



Guidance Note – Infection Control

What is this guidance about?

This guidance note provides information about infection control practices for activities undertaken on church premises and by Church Councils.

Who does this guidance apply to?

This information is provided for use by Presbytery and Church Councils who decide to continue to undertake community activities.

Church Councils with non-church organisations renting or providing community services to vulnerable community members from congregation or presbytery facilities should use these guidelines as a tool to confirm the entity has appropriate protocols in place when deciding if the rental arrangement should continue.

Please note, other church entities who are authorised providers of community services using congregation facilities for this purpose have protocols they are required to follow.

Guidance

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders from all Presbyteries and Synod have provided strong recommendations to Presbyteries, Congregations and Faith Communities about worship and groups meeting on Uniting Church Facilities. Following the advice that has been provided by government health authorities, the priority is to:

1. Minimise the risk of exposure;
2. Reduce/slow down the spread; and

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3. Mitigate the impact of the virus on both ourselves and the most vulnerable members of the community.

To lessen the risk to our communities, the following strategies are proposed to slow the rate of the spread of the virus:

1. Support Church Councils of Uniting Church congregations who have already decided to suspend worship in their congregation;
2. Strongly urge that Church Councils of Uniting Church congregations immediately decide to suspend all worship services from 18 March 2020;
3. Strongly urge that Church Councils of all Uniting Church congregations
 - a. decide to suspend immediately all other church activities in their premises; and
 - b. decide to suspend immediately the use of their church facilities for all community users;
4. Noting that many church facilities are the base for community activities which are relied upon by the most vulnerable people in our communities (emergency relief, food banks, and the like), strongly urge that Church Councils in this situation adopt clear infection control protocols; and
5. Should your Church Council determine that it can continue activities/services safely, please notify your Presbytery. We would also welcome you registering the activity [here](#).

For further assistance please contact Synod Risk & Compliance:

- 02 8267 4248 (office hours)
- risk@nswact.uca.org.au

This guidance note provides general infection control information that Church Councils are strongly urged to adopt (see

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attachments). Detailed sample policies and procedures are available from Synod Risk & Compliance on request.

As the situation is constantly evolving, Church Councils should continue to monitor legislative and regulatory requirements that apply.

Supporting information

For further information see:

<https://www.health.gov.au/>

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/corona-virus.aspx>

<https://www.health.act.gov.au/about-our-health-system/novel-coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-employers>

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the COVID-19 Information Update shared by General Secretary, Rev Jane Fry and Moderator, Simon Hansford on 18 March 2020 (see **Attachment 1**).

Acknowledgement

The Synod acknowledges and thanks UnitingCare Kippax for sharing its resources for use by the wider Church.

Attachments

1. COVID-19 Information Update dated 18 March 2020
2. Key Principles

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GUIDANCE NOTE (GN-01)

3. Generic Risk Assessments
4. Poster: 5 steps to stop respiratory illness
5. Poster: Covid-19: Help stop the spread

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Attachment 1 - COVID-19 Information Update dated 18 March 2020



People in leadership in the Uniting Church in the Synod of NSW.ACT

Leaders from all Presbyteries and the Synod have met today, to give consideration to the situation regarding worship and groups meeting on Uniting Church facilities. We have agreed to provide the following guidance to Presbyteries, Congregations and Faith Communities across the Synod.

We note the clear advice that has been provided by government health authorities, about the importance of acting early for the benefit of the whole society. Early action will minimise the likelihood of becoming infected, slow the rate at which the virus spreads, flatten the curve of the incidence of serious cases, and assist the medical and hospital systems in responding to seriously increased demands.

The very strong recommendation is that **we should not be meeting in person in any gathering.**

As Paul long ago advised, "whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith" (Gal 6:10). Our commitment to the common good mandates that we proceed in this direction.

We have a responsibility towards one another in our community of faith. By keeping distant from one another, not touching physically, not gathering in groups, we lessen the possibility that we pass on the virus to one another.

We also have a responsibility to other people in our society. We know that the virus will keep on spreading. By not gathering, we reduce the spread of the virus in society, which flattens the curve, spreading out the number of serious cases, making it more feasible for the hospital and medical systems to cope with the inevitable rise of cases to be dealt with.

We acknowledge that conversations about modes of operating have been undertaken already in many presbyteries, congregations and faith communities. We anticipate that a government directive is imminent, which will restrict meeting in groups and require us to cease all gatherings.

We therefore propose the following strategies, on the understanding that they will contribute to lessening the risk, slowing the rate of spread of the virus in our communities.

1. Support Church Councils of Uniting Church congregations who have already decided to suspend worship in their congregation;
2. Strongly urge that Church Councils of Uniting Church congregations immediately decide to suspend all worship services as from today;

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INFORMATION UPDATE

3. Strongly urge that Church Councils of all Uniting church congregations
 - (a) decide to suspend immediately all other church activities in their premises and
 - (b) decide to suspend immediately the use of their church facilities for all community users;
4. Note that many church facilities are the base for community activities which are relied upon by the most vulnerable people in our communities (emergency relief, food banks, and the like), and strongly urge that Church Councils in this situation adopt clear infection control protocols which will be available from Albert Olley in Uniting Resources on alberto@nswact.uca.org.au or 0404 801 191;
5. Strongly recommend that Ministers and Pastors, Elders and Church Councils
 - (a) give active consideration to ways that they can foster social contact amongst their people in safe ways.
 - (b) encourage people within the congregation to maintain fellowship and mutual support by other means: Australia Post, telephone, internet, Facebook, online resources (Saltbush, Insights, Facebook, etc), and
 - (c) note that Adrian Drayton, (Synod Communications adriand@nswact.uca.org.au) is collating the various options available for online activities as a church;
6. Encourage people to use this time as an opportunity for personal retreat and reflection, for enriching and renewing their life of faith, for discovering new ways of reaching out in friendship and support to others in faith, even in the midst of the challenges being experienced.

Rev. Jane Fry
General Secretary

Rev. Simon Hansford
Moderator

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Attachment 2 - Key Principles for infection control

If there is any concern regarding the capacity of the church, its members or volunteers to provide and/or continue an activity/service safely, the service/activity should be discontinued, until such time as reasonable controls can be determined and put in place.

Reasonable controls include:

- Protecting oneself from harm
- Practicing social distancing
- Cancelling mass gatherings of more than 100 people in an indoor setting or 500 people in an outdoor setting
- Protecting those at greatest risk of serious infection

Protecting yourself

The best way to protect yourself from COVID-19 is the same way you would protect yourself from catching flu or other respiratory illness:

- [clean your hands](#) for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or use an alcohol-based sanitiser with at least 60% alcohol.
- cover your sneeze or cough with your elbow or with tissue.
- avoid close contact with people who are ill
- avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth
- stay home if you are sick.

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/protect-yourself.aspx>

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Practicing social distancing

What is social distancing?

Social distancing means we reduce the number of close physical and social contacts we have with one another.

When social distancing actions are combined with good personal hygiene measures the spread of a pandemic through the community can be slowed. This helps protect the most vulnerable members of the community and reduces the impact of the pandemic on essential, life-saving health services.

Social distancing is an effective measure, but it is recognised that it cannot be practiced in all situations and the aim is to generally reduce potential for transmission.

While practicing social distancing, people can travel to work (including public transport). For non-essential activities outside the workplace or attendance at schools, universities and childcare - social distancing includes:

- avoiding crowds and mass gatherings where it is difficult to keep the appropriate distance away from others
- avoiding small gatherings in enclosed spaces, for example family celebrations
- attempting to keep 1.5 metres between themselves and other people where possible, for example when they are out and about in public place.
- avoiding shaking hands, hugging, or kissing other people.
- avoiding visiting vulnerable people, such as those in aged care facilities or hospitals, infants, or people with compromised immune systems due to illness or medical treatment.

For more information about social distancing, refer to [COVID-19 - Advice for the NSW community](#).

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Mass Gatherings: Public Health (COVID-19 Mass Gatherings) Order 2020

On 18 March 2020, NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard made an Order under Section 7 of the Public Health Act 2010 to force the immediate cancellation of major events with more than 500 people.

The object of this Order is to deal with the public health risk of COVID-19 and its possible consequences by giving a Ministerial direction that prohibits mass gatherings of 500 or more people in outdoor spaces and 100 people or more in indoor spaces, subject to certain exclusions.

Section 10 of the Public Health Act 2010 creates an offence if an individual fails to comply with a direction with a maximum penalty of imprisonment for 6 months or a fine of up to \$11,000 (or both) plus a further \$5,500 fine each day the offence continues. Corporations that fail to comply with a direction are liable to a fine of \$55,000 and \$27,500 each day the offence continues.

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/covid-19-events.aspx>

Who is most at risk?

People most at risk of getting COVID-19 coronavirus infections are those who have:

- recently returned from overseas, particularly from mainland China, Iran, Italy or Korea
- been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19.

There is also evidence of limited spread of COVID-19 in the community in Australia. Based on what we know so far about COVID-19 and what we know about other coronaviruses, those at greatest risk of serious infection are:

- people aged 65 years and over

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- Aboriginal people (as they have higher rates of chronic illness)
- people with chronic medical conditions, such as lung disease, heart disease, kidney disease, neurological conditions and diabetes
- people with impaired immune systems (such as people who have cancer or HIV, or who take high dose corticosteroids).

People living in group residential settings are at greater risk of being exposed to outbreaks of COVID-19 if a case is diagnosed in a resident or staff member. This includes:

- people living in residential aged care facilities and disability group homes
- people in detention facilities
- students in boarding schools
- people on cruise ships.

People living in some group residential settings are also more likely to have conditions that make them at greater risk of serious COVID-19 infection.

What should I do if I come into contact with a person who has been identified as a contact?

If you have been in contact with a person identified as a close contact of another person with confirmed COVID-19 infection, you do not need to self-isolate (although the close contact does) and don't need take any other special precautions.

If a close contact develops symptoms and is confirmed as a COVID-19 case, public health authorities will determine who, if anyone, has been in close contact with them while they were infectious, and these people will be directed to self-isolate.

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/alerts/Pages/coronavirus-faqs.aspx#1-14>

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Additional Infection Control Practices

In addition to the measures above additional infection control practices (subject to the specific context of each activity/service) should include consideration for:

- Provision for working from home.
- Updating contact details and distribution lists to ensure effective communication.
- Providing regular updates on arrangements and expectations with staff / volunteers / clients.
- Increasing the frequency of general cleaning regimes.
- Outsourcing of cleaning to professional cleaning service providers.
- Monitoring and securely storing supplies of tissues, hand sanitizer, toilet paper and Personal Protective Equipment.
- Use of highly visible hygiene protocol and etiquette posters <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-resources>
- Making infection control a standing agenda item at all meetings and discuss concerns and precautions being-taken.
- Avoiding sharing of pens.
- Maximising space between people working/occupying an office / enclosed environment.
- Maintaining good ventilation.
- Using alcohol-based wipes and/or disinfectants to sanitise high traffic/high touch areas / artefacts (at least) twice-daily, e.g.:
 - Counters/benchtops/tables
 - Door handles and light switches

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- Phones computers, computer mice and computer keyboards
- Bathrooms
- Spraying (high-use) furniture with Glen-20 (or similar) twice a day.
- Removing books, magazines and other public reading material from reception areas, except for program leaflets which people should be encouraged to take away.
- Providing additional bins to encourage people to use tissues and advocate the “catch it, bin it, kill it” strategy for those with coughs and sneezes.
- Removing water fountains
- Ensuring that those hiring your facilities/spaces are informed of any specific expectations and are aware of their own responsibilities regarding preventing exposure/spread, including restrictions on mass gatherings.
- Maintaining records of groups/persons hiring facilities/spaces for use.

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Attachment 3 - Generic Risk Assessments

Please review the following with a view to determining if you can implement the suggested modifications. If not, it is recommended that you discontinue the service / activity.

Preparation and Provision of Meals and Food Services	
Risk Level	High
Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proximity to others Touching contaminated surfaces/food/utensils/plates Exposure to respiratory droplets
Risks for continuing to provide food service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inability to maintain appropriate social distancing Potential for person to person transmission Potential for contact with contaminated surfaces / food
Risks for suspending food services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased isolation of vulnerable and marginalized
Possible Modifications	<p>Adhere to NSW Department of Health guidelines concerning personal hygiene, social distancing and mass gatherings and consider;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wearing Personal Protective Equipment (i.e. gloves and masks) Serving in an outdoor space Serving items in individual/single use packages, including cutlery Providing a take-away / drop-off / delivery service Regularly communicate and reinforce expectations regarding self-isolation, personal hygiene and social distancing

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Outreach Activities	
Risk Level	Moderate to High
Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proximity to others Exposure to respiratory droplets
Risks for continuing the activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inability to maintain appropriate social distancing Potential for person to person transmission
Risks for suspending the activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased isolation of vulnerable and marginalized
Possible Modifications	<p>Adhere to NSW Department of Health guidelines concerning personal hygiene, social distancing and mass gatherings and consider;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider on-line engagement Meet outdoors Connect via phone Wearing Personal Protective Equipment (i.e. masks) Regularly communicate and reinforce expectations regarding self-isolation, personal hygiene and social distancing A drop-off (non-contact) service

Synod would like to encourage congregations to share creative and above all safe ways in which you have continued to worship, witness and serve.



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Facilities Management - Sharing of Spaces	
Risk Level	Moderate to High
Why	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exposure to contaminated surfaces Failure to comply with mass gathering requirements
Risks for continuing to share spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inability to maintain appropriate social distancing Potential for person to person transmission Potential for exposure to contaminated surfaces
Risks for suspending space sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased isolation of vulnerable and marginalized
Possible Modifications	<p>Adhere to NSW Department of Health guidelines concerning personal hygiene, social distancing and mass gatherings and consider;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If event can be conducted outdoors Increasing frequency of cleaning regime Outsourcing cleaning to a professional cleaning service Regularly communicate and reinforce expectations regarding self-isolation, personal hygiene and social distancing

Please direct any specific risk management inquiries to phone 02 8267 4248 (office hours) or email risk@nswact.uca.org.au



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Attachment 4 - 5 steps to stop respiratory illness

5 STEPS
to stop the spread
of respiratory
illnesses

- 1** Cover your mouth and nose with tissues when coughing, sneezing, blowing and/or wiping your nose
- 2** Dispose of tissues in the nearest waste bin after use
- 3** If no tissues are available, cough or sneeze into your inner elbow rather than your hand
- 4** You may be asked to put on a face mask to protect others
- 5** Wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol based handrub after coughing or sneezing into hands or tissues

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Attachment 5 – COVID-19: Help stop the spread

COVID-19: HELP STOP THE SPREAD OF INFECTION



WASH YOUR HANDS REGULARLY

Wash your hands regularly and thoroughly with soap and water or antibacterial hand rub.



COVER YOUR MOUTH AND NOSE WHEN COUGHING OR SNEEZING

Practice good hygiene by covering your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your elbow.



AVOID CONTACT WITH OTHERS IF UNWELL

Avoid close contact if you or others show symptoms such as coughing and sneezing.



TELL THE DOCTOR IF YOU GET SICK

Speak to your GP if you develop symptoms, have been overseas, or had contact with a person with confirmed COVID-19.



ONLY WEAR A MASK IF UNWELL

Face masks are not recommended for healthy people as they do not protect you against becoming infected.

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