

BEING COVID-READY

AT YOUR PLACE OF WORSHIP

**Prevent COVID-19.
Protect your community.**

ARPHS

The [COVID-19 Protection Framework](#) sets out the current requirements for faith-based organisations. This guidance outlines additional measures you can consider to protect your community while there is ongoing transmission of COVID-19 within the Auckland region.

While restrictions are reduced at the Orange traffic light setting COVID-19 still poses a threat, especially to our most vulnerable communities. The Omicron variant of COVID-19 can make people very sick, even if they are fully vaccinated. As we enter winter we will also see an increase in other illnesses such as the flu. It's therefore important to consider what level of safeguards you can maintain at your place of worship to run gatherings and events safely to reduce the risk of people getting very ill.

Please look out for your community at this time, especially those who are older or others who could get very sick. This includes people aged 70-plus, pregnant women and those who have a health condition like diabetes or cancer.

This guidance covers:

- How to hold COVID-19 safe gatherings
- What to do if someone with COVID-19 visits your place of worship
- How to protect yourself and your community against COVID-19
- What to do if someone in your community is unwell

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Step 1: Think about whether you can gather in other ways.

- There is a higher risk of people passing on COVID-19 at indoor face-to-face services or gatherings. Before planning or holding a service or gathering consider alternative options for hosting it, or ways to modify the service.
- This could include:
 - holding services or gatherings outside where possible
 - modifying your service or gathering to reduce high-risk activities, such as sharing food and drink, singing and dancing
 - going on-line (e.g. via Zoom, Facebook or Microsoft Teams if you have it)
 - temporarily pausing or delaying some gatherings



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Step 2: If you decide to go ahead, use this COVID-19 checklist:

Action to take



Remind people to stay home if they are unwell

People who are unwell should get a test and stay home until it comes back negative and they feel better. If they test positive, they will need to isolate at home for 7 days, and so will the people they live with.

Hold the gathering outside if you can

It is harder for COVID-19 to spread outdoors, especially when there is a breeze and people stay distanced.

Capacity limits are no longer required

At Orange there are no capacity limits for indoor gatherings or events. You may want to consider still maintaining caps on indoor gatherings and events to avoid widespread transmission at your place of worship.

People also no longer need to show their My Vaccine Pass, however you can still require it if you wish.

Make sure you have ways to contact people

People no longer need to scan-in using the COVID-19 tracer app, however it's still good practice to have contact details for attendees.

This will be helpful if there are multiple cases at your venue following a gathering or event, so you can warn others to watch out for COVID-19 symptoms. Try and keep your congregation rolls up to date, or ask people to follow your social media or share their email addresses.

Keep bubbles physically-distanced as much as possible (at least one metre)

Having distance between people in different bubbles helps to prevent the virus spreading. Make sure there are plenty of chairs and space them well apart to allow groups to spread out. Mark the floor to show how far apart people should be sitting to physically distance themselves from others in places of worship like temples.

Consider spreading your prayer times, so that fewer people are attending at any one time. Singing is allowed but it increases the risk of COVID-19 spreading.

Ventilate indoor spaces

Keep windows and doors open, and use air filtration systems if available.

Ensure everyone wears their masks covering their mouth and nose when indoors

Wearing a mask is an important way to stop COVID-19 spreading and surgical masks are a great option.

Face masks are not required for attendees at gatherings and events, however you should consider encouraging them to be worn when people are moving about your venue, as well as upon entry and exit.

Face masks are required for workers at indoor events and gatherings, including volunteers. Performers and formal speakers, such as a person leading a service, can remove a mask provided they are 2m apart from the audience or other attendees.

To make it easier for people to wear masks you could keep a supply of them at entry points for those who forget to bring one.

Always make 'on-line' an option

Even if you are gathering in-person, consider providing an on-line option too for those in your community who could get really sick if they got COVID-19 or for those isolating. You could also offer an on-line option for any personal, one-on-one prayers or faith-based support.

Consider stopping shared meals, and serve food and drink in a safe way.

You could offer takeaway lunches or ask people to eat outside. People serving food must wear masks if the gathering or service is indoors. Make sure there is enough cutlery and cups for everyone so no one has to share.

Consider not having full communion

Do not share a communion cup or have people gather at the altar (if this is part of the usual practice for your faith). The minister or lay members can take the bread to each congregant while keeping physical distance, wearing masks and with sanitised hands. Please do not have the bread passed between congregants. Communion wine can be served in individual cups.

Avoid high risk activities like hugging and shaking hands

Encourage congregants to signal a sign of peace while keeping physical distance, without shaking hands or embracing.

Remind people who attend to let you know if they test positive for COVID-19

If someone unknowingly attends your gathering while infectious, then later tests positive for COVID-19, it's important they tell you. That way you can let others from the gathering know and help to reduce the virus spreading. *See Step 4 in the next section.*

It's important they tell the person leading the service, or the person in charge of the venue or gathering (e.g. the pastor, minister, priest). They should not share the information via social media.

Make soap, paper towels and hand sanitiser readily available

Encourage people to wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds, then dry well every time:

- After going to the toilet or changing nappies
- Before preparing food, eating or drinking
- After changing nappies

Hand sanitiser is a good option if soap and water aren't available. Keeping your hands clean helps to keep everyone well.

Have options available for contactless donation

Encourage devotees to make contactless donations and remove cash donation boxes and/or passed collection plates from your place of worship.

Clean and sanitise shared surfaces thoroughly before and after use

Guidance on cleaning is available from the [Ministry of Health](#).

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Step 3: What to do if someone with COVID visits your place of worship

If someone with COVID-19 attends your service or gathering, take action to reduce the chance of others getting sick too:

- If someone from your gathering tells you they have tested positive for COVID-19, you should **tell the other people who were there at the same time. Use the template on the next page to do this.**
- You can use channels such as email or social media to communicate with your devotees and congregants. **You must not share the name or any personal information of the person who has COVID-19.** This is private and confidential health information.
- Don't wait for a health professional to reach out before you start taking action – the sooner you start telling others the better.

Contact Auckland Regional Public Health Service if you need public health advice or support regarding:

- A COVID-19 outbreak in your community of faith that is spreading quickly (i.e. lots of people are becoming sick with COVID-19).
- You have a large number of people who have been exposed to COVID-19 at your place of worship and who could be seriously affected by the virus (for example, they have other health conditions, are pregnant, or are age 70-plus).

How to reach us:

- By email: <https://www.arphs.health.nz/about-us/contact-us/>
- By phone: 09 623 4600 (8am to 5pm, Monday to Friday).

Template for telling your community of a COVID case at your gathering

Insert the correct details in the highlighted spaces below before sending.

<Your usual greeting>

We've learned that someone with COVID-19 attended our <gathering> and there is a risk they may have passed the virus to others. The person was at our <gathering> at the following time:

- <Insert Day, Date and Time>

What to do if you were there at this time – if you do NOT live with the person with COVID-19:

- If you are free of COVID-19 symptoms, you do NOT need to get a test or self-isolate. However, please avoid contact with vulnerable groups or individuals for 10 days from the date above, and watch out for symptoms.
- If you have COVID-19 symptoms, please isolate at home and get tested immediately (see below for how to do this). If you still have symptoms after a negative test, stay at home and carry out another test the following day. If your symptoms get worse, contact your local healthcare provider or call Healthline for free on 0800 358 5453.
- If you have symptoms and you need to miss work [financial support may be available](#). You can show your employer this letter if necessary.
- If you test positive, there is further advice available on the Unite against COVID-19 website: <https://covid19.govt.nz/isolation-and-care/if-you-have-covid-19/>

What to do if you live with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19

If you live with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, you are a household contact. You should:

- isolate at home for at least 7 days - starting from when the person tested positive or first developed symptoms
- get tested on Day 3 and Day 7 of the isolation period

More information is available from: <https://covid19.govt.nz/testing-and-tracing/contact-tracing/household-contacts/>

You can also call Healthline for free on 0800 358 5453. This is a free, 24/7 service with interpreters available. Tell them you are a household contact.

What to do if you are a household contact and a critical worker

If you are a household contact and a critical worker you may be able to return to work early. More information is available from: <https://covid19.govt.nz/testing-and-tracing/contact-tracing/critical-workers/>

Testing

Testing is free. You can find your nearest testing centre here: www.healthpoint.co.nz/covid-19, or free-phone Healthline: 0800 358 5453.

You can also order free Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) if you have symptoms, and use these yourself at home. RATs are the main type of test now being used, with results only taking about 20 minutes. You can order RATs on-line or over the phone.

- **Online:** requestrats.covid19.health.nz
- **Over the phone:** [0800 222 478](tel:0800222478), choose option 3 (8am-8pm, 7 days a week)

Find out more at <https://covid19.govt.nz/testing-and-tracing/covid-19-testing/how-to-get-a-covid-19-test/>.

Common COVID-19 symptoms

- new or worsening cough
- sneezing and runny nose
- fever
- temporary loss of smell or altered sense of taste
- sore throat
- shortness of breath

Less common symptoms of COVID-19 may include: diarrhoea, headache, muscle aches, nausea, vomiting, malaise, chest pain, abdominal pain, joint pain, or confusion/irritability. These almost always occur with one or more of the common symptoms.

For further help:

- If you are worried or have questions you should call your GP or family doctor.
- The Unite against COVID-19 website has lots of useful information on COVID-19. Visit: <https://covid19.govt.nz>.
- Information in other languages is available from: <https://covid19.govt.nz/languages-and-resources/translations/>
- Information about the vaccination is available from: <https://immunisation.northernregion.health.nz/>
- Information for people with COVID-19 is available from: <https://immunisation.northernregion.health.nz/whanauhq/>.
- You can also call Healthline for free anytime on 0800 358 5453. Healthline has interpreters if you need one.

<Closing greeting>



Step 4: Help others to get vaccinated

Encouraging your community to get vaccinated and boosted is the best way to help protect them against COVID-19.

The COVID-19 vaccine is free and available to anyone in Aotearoa aged 5 years and over.

Use the FAQs to learn more about how people can get vaccinated, and common questions they may have.

Vaccine FAQs

How many doses of vaccine should you have?

- If you're over 18, you should have two doses of the vaccine, at least three weeks apart – and then a booster around three months after the second dose.
- If you have children aged 5-11, they should have should have two doses, at least eight weeks apart. Children receive a smaller dose and volume of vaccine, and it is given with a smaller needle.
- And just recently boosters were approved for 16 and 17-year-olds. They should now get a booster if it's been six months since they had their second dose of the vaccine.

Where can people get the vaccine from?

There are lots of options for where to get vaccinated:

- There are vaccination centres across Auckland.
- There are two Pacific-led vaccination centres in Otara and Westgate.
- There are pharmacies offering vaccination.
- You can go to your usual doctor to get vaccinated.

You can find all of the vaccination centre locations on-line at nrhcc.health.nz. When encouraging your community to get vaccinated try and find clinics near your place of worship to make it easy for them.

How do you book a vaccination appointment?

You can just walk-in or drive up to one of the Auckland vaccination centres during their opening hours. You can find all of the vaccination centre locations on-line at nrhcc.health.nz.

If you do want to book ahead you can:

- Call 0800 28 29 26 – this line is available from 8am to 8pm, seven days a week and has interpreters available.
- Visit bookmyvaccine.nz

Can pregnant women be vaccinated?

Yes, if you're pregnant you can – and should – get the COVID vaccination.

If you catch COVID-19 when you're pregnant, you're more likely to become very unwell — so it's a good idea to get vaccinated and boosted. The vaccine also protects your baby.

Millions of pregnant people have been vaccinated around the world. Data shows no evidence that the vaccine is associated with an increased risk of miscarriage during pregnancy, and no additional safety concerns have been raised. There are also no additional safety concerns or issues with continuing to breastfeed after vaccination.

If you've already had COVID, do you still need to get vaccinated?

Yes. Getting vaccinated will help to protect you against COVID, even if you've already had the virus. You need to wait until three months after you have recovered to get your vaccination. If you tested positive, but didn't have symptoms, you can get vaccinated three months after the date of your positive test.

Ask your communities to check they're vaccinated against other illnesses

With winter approaching there will be a higher risk of other illnesses and viruses spreading in New Zealand. For many of these however there are vaccines available which can provide great protection.

People can check with their GP if they and their whānau are fully up-to-date with the vaccines they require. This is especially important for children, those who are older, and those with other underlying health conditions.

Consider asking your community to contact their GP to check they and their family are up-to-date.



Step 5: What to do if someone in your community has COVID-19 symptoms

If a family member, friend, or someone else you know feels unwell and has one or more symptoms of COVID-19, it's important that they get a COVID-19 test and stay at home:

-  **Until it comes back negative, AND**

-  **Until they have felt well and free of symptoms for 24 hours.**

If they test positive, they will need to isolate at home for seven days and so will anyone they live with.

You can find your nearest testing centre here: www.healthpoint.co.nz/covid-19, or free-phone Healthline: **0800 358 5453**.

You can also order Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) and use these yourself at home. You can order RATs on-line or over the phone.

- **Online:** requestrats.covid19.health.nz
- **Over the phone:** [0800 222 478](tel:0800222478), choose option 3 (8am-8pm, 7 days a week)

You can get a free test if:

- You have symptoms
- Are a Household Contact
- Are a Critical Worker and need a test to go to work
- Are part of the healthcare and emergency service workforce
- Require a test for domestic travel or to attend court
- Do a job where mandatory testing applies