

December 2, 2021

Dear Faith Leaders,

First, I would like to offer my deepest thanks for the ongoing work you have done over the past two challenging and unpredictable years to support the spiritual health of Nova Scotians. I also recognize that you, and the faith community you lead, continue to provide invaluable support for Nova Scotians who face challenges of many kinds.

One of the challenges we continue to face is the ability to have a clear communication process so that all faith organizations receive consistent and timely communication regarding the pandemic response and required public health measures and restrictions. My office will be working to establish a limited number of key contacts representing separate faiths and denominations as the current mechanism of a long list of individual faith community leaders is cumbersome and has many gaps. There will be more on this in the weeks ahead

In the meantime, I would like to provide some clarification on the proof of vaccination and other issues based on common questions that I and my team have received. As starting point, please review the entire [COVID-19 Protocol for Proof of Full Vaccination for Events and Activities](#) but I will highlight some key points.

- Proof of full vaccination is **not** required for a regular faith service, such as daily or weekly services. Services that are part of your faith's annual calendar (such as Christmas and Easter services in Christian faiths) are considered the same as regular daily/weekly services – no proof of full vaccination is required. Masking is required throughout these services, whether people are seated or not, except for officiants or singers when they are speaking or singing. While physical distance is no longer required, you can still practice it as an added layer of protection but physical distance does not allow the congregation to remove masks.
- If a faith organization holds multiple regular or special services in a single day, I would encourage you to consider making one or more of the services for vaccinated people only to accommodate people who require or are seeking a greater level of safety and to decrease overall exposure risks.
- If a singer, organist or choir needs to practice for a regular service and if people need to clean or prepare the place of worship for regular services, proof of full vaccination is not required.
- Proof of full vaccination **is** required for any other events and activities hosted by a faith organization, including social time after a service, bible study, youth group, retreats, community meals or fundraisers and meetings, and holiday concerts and special events. It is also required when people rent/use the church's facilities (like a hall or other rooms) for events like a wedding reception or leisure activities/clubs like playing cards. Masking is required at such events except when people are actively eating or drinking and for officiants or singers when they are speaking or singing.

- Home-based activities, including those initiated or arranged by a faith organization, hosted by a family or individual do not require proof of vaccination but there can be no more than 25 people indoors or 50 people outdoors. Masking is not required as this is a private space.
- Proof of vaccination isn't required for business meetings in the workplace when they involve people who regularly work together and where the general public is not present (unless they're held in a rental space).
- Proof of full vaccination is required for participants (not officiants) at weddings, funerals and other ceremonies – even if they take place in a church or other faith facility. However, it is not required for indoor and outdoor funeral services with a maximum of 25 participants (not including officiants or funeral home staff). Everyone must wear masks. Proof of full vaccination is still required for visitation and receptions.
- If a faith organization is offering space for mental health and addictions support groups or for programs and services for vulnerable populations, proof of full vaccination is not required. If faith organizations are offering food bank services, shelters or meal programs for vulnerable populations (including dine-in), proof of full vaccination is not required for people accessing those services or for employees providing them. It is required for volunteers providing them.
- Collecting contact information has never been required for faith gatherings and so this is at the discretion of each faith organization.

I encourage you to carefully review the [protocol](#) for further details. Please note that there are resources at the end that will help your organizations when you are hosting events and activities where proof of full vaccination is required.

Communicating, supporting and following the general protection measures outlined at <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/avoiding-infection/> are very important along with the proof of vaccine policy.

Working together to follow consistently and closely all the above will provide the strongest ability to maintain regular faith services without a requirement for proof of vaccine. If additional levels of safety become necessary due to changing epidemiology then my intended approach would be to move back to the restrictions for regular faith services used in phase 4 <https://novascotia.ca/reopening-plan/phase-four/> as a first step, however, I cannot be definitive or certain on this ahead of time.

We understand everyone is eager for life to become more normal and we look forward to a time when we're able to lift restrictions further. For now, as we continue to navigate the fourth wave of the pandemic, I thank you for your continued efforts to keep your congregations safe from COVID-19.

Sincerely,



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Department of Health and Wellness