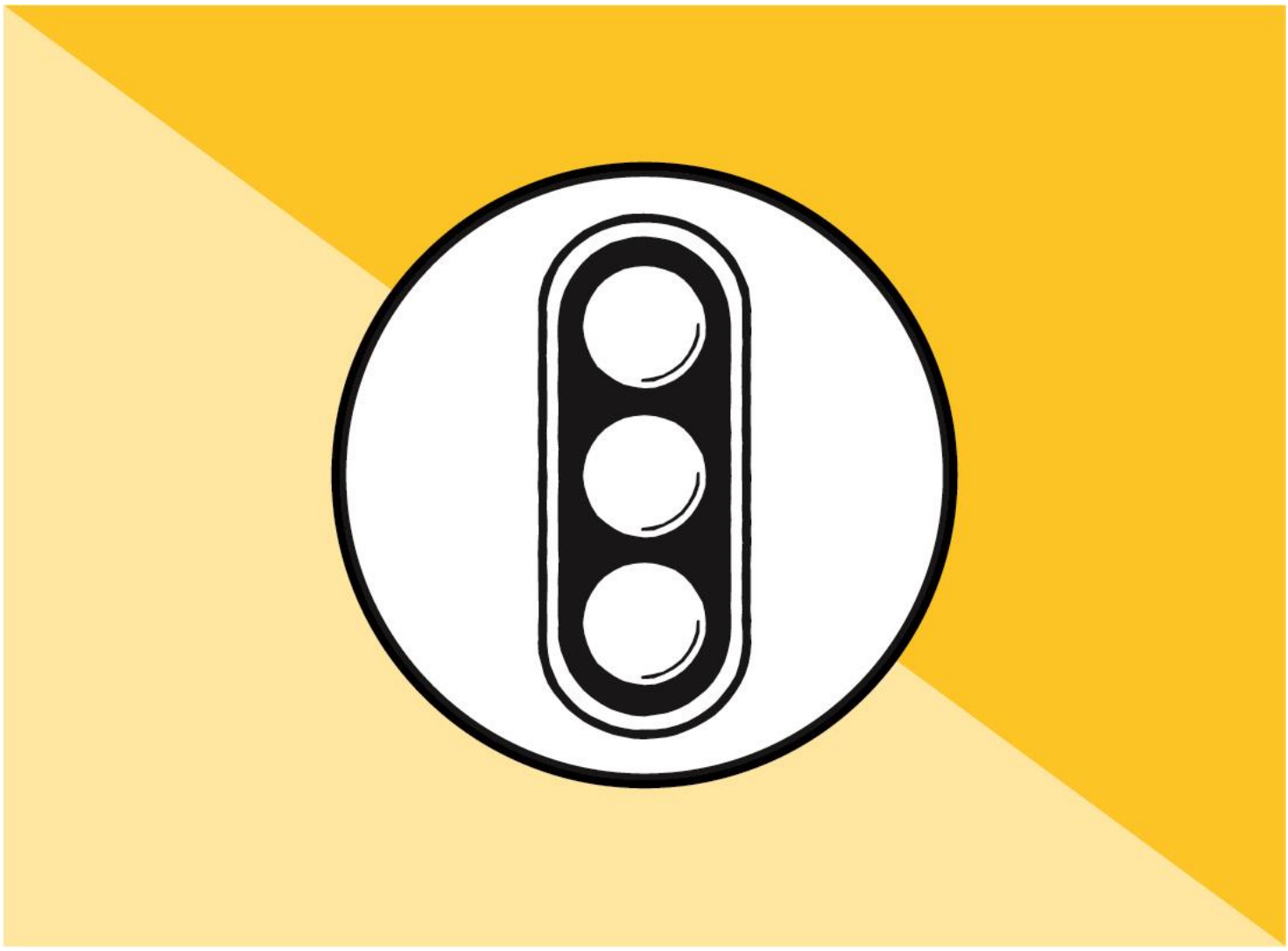

COVID-19 Protection Framework – Guidelines for places of worship

Updated 9th February 2022

Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

Unite against COVID-19

The Covid-19 Protection Framework (traffic lights) outlines the settings being used in New Zealand to manage COVID-19. It has three settings Green, Orange and Red.

This guidance is provided to support places of worship to operate safely. It is correct as at 9th February 2022

It outlines the minimum measures that need to be applied to places of worship under the three settings of the COVID-19 Protection Framework. Places of worship are also encouraged to consider what additional measures they may want to put in place that suit their communities.

This guidance will be updated over the coming weeks and months as the government response to Covid-19 continues to evolve.

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Overview of the settings for places of worship

Places of worship can operate at all framework settings (Red, Orange, and Green).

If your place of worship carries out activities that fall under categories of activity other than events and gatherings, for example runs a café or a shop, you need to apply the rules for these activities. Detailed guidance on the rules for food and drink activities, retail and venue hire can be found here [COVID-19 Protection Framework — business.govt.nz]

Under the framework a **gathering** is defined as:

- a group of people who are intermingling.

This does not include people who remain at least 2 metres away from each other so far as is reasonably practical.

Most faith-based services are treated as gatherings. For example, services at a place of worship, or a prayer group in an individual's home.

Under the framework an **event** is defined as an activity organised by a business or service:

- that takes place at a commercial or private indoor or outdoor premises or a publicly owned premises hired for that purpose
- that has controlled access of customers or clients via ticketing, fee paying on premises, registration, or other practicable means of controllable entry
- unless that activity is an outdoor community event or a gathering.

Ticketed concerts held at places of worship are an example of an event.

Face mask requirements

A face covering will need to be an actual mask and attached to the head by loops around the ears or head. This means scarves, bandannas, or t-shirts should not be used.

Face masks are required at gatherings by everyone, for the entire time. However, there are some exemptions. For example, a face mask does not need to be worn by attendees at a gathering where you have the "exclusive use" of the venue.

The “exclusive use” exemption doesn’t universally apply to certain types of gatherings. The person responsible for a gathering (including those responsible for a church service) need to consider whether or not the defined space the service is held in is being exclusively used for the purpose of the service. (see page 6 for defined space definition).

If the “exclusive use” exemption does not apply and masks are required at the gathering, face masks can be removed while eating and drinking. Face masks cannot be removed to sing.

Face mask rules are not applied to gatherings in private dwellings, for example, bible study in a private home.

Face masks are required to be worn by workers (including volunteers) at gatherings. This requirement excludes performers and formal speakers, such as a person leading a service, provided they are 2m apart from the audience or other attendees.

All workers who are legally mandated to be vaccinated must now also wear a medical grade face mask (for example a Type IIR/Level2 masks or above) while working in public facing roles. These include the widely available ‘blue’ medical-grade mask. This would apply to places of worship running My Vaccine Pass services.

A summary of the event and gathering rules as they apply to places of worship follows.

	With My Vaccine Pass	Without My Vaccine Pass
Green	Record keeping/scanning required Face coverings are encouraged.	
	Gatherings at a place of worship (e.g. weddings, funerals) no limits. Events no limits.	Gatherings at a place of worship (e.g. weddings, funerals) up to 100 people based 1m distancing. Events (indoor/outdoor) – up to 100 people based on 1m distancing, seated and separated for service of food and drink.
Orange	Record keeping/scanning required. Face coverings are required for workers and volunteers at gatherings (excluding performers and formal speakers, such as a person leading a service, provided they are 2m apart from others), and encouraged for others.	
	Gatherings at a place of worship (e.g. weddings, funerals) no limits. Events no limits.	Gatherings at a place of worship (e.g. weddings, funerals) up to 50 people, based on the maximum number of people who could occupy the space if each person was 1 metre apart. Events cannot operate
Red	Record keeping/scanning required. Face masks are required at gatherings by everyone. However, a face mask does not need to be worn at a gathering where you have the exclusive use of the venue. (Performers and formal speakers, such as a person leading a service, provided they are 2m apart from the audience and other attendees, do not need to wear a face mask)	
	Gatherings at a place of worship (e.g. weddings, funerals) up to 100 people based on the maximum number of people who could occupy the space if each person was 1 metre apart. Events – up to 100 people based on 1m distancing, seated and separated for service of food and drink.	Gatherings at a place of worship (e.g. weddings, funerals) up to 25 people, based on the maximum number of people who could occupy the space if each person was 1 metre apart. Events cannot operate.

Operating safely under the COVID-19 Protection Framework

Operating with and without My Vaccine Pass

A place of worship can switch between activities operating with My Vaccine Passes and operating without My Vaccine Passes as long as;

- spaces are cleaned between groups
- there is no intermingling of the two groups
- spaces being used are ventilated
- it is made clear to all involved (attendees/staff/volunteers) which activities are using My Vaccine Pass and which are not.

Advice on cleaning can be found here Ministry of Health – cleaning and disinfection advice.

Places of worship must display posters or signage indicating to attendees whether or not a My Vaccine Pass is required. These can be downloaded here COVID-19 protection Framework – posters

Operating multiple activities at the same time

If you have multiple defined spaces in a venue, you can operate multiple activities at once. This means that you could have an activity requiring My Vaccine Pass in one space, and an activity not requiring My Vaccine Pass in another space.

Workers can move between gatherings held in different single defined spaces as long as worker vaccine requirements are meet. A defined space is:

- an indoor area that has no direct airflow to another indoor area that is being used); or
- an outdoor area that is separated from other outdoor areas by 2 metres; and
- there are systems and process in place to ensure that people using one space do not intermingle with others using another (including when entering or exiting the premises

Spaces must be managed so that as much as possible groups from different spaces do not mix. For example, by making sure there are separate entrances for shared

areas, staggering start times, and having different bathrooms or service counters for different groups.

For example, at Orange, a place of worship can run a service operating with My Vaccine Pass without capacity limits at the same time as a separate service operating without My Vaccine Pass with up to 50 in a separate defined space. No intermingling is allowed by groups (including in entrances, exits and toilets).

Record keeping

Places of worship must have ways for attendees to record their attendance at all framework settings (Red, Orange and Green).

This can be done by asking everyone to scan in using the NZ COVID Tracer app, or by recording their contact details manually. Your manual contact tracing register must collect people's: full name, phone number or email or other effective means of communicating with them, date and time of entering the business. This register should be safe and secure to protect individuals privacy (e.g. using providing paper forms for customers and visitors to fill in with their details and place in a collection box).

Capacity limits

Capacity limits do not include workers or volunteers (paid and unpaid), but do include all other people (adults and children) within the 'defined space'.

Capacity limits are based on 1 metre distancing. This means the maximum number of people who could occupy the space if each person was 1 metre apart. People do not need to stand 1 metre apart.

Serving food and drink

Remember If your place of worship runs a café, you need to apply the rules for these activities. Detailed guidance on the rules for food and drink activities is here COVID-19 Protection Framework — business.govt.nz

If you are operating as a **gathering**, you can serve food and drink at green, orange or red.

If you operating as an **event**:

At Green

- with My Vaccine Pass you can serve food and drink without additional requirements.
- without My Vaccine Pass, the event attendees must be seated and separated for the service of food and drink.

At Orange

- with My Vaccine Pass you can serve food and drink without additional requirements.
- without My Vaccine Pass events cannot operate

At Red

- with My Vaccine Pass, the event attendees must be seated and separated for the service of food and drink.
- without My Vaccine Pass events cannot operate

Workers and volunteers must wear a face covering when serving and handling food at orange and red.

Hygiene and Safety

The steps below help reduce the spread of Covid-19;

- Stick to capacity limits.
- Clean and sanitise shared surfaces thoroughly before and after use.
- Ensure that spaces being used are well ventilated.
- Encourage those who are unwell to stay home and seek advice about getting a test.
- Have plenty of places for people to wash hands with soap and water.
- Singing and other types of performances can go ahead. Performers are not required to wear a mask whilst performing, provided they are 2m apart from others.

  Especially at orange and red;

  - minimise the time spent in close contact, especially those working or volunteering (as they are likely to interact with large numbers of people)
  - encourage people to physically distance from one another wherever possible
  - encourage contactless donations instead of a cash collection box
  - consider offering online services.

Cases of COVID-19 and your place of worship

The place of worship will need to work with the health authorities, provide contact tracing information and undertake cleaning.

Generally, good processes to follow include:

- if you have people responsible for Health and Safety within your place of worship; they are usually the best people to have contact with the Public Health Unit (PHU)
- identify spaces that the person with COVID-19 may have spent significant time in and ensure cleaning is undertaken before the space is used again (see General cleaning for more information)

- specific or additional advice will be given by public health officials of any cleaning requirements based on the extent of exposure
- assist as required with the PHU's contact tracing process and support any workers or volunteers identified as a contact of a confirmed case who needs to self-isolate or stay at home
- follow PHU advice on communication with your workers and volunteers and community/attendees/customers
- follow PHU advice on any additional requirements that are specific to your place of worship.

Any decision to close should be made on the advice of a public health official based on information on the extent of the exposure.

Useful links:

- General advice for contacts of cases Ministry of Health - actions contacts need to take.
- Information on the processes to follow if an employee, volunteer, attendee becomes a confirmed or probable COVID-19 - Ministry of Health Guidance for workplaces
- COVID-19 cleaning Frequently asked Questions – Ministry of Health Covid-19-general-cleaning-and-disinfection-advice

Using My Vaccine Pass and the Verifier App

My Vaccine Pass is an official record of your COVID-19 vaccination, or exemption, status for use within Aotearoa New Zealand. A purple vaccination card or vaccination confirmation letter cannot be used as proof of vaccination status. A negative test result is not a substitute for My Vaccine Pass.

The Ministry of Health has a free verifier app that can be used to scan the official QR code that is embedded into a customer's My Vaccine Pass. It is called NZ Pass Verifier and is available on the App Store and Google Play. The Verifier app can be downloaded onto a smart phone or tablet.

The verifier app will not store personal data or show any information other than the person's name and date of birth.

Places of worship operating with My Vaccine Passes are required to check attendees' My Vaccine Pass at or shortly after entry. This can be done by;

- sighting the person's Vaccine Pass, or

- scanning the NZ Vaccine Pass QR code with a verifier app.

A reasonable number of My Vaccine Passes must also be verified. The only way to confirm the authenticity of a My Vaccine Pass is a verifier app. This will give greater assurance that only vaccinated people (or those who are exempt) are gathering.

It is recommended that workers/volunteers checking the passes have wording to use if people do not wish to comply.

Places of worship are encouraged to talk with workers and volunteers about how they will handle these situations. This includes making it clear to workers/volunteers when not to continue to request the pass, how to turn someone away and when to seek help from other workers/volunteers or call the Police.

Attendees are responsible for presenting their own My Vaccine Pass. Places of worship are not required to check ID, but they may request it.

People under the age of 12 years and 3 months can be admitted without a My Vaccine Pass (regardless of their vaccination status), even if the place of worship is operating under My Vaccine Pass rules.

Places of worship are expected to exercise judgement in identifying those under 12 years and 3 months, who are not required to have a Vaccine Pass. This might include asking the child their age, year at school, or student ID if they have it, for example.

Useful links:

- Information on downloading, using and technical support for the NZ Pass Verifier – Ministry of Health NZ Pass Verifier you can also call 0800 800 606 for technical assistance.
- Information on how the QR code scanner within the Verifier app can be built into existing smartphone apps or ticketing operations - Ministry of Health Technical information
- Additional resources Ministry of Health Github

Vaccine mandates for staff and volunteers

Vaccination has been mandated for workers at businesses and venues that must use My Vaccine Passes to operate under the COVID-19 Protection Framework.

This mandate applies to events, hospitality, close contact businesses, and gyms, regardless of whether they choose to operate with My Vaccine Pass, operate at lower capacity limits, or close.

Workers at gatherings are only required to be vaccinated when attendees are required to hold a My Vaccine Pass. This means that workers at gatherings that choose to operate within capacity constraints set out in the COVID-19 Protection Framework, without vaccine passes, do not have to be vaccinated.

All workers who are legally mandated to be vaccinated must now also wear a medical grade mask (for example a Type IIR/Level2 masks or above) while working in public facing roles. These include the widely available 'blue' medical-grade mask.

Places of worship must:

- Keep records of their workers' vaccination status.
- If the worker is vaccinated, the record needs to include the name of the vaccine(s) received and the date on which doses were received. This information can be collected through a worker's My COVID Record. This is because My COVID Record includes dates of vaccination and the specific type of vaccine received. A My Vaccine Pass will not be sufficient because it does not include information about type of vaccine received and dates of doses. MBIE will be working with the Privacy Commissioner on guidance for record keeping.

For workers who choose not to be vaccinated, a minimum four-week paid notice period will be provided if their employment agreements are terminated because they are not vaccinated. This change came into effect at the end of November 2021.

Employees will also be entitled to paid time off to be vaccinated during work hours. This change will also apply from the end of November.

Workers need to:

- provide information about their vaccination status to their employer. If they don't, their employer can treat them as not being vaccinated.

Other than these two changes, normal employment law will also apply in these situations. This means employers and employees need to work through any employment issues in good faith. Employers and employees can access support from

MBIE's employment mediation service to assist with disputes over any employment consequences from Government mandates or vaccination requirements imposed by employers including places of worship. This can be a formal mediation, or using their early resolution service. If a dispute is not resolved at mediation, the Employment Relations Authority or Employment Court can determine it.

Education vaccine mandate

The education mandate only applies to workers over the age of 12 years who carry out work at or for an 'affected education service' (including as a volunteer worker or an unpaid worker) and who either:

- may have contact with children or students while carrying out the work
- will be present at the affected education service at a time when children or students are also present.

An affected education service is:

- a licensed early childhood service
- a registered school
- a hostel (which are boarding establishments used mainly or solely for the accommodation of students enrolled at a registered school)

Useful links:

- Latest information on the vaccination assessment tool and My Vaccine Pass mandates Business.govt.nz -Vaccination assessment tool and My Vaccine Pass mandates
- Guidance for employees and employers on COVID-19 vaccination requirements in the workplace - Employment NZ – Covid-19 and employment
- Information to support workplace conversations about vaccinations Unite against COVID-19 toolkit for businesses
- Information on the Education vaccination mandate - COVID-19: Mandatory vaccinations | Ministry of Health NZ

Enforcement and Compliance

There will be a graduated enforcement model in place to support compliance. This means taking an education first approach to help everyone, including places of worship, work out how best to implement new requirements.

Questions and Answers

What is the difference between a 'gathering' and an 'event'?

An event is defined as an activity where entry is controlled, e.g. through ticketing, fees, registration or other ways to control access. Events are held at commercial or private venues, or publicly owned premises hired for the purpose of the activity, and can be held indoors or outdoors. It also includes an activity held at an outdoor area where a group of customers and clients is accompanied or supervised by a worker providing services to that group (for example, a guided tour).

The normal operations of cinemas, theatres, stadiums, concert venues, conference venues, casinos, and private galleries are considered events.

The definition of what is an event excludes an activity that is held at a private dwelling (like your home).

If you meet the definition for an event, you should apply events rules to your activity. If you don't, and your activity involves an intermingling of people, then you should follow gatherings rules (including at your home). You should also follow gatherings rules for things like funeral or tangihanga, faith-based services, weddings, and non-professional sport and recreation activities.

Can we provide services with and without My Vaccine Passes?

A place of worship can switch between activities operating with My Vaccine Passes and operating without My Vaccine Passes as long as: spaces are cleaned between groups, there is no intermingling of the two groups, spaces being used are ventilated, and it is made clear to all involved (attendees/staff/volunteers) which activities are using My Vaccine Pass and which are not.

Can multiple activities take place at the same time?

If you have multiple defined spaces in a venue, you can operate multiple activities at once. A defined space is: an indoor area that has no direct airflow to another indoor area that is being used, or an outdoor area that is separated from other outdoor areas by 2 metres. Separate spaces must be managed so that as far as reasonably practicable groups do not mix entering, leaving, or using the premises, for example, in entrances, exits and toilets.

This includes operating activities in different defined spaces with and without My Vaccine Pass at the same time.

What are the requirements if we are serving food and drink?

If your place of worship runs a café, you need to apply the rules for such activities. If you are operating as a gathering, you can serve food and drink without any additional requirements

at green, orange or red. If you are operating as an event, there are different requirements relating to food and drink at green, orange and red. Workers (including volunteers) must wear a face covering when serving and handling food at orange and red.

Do staff and volunteers have to be vaccinated?

Workers at gatherings are only required to be vaccinated when attendees are required to hold a My Vaccine Pass. This means that workers at gatherings that choose to operate within capacity constraints set out in the COVID-19 Protection Framework, without vaccine passes, do not have to be vaccinated. In other words, the vaccine requirements for workers must match the vaccine requirements for those attending the gathering.

If you are holding an event, regardless of whether the event is requiring vaccine passes or not, workers (including volunteers) must be vaccinated. This requirement applies at all colour settings.

The education vaccination mandate only applies to workers (paid or unpaid) at a licensed early childhood service, a registered school, or a hostel.

Do we have to check the vaccination status of people attending our services?

Places of worship operating with My Vaccine Passes are required to check an attendee's My Vaccine Pass at or shortly after entry. This can be done by sighting the person's Vaccine Pass, or scanning the NZ Vaccine Pass QR code with a verifier app. It is recommended that workers/volunteers checking the passes have wording to use if people do not wish to comply.

People under the age of 12 years and 3 months can be admitted without a My Vaccine Pass, even if the place of worship is operating under My Vaccine Pass rules.

If a place of worship has checked an attendee's My Vaccine Pass and has systems and processes to ensure that vaccine passes are valid (and have not expired), it can allow the person to join gatherings without checking their Pass every time. For example, this could be by carrying out spot checks with a verifier app, recording in their systems whose passes have been checked and when they expire, and / or regularly re-checking attendees' passes.

Who would be considered a 'worker' at a faith-based gathering?

Workers includes people who are paid, and volunteers.

If a place of worship is operating multiple defined spaces at the same time, can workers move between the defined spaces?

Yes, workers can move between gatherings held in different single defined spaces. Workers vaccine requirements would need to be met either way.

What are the new face masks rules for gatherings under the red setting?

Most gatherings won't require guests to wear a face mask, this includes weddings, funerals, faith-based gatherings, gatherings at marae and post-sport match functions, as long as the

gathering has exclusive use of the venue. Workers and volunteers will continue to be required to wear a face covering. Gatherings not held at official venues, such as a community gathering in a park or spectators at community sport are still required to wear a mask.

Do all workers at gatherings have to wear facemasks?

At Orange and Red, workers at gatherings must wear face masks unless they are an entertainer or a person presenting to an audience (such as a person presiding over, or assisting in leading, a faith-based gathering), provided that they are 2-metres physically distanced from others.

Are gatherings in private homes covered by the face mask requirements? e.g. bible study in the home?

No, gatherings held at private homes are not covered by the new face mask requirements.

Are children required to wear face masks at gatherings?

Children under the age of 12 are not required to follow face mask rules at gatherings.

Where do medical masks have to be worn?

Medical-grade masks, such as the blue medical masks are to be worn by workers who are mandated to be vaccinated, when working in public-facing roles.

All other people can wear any face covering that covers the mouth and nose and is secured to the person's head by ear loops or a head loop. This includes medical masks or cloth masks (with 3 layers recommended) as an alternative to medical masks.

Can a negative COVID-19 test be used in place of a My Vaccine Pass for a gathering or event requiring vaccinations?

No, it cannot. Vaccinations are widely accepted the best way to keep our community safe and protected from Covid-19.

Can close contact services take place at gatherings, e.g. a baptism?

Yes. Close proximity services are generally those that are longer than 15 minutes. It is recommended that you take public health precautions where practical and minimise contact with others where possible.

Why do places of worship have to abide by gathering rules?

Gatherings rules are based on public health advice and have been developed to protect communities from COVID-19. They apply to all settings that involve an intermingling group of people, ranging from social, to sporting, to faith-based groups.

Other useful resources

There are a wide range of resources to support places of worship to apply COVID-19 Protection Framework settings.

Free online posters/resources

Find and download resources; including logos, templates, posters, videos, social media tile. This includes a range of resource in languages other than English.

https://covid19.brandkit.io/login

Free printed posters/resources

Order free collateral through our online catalogue and have the resources delivered direct to you. This includes a range of resource in languages other than English.

Go to the Bluestar Portal.

Translated information

Information is available in over 28 languages.

Information in alternative formats

Information is available in 5 alternate formats