

# Resuming Church Services

## COVID-19 prevention Public health Directives

*Date: June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020*

### Request

Many community members have reached out asking when church services can be held again in Eeyou Istchee. Although, they cannot yet be conducted in their usual “pre-COVID” fashion, it is certainly possible to plan church services which respect COVID-19 precautionary measures.

### Recommendation

Although large indoor gatherings might have to wait until the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, this does mean that church services cannot resume, while still respecting the current limits. Indeed, as long as church services are held in a way which **respect physical distancing measures as well as the size limits** imposed on social gathering (limited to 2 households indoors or 5 households outdoor), there are no reason to withhold these activities.

**Important caution:** Although COVID-19 is not considered to be an airborne disease, some recent research suggest that singing may at times produce aerosols, which could increase probability of viral transmission. **Outdoor services are therefore highly preferable** to indoor ones.

The following specific conditions are provided to manage the risk associated with the activity in Cree communities:

#### 1. Monitoring the health risk of community members wishing to attend

- Before entering the church service site, whether indoors or outdoors, community members should be asked the following **3 questions**:
  1. Have you been out in a region considered at [risk for Eeyou Istchee](#) in the last 2 weeks?

## COVID-19 advisory church services

2. Have you been in contact with someone who has COVID-19 in the last 2 weeks?
  3. Do you have any of these symptoms: cough, fever, difficulty breathing, sudden loss of sense of taste or smell?
    - *Note: Temperature taking is not recommended because the results are unreliable; COVID-19 cases do not always present with fever.*
  - Anyone answering yes to any of these questions must return home and [Self-isolate](#).
    - In addition, anyone presenting the above mentioned symptoms should consult their local CMC, to be examined and tested (see <https://www.creehealth.org/about-us/contacts>)
  - Because of their increased susceptibility to COVID, we also recommend that the following **people refrain from attending** church services:
    - Pregnant women,
    - Elders who are 70 years old or older, or
    - Anyone suffering from immunodeficiency (cancer patients, for example) or from a chronic disease, which is not well controlled (unstable diabetic, hypertensive or MPOC patients, for example).
  - If present, people suffering from these conditions are strongly encouraged to wear a medical mask.
  - In addition, organizers must **keep a registry** of everyone present (whether indoors or outdoors).
    - If there is a case of COVID-19 eventually reported in the people attending the service, public health will have to conduct an investigation to determine the level of contact with everyone else present. Depending on the assessment, other people might also have to be tested and self-isolate for 14 days.
2. **Promote hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette**
    - Provide a space, right at the [entrance](#) of the outdoor site or of the church itself (for indoor service) where everyone can wash their hands or apply an alcohol-based solution (make sure that it is outside the children's reach)
    - Encourage everyone to cough into a bent elbow, or into a tissue that is discarded immediately after use, then washing hands as soon as possible
    - Place posters to remind everyone of the importance of respecting these basic hygienic measures [poster hand washing](#), [poster respiratory etiquette](#)
  3. **Ensure proper physical Distancing** [poster](#)

## *COVID-19 advisory church services*

- There is no limit to the number of people present, but sitting capacity must be adjusted depending on the church service site
    - If indoors, sitting arrangements should be limited to members of 2 households only
    - If outdoors, sitting arrangements (chairs, covers, or else) can accommodate a maximum of 5 households
  - Keep a minimum distance of 2 meters (6 feet) between people of different households
    - People living at the same address can sit together without physical distancing. (irrespective of how many there are)
    - However, it is important to maintain a 2 meter physical distance between people that are not living at the same address (or between the different household groups); it is best to use visual markers to help people know where they can sit.
  - Brief interactions (under 15 minutes) that takes place between people of different households at less than 2 meters distance is not considered at very high risk and does not require additional measures.
    - However, in situations where a longer contact may be necessary (more than 15 minutes) within 2 metres of another person, it is important to wear a mask (or a scarf if no mask is available).
  - Everyone is encourage to wear a mask or artisanal face cover, but these are not an obligation as long as physical distancing is respected; indeed, **physical distancing is considered more efficient than wearing masks** to protect against COVID-19.
4. Ensure adequate [disinfection](#):
- If the service is held indoors, it is important to ensure proper cleaning and disinfection of the church site (chairs, door handles, toilets if available, etc.)
  - It is preferable to avoid serving food or refreshments.