

Communicable Disease Plan: Willingdon Heights United Church

This is a living document. It will be revised in accordance with the current Provincial Health Orders, recommendations from the Pacific Mountain Regional Council, and to accommodate the requirements of other groups using our building.

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1. Introduction

Over the COVID-19 pandemic, the BC Provincial Health Officer has issued numerous health orders that placed mandatory restrictions on the activities of communities of faith. Many of these restrictions are no longer mandatory because our high level of vaccination is making it less likely that COVID-19 will spread. Although vaccines significantly reduce the risk, they do not eliminate it. We still need to be cautious. Even fully vaccinated people can contract COVID-19, can transmit it to other people, and risk hospitalization and death if they catch the disease.

COVID-19 is one of many communicable diseases, and similar techniques can be used to control many of these diseases. Vaccination (when appropriate), masks and physical distancing are helpful. Most critically, anyone exhibiting symptoms of a communicable disease should stay at home. The following plan explains the policies that will be in effect at Willingdon Heights United Church (WHUC). WHUC expects that all our renters will abide by this policy and will enforce it among their members.

The policies in this document are intended to protect everyone entering the Willingdon Heights United Church building. They are not medical advice. For authoritative medical advice, consult your personal physician. For up-to-date information about COVID-19 and the policies of the BC government, see the webpages for BC Centre for Disease Control COVID-19 Surveillance Dashboard and the Provincial Health Officer at:

<http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/data-reports/covid-19-surveillance-dashboard>

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/current-health-topics/covid-19-novel-coronavirus>

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-order-face-coverings.pdf>

2. Assessment of Risk

The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads in several ways. It can spread in droplets when a person coughs, sneezes, talks loudly, or breathes heavily. The virus persists for some time on surfaces. Touching the surface can spread the virus to our faces (and especially to our noses and eyes). The same is true for most airborne viral diseases such as seasonal flu and the common cold.

The risk of person-to-person transmission increases the closer you come to other people, the more time you spend near them, and the more people you come near. The risk of surface transmission increases when many people contact the same surface in quick succession.

At WHUC, the risk comes primarily from crowding in the sanctuary, fellowship hall and board room and from contact with high-touch surfaces near the doors and washrooms. These issues will be addressed in the following sections.

Although the pandemic is subsiding now, it may flare up again as new variants begin to circulate. We must be prepared to re-activate the pandemic restrictions when this happens.

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3. Discretionary and Non-Discretionary Activities

We will monitor and implement the directives from the BC Public Health Office (PHO). We will also follow the policies set by the Pacific Mountain Regional Council of the United Church of Canada.

Worship services are considered to be “non-discretionary” and are explicitly exempt from public health orders like those that were imposed during late 2020 and early 2021. Worship services include:

- regular worship (Sunday, baptisms, vespers, and on other days of the week)
- weddings
- funerals

Discretionary forms of gathering that are not considered to be worship include:

- choir practice
- bible study
- meetings of the board, trustees, etc.
- receptions after weddings, funerals, and baptisms
- community organizations renting space in the church

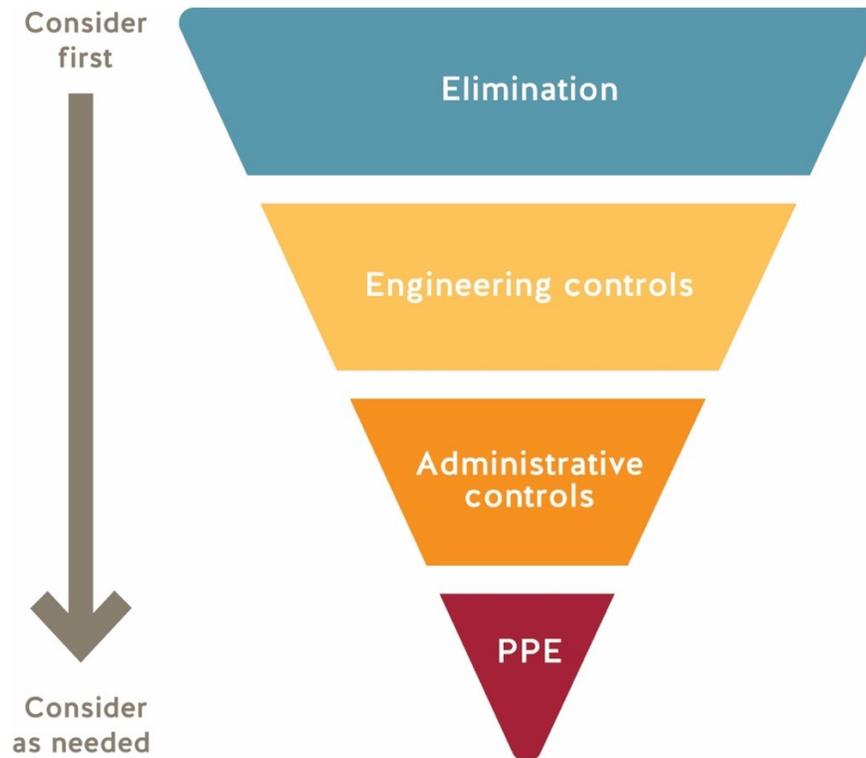
The mandates for vaccine passports, masks, and attendance limits have been rescinded for both non-discretionary and discretionary activities but may be reimposed if another wave of COVID-19 arrives. Organizations offering discretionary services, such as churches, restaurants, theatres, and private social groups, can apply restrictive policies that are stronger than the PHO requirements if their circumstances justify them.

Masking during in-person worship is the one policy that the United Church of Canada in the Pacific Mount Region still recommends, as discussed below.

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4. Levels of Protection

Different protocols offer different levels of protection. Wherever possible, use the protocol that offers the highest level of protection. Consider controls from additional levels if the first level isn't practicable or does not completely control the risk. You will likely need to incorporate controls from various levels to address the risk at your workplace.



First level protection (**elimination**) — Limit the number of people in your workplace where possible by implementing work-from-home arrangements, establishing occupancy limits, rescheduling work tasks, or other means. Rearrange workspaces to ensure that workers are at least 2 m (6 ft.) from co-workers, customers, and members of the public.

Second level protection (**engineering controls**) — If you can't always maintain physical distancing, install [barriers](#) such as plexiglass to separate people.

Third level protection (**administrative controls**) — Establish rules and guidelines, such as posted [occupancy limits](#) for shared spaces, designated delivery areas, cleaning practices, and one-way doors and walkways to keep people physically separated.

Fourth level protection (**PPE**) — If the first three levels of protection aren't enough to control the risk, consider the use of masks. Ensure masks are [selected and cared for appropriately](#) and that workers [are using masks correctly](#).

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5. **Vaccination**

The most effective way to reduce the risk of COVID-19 is vaccination. Because the newer variants of COVID-19 are so contagious, we request that everyone who attends our in-person service be fully vaccinated if they are eligible for vaccination. This is also true for seasonal flus. The vaccines approved for use in Canada are effective and extremely safe.

We recognize that some people cannot be vaccinated or receive very little protection from the available vaccines. There are, at the time of writing, no vaccines approved in Canada for very young children. Some people with serious medical conditions cannot take the vaccine (check with your personal healthcare provider if you are in doubt.) Some medical conditions require that the patient's immune system be suppressed. The effectiveness of vaccination varies with age and with time. These people are still welcome in our worship services.

Everyone has a right to choose whether they will have a vaccination. With that choice comes the responsibility to protect those who cannot make that choice. **We provide an alternative to in-person worship through our online worship program**, as discussed below.

Vaccines reduce the risks associated with contagious diseases like COVID-19 but do not eliminate them. Other policies discussed below are intended to reduce the remaining risk to negligible levels.

6. **Physical Distancing and Attendance Limitations**

The province has removed mandatory limits on attendance during worship services.

Physical distancing is still **strongly recommended**, so we recommend that only one (large) family sit in each pew, or two (small) families at opposite ends of the pew, where the term "family" refers to people who live in the same house or are members of a social bubble (ideally **small** and **exclusive**). To minimize the risk of transmission between groups, invited visitors should sit with the people who invited them.

We have removed the yellow tape that blocked alternate pews, but still recommend leaving two meters between each family group. (Our pews are roughly one meter apart.)

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7. IN-PERSON WORSHIP

WHUC holds its in-person worship services from 10:30 to 11:30 each Sunday morning in the sanctuary

Access to the sanctuary is through the main doors and the ramp access door in the northeast corner of the sanctuary. During the services, both doors will be kept unlocked as emergency exits.

WHUC will minimize or eliminate paper handouts for information available online, such as weekly bulletins and copies of the sermon.

Music during the services may be live or prerecorded videos. **Singing is allowed during the service for those wearing masks.**

Communion may be conducted in the sanctuary with individual glasses and precut bread. Fellowship time before and after the service will be held in the fellowship hall. Food will be available in single servings. Beverages will be provided by a single server who will wear a mask while serving.

Only one person at a time may use the washroom and hallway, except for small children accompanied by a parent. Each person should clean up after use, including doorknobs, sink taps and the toilet seat. Cleaning supplies such as wipes are provided in the washroom. The lights in the washroom should be left on during the service.

8. Online Worship

WHUC is continuing to offer online worship.

We support active participation using Zoom. Our online presence is intended for anyone unable or unwilling to attend an in-person service. **Our online services are open to everyone regardless of their health and vaccination status.** To join us via Zoom, please contact the church office at whuc.office@gmail.com and ask to be added to the notification list for our services. The Zoom contact information is sent by e-mail each Sunday before the start of the service at 10:30 AM.

We also post our services to YouTube, after light editing to ensure privacy. A link to each recorded service is sent by e-mail to everyone in the notification list after the service. We are not currently broadcasting our services live on YouTube.

We **strongly recommend** that anyone experiencing the symptoms of any communicable disease, including COVID-19, cold, and flu, should stay home and join us online.

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9. Masks

Mask mandates have been rescinded in BC, but masks are an effective tool to reduce the transmission of many respiratory diseases. They also filter out dust and smoke particles when we are experiencing poor air quality.

So long as COVID-19 continues to present a significant hazard to our members, the Pacific Mountain Regional Council of the United Church of Canada strongly recommends that we continue wearing masks during worship. This strong recommendation is emphasized during singing. Choirs and soloists should also be masked, or if not, should ensure that there is a good distance between themselves and the congregation.

10. Barriers and Partitions

The building is partitioned for reasons of security into two sections:

- 1) Upper: Sanctuary and offices
- 2) Lower: Daycare, fellowship hall, boardroom and gymnasium

During the week, these two sections are physically separated by iron grills at the top of the stairwells that join them. The grills are padlocked closed most of the time. The internal doors to the church office and the minister's office are normally kept closed and locked for security reasons. WHUC does not foresee a need to partition the building any further.

Communities of faith who worship in the sanctuary will have access to the fellowship hall and boardroom

Note that the license from Fraser Health Authority for Captain Alpha Childcare Service to use space at WHUC requires exclusive use of their space downstairs and in the gym. Other users should not trespass into these areas.

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11. Suggestions for Food at Discretionary Activities

Food is an important part of many activities. It is the duty of the organizer of a gathering to ensure that food is prepared and consumed responsibly. It is possible to prepare and consume food safely, but some care is required to prevent the spread of contagious diseases. An important consideration is whether to hold the gathering indoors or outside.

Meeting in large groups is more safely done outside than inside. Outside, air that mixes up will probably not return to ground level where other people are around. The gentlest breeze will blow infectious droplets away from a gathering quite quickly, so the risk of contagion is similar to passing other people on a sidewalk.

Inside, the air tends to circulate, and infectious droplets will blow past each potential victim multiple times. WHUC recommends that people wear masks when not alone in the building, except when eating or drinking.

Serving food indoors can be done safely: restaurants have been doing it for most of the pandemic. Restaurants maintain a level of discipline enforced by public health inspections and can lose their license if they get sloppy. During periods when contagious diseases are rampant, people are requested to stay at their tables and to wear masks when not at a table. The server takes each order and brings the food. Food preparation requires levels of hygiene that we rarely practice at home. If a group is prepared to imitate the practices employed by restaurants, it should be possible to prepare and consume food safely.

Inside or outside, buffets should be avoided because:

- 1) people queue close together for the food
- 2) people talk to each other in the line, loudly because of the noise (traffic and other conversations)
- 3) quite often multiple people will use the same utensils unless care is taken to have everyone use their own
- 4) anyone who coughs or sneezes near the food risks contaminating the entire buffet

Note that **alcohol is forbidden anywhere in the church building** (a necessary condition for Alcoholics Anonymous groups to use our church as a safe place for meetings.)

WHUC will be celebrating communion using precut bread and individual cups of juice, as has been common in many churches over the years.