



September 3, 2021

Friends,

September is now upon us, and many of us are considering and planning for a return to in-person worship. We do this in the context of rising numbers, more contagious COVID variants, and a lot of uncertainty – and we recognize that this virus is not going away soon. Under the leadership of our amazing Provincial Health Officer, we in BC are moving towards learning to live with COVID while being together, but in a way that minimizes virus transmission. The standards provided by the province are minimum standards, and it is important to acknowledge that we as United Church people can ask for a higher standard in our communities of faith and ministries, in response to our duty of care of our people. This is an ever-evolving landscape and we have been called to offer leadership that none of us feel prepared for, but our faith reminds us that we are never alone when we face these challenges. I hope that this document provides you with some guidance as you make decisions as a Community of Faith about how you will stay safe when gathering, so that our people can be together.

Treena Duncan
Executive Minister

Gathering Together During COVID

Informed

We have excellent information about what minimizes transmission, and this knowledge informs our practices going forward. It is the PMRC's belief that COVID-19 and variants are equally transmissible in churches as in grocery stores and restaurants. We don't feel that mask-wearing that hinders people's access to church.

Empowered

Communities of Faith Governing Bodies (boards, session, council) and Faith Leaders can choose to do more for communicable disease prevention than what is outlined the minimum requirements by the BC Centre for Disease Control and Public Health Office.

Required

The August 24 Guidelines are the minimum requirements for Communities of Faith and their leaders in all activities except Worship Services and Support Groups. Worship Services and Support Groups are exempt. Worship includes wedding and funeral ceremonies, but not receptions, jazz vespers, Sunday and mid-week worship times. Support groups include AA, ANON, etc.

Provincial Vaccine Passport requirements must be met for your communities of faith's group activities (excluding Worship and Support Groups). Rental Groups are responsible for monitoring their people's compliance. Communities of Faith must follow the mask and double vaccine guidelines for all non-Worship service times of community, business, work, reflection, prayer, bible study etc.,

"Discretionary meetings taking place at places of worship will be subject to proof of vaccination requirements. Non-discretionary meetings such as AA and other support groups are exempt." – Aug 24 CDC POH Guidelines



September 3, 2021

The Pacific Mountain Regional Council

Requires

- Stay home when sick, including church leaders and staff

Strongly Encourages

- Single Serve Communion
- No-Contact Donation Methods
- Masks in Worship and gatherings for all people of all ages (including under 12s), as they are able
- Mask when Singing: We recognise that singing is still considered a high-risk activity, and mask wearing limits transmission
- Social Distancing: Maintaining 6' between people as much as possible, as outlined in previous guidelines
- Offering Online Worship Access: Zoom, Facebook Live, YouTube streaming in-person worship services for people to attend from home. Communities of Faith can find support from LeaderShift and UnitedOnline in providing Online Worship.

Turns to Neighbours

- Encouraging one other and congregational members to attend where they can be fed through worship, even if not your own place of worship if your members aren't able to attend with you in person.
- Empowering people to take advantage of online offerings from other United Churches if you don't offer them yourself, and can't attend in person

Supports First Third Ministry

- This [comprehensive document](#) has been created by the Chinook Winds Pacific Mountain Regional Council First Third Ministry Staff to support communities of faith in preparing for ministry with children, youth and families.

Q&A / FAQs with Treena from the August 25 Town Hall

Can we require masks and enforce it?

You can say it's a requirement, but you'll have to make your own decisions about how to enforce it

Which set of guidelines are applicable for which activities?

The Vaccine Passport is applicable to anything that is not considered to be a 'non-discretionary' or 'essential'. Worship Services (including wedding ceremonies) are considered essential; AA is considered non-discretionary. All other group activities, gatherings, meetings, etc. indoors are required to up to comply with the Vaccination Passports and Mask Wearing mandate.

Are church staff required to wear masks?

You can make this a policy in your setting. The PMRC strongly encourages mask wearing in all situations.

Are church staff required to be vaccinated?

Not at this time. We will get future direction on this topic from the national office.



Can we Sing?

Yes. The PMRC strongly encourages mask wearing in all situations, including singing.

Can we have after worship coffee time?

Yes when following the BC Health Officials guidelines for indoor gatherings – Mask Wearing and Vaccine Passport are required.

Do worship services such as Wedding Ceremonies, Funerals, Jazz Vespers, Sunday Worship require Vaccine Passports and Mask Wearing?

No. However, the PMRC strongly encourages mask wearing in all situations.

Do group activities such as Wedding and Funeral Receptions, Bible Studies, Labyrinth Walks, Thrift Stores, Cooking groups require Vaccine Passports and Mask Wearing?

Yes.

Are 12-Step Groups exempt from Vaccine Passports and Mask Wearing?

“Support Groups” are exempt from Vaccine Passports. They are not expressly exempt from Mask Wearing.

Do rental groups need to have the Vaccine Passport and Mask Wearing in place?

Yes, and it is up to Rental Groups to monitor compliance for their people.

Do churches have to monitor Rental Group’s compliance?

No. It is up to each rental group to monitor and enforce the requirement.

What guidelines do United Church Thrift Shops have to follow?

United Church Thrift Shops need to follow WorkSafeBC Retail Store guidelines as found on [WorkSafeBC website](#).

What guidelines should Sunday School, Youth Group and Pro-D Programs follow?

Please see the document “[Suggested COVID- 19 Health & Safety Guidelines for Fall 2021 Ministry with Children, Youth and Families in Communities of Faith \(August 2021\)](#)” by the Chinook Winds Pacific Mountain Regional Council First Third Ministry.

Where can churches get help for through the process of hybrid planning?

[Andria Irwin, UnitedOnline.ca](#)
[LeaderShiftpm.ca YouTube](#)

Is social distancing required indoors?

No, however the PMRC strongly encourages social distancing as much as possible.

If have more questions about guidelines and compliance, who do I speak with?

Please contact your [Regional Minister](#).