on people attending either a wedding or funeral in your church;
- no food, drink, crockery or utensils is permitted to be shared by participants.

While these guidelines are up-to-date and as accurate as I can make them, I am not guaranteeing that they are complete or exhaustive - in the final analysis the responsibility remains with you and your Session to read the CHO's direction papers for yourself and be satisfied that your church is compliant.

John P Wilson
(Clerk of Assembly)