

# Communicable Disease Plan: Willingdon Heights United Church

Safety plans are no longer mandatory, but communicable disease prevention plans are very similar. This plan is derived from the template for the COVID-19 Safety Plan provided by WorkSafeBC.

This is a living document. It will be revised as new information comes available, and to accommodate the requirements of other groups using our building.

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## 1. Introduction

Under the current provincial health orders, worship services are classified as “non-discretionary.” The primary significance is that many health restrictions are no longer mandatory, but are still

### **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.**

With effective vaccines widely deployed in BC, the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided but not disappeared. A few Variants of Concern (VOC), chief among them the delta variant, are far more contagious than the original virus and remain as serious threats. Although over 80% of the local population have been fully vaccinated, a substantial minority have not received any vaccine, and many have received only a single dose where two are required for maximal effect. Even fully vaccinated people can contract COVID-19, can transmit it to other people, and risk hospitalization and death if they come down with the disease. The vaccines reduce the risk but do not eliminate it.

COVID-19 is only 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. For other communities of faith, the restrictions will be highly recommended during worship services, as they are for us. For other activities and for discretionary organizations (see below), the restrictions will be mandatory.

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>

## 2. Assessment of Risk

The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads in several ways. It can spread in droplets when a person coughs or sneezes. It can also spread if you touch a contaminated surface and then touch your face. The same is true for most 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.

Other diseases, such as seasonal colds and flu, spread by the same processes and can be prevented using similar measures. We note that there were very few cases of the flu in the province in the winter of 2020-2021.

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

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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 now 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

Regardless of this change in classification, the threat from COVID-19 and other communicable diseases remains significant. Most of the restrictions that are mandatory for discretionary activities are still **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED** during worship.

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

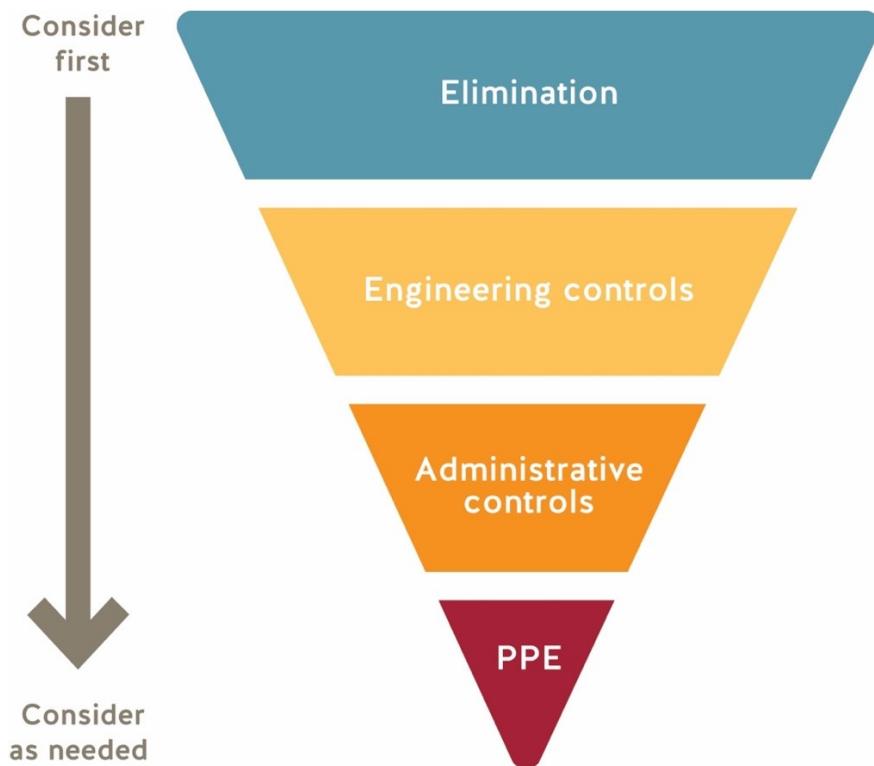
- choir practice
- bible study
- meetings of the board, trustees, etc.
- receptions after weddings, funerals, and baptisms
- community organizations renting space in the church

For discretionary activities, provincial health orders are still mandatory. 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.

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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 first step towards eliminating the risk of COVID-19 is vaccination. This is also true for seasonal flus. The vaccines approved for use in Canada are effective and extremely safe.

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

Fully vaccinated people will have had two doses of the Pfizer, Moderna, or Astrozenica vaccines, with at least two weeks since the last dose. From the latest statistics, their risk of catching the disease is reduced by a factor of 4, their risk of hospitalization is reduced by a factor of 17, and their risk of requiring treatment in an ICU is reduced by a factor of 70. (These numbers are likely to change as new variants of the virus appear and as the statistics are refined.)

The majority of COVID-19 cases in BC today are among people who have not been vaccinated, with a significant minority among people who have only their first vaccination. In every age group and across the province, more people have not been vaccinated than have already contracted the disease. The potential for the current wave of infections to run out of control is very high.

For nondiscretionary activities like worship, we cannot require people to get vaccinated and are advised not to ask about anyone's vaccination status, but **we strongly recommend that everyone get fully vaccinated as soon as possible.**

We recognize that some people cannot be vaccinated and that the effectiveness of vaccination varies with age, with health conditions, and with time. To provide an alternative to in-person worship, we are committed to maintaining our online worship, as discussed below.

Organizations providing discretionary services, such as restaurants, may require a "vaccine passport." We will normally be true for discretionary activities at WHUC such as receptions after weddings, funerals, and baptisms.

## 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 have taped-off every second pew (our pews are roughly one meter apart). 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 **small and exclusive** social circle. With proper spacing in the sanctuary, roughly 50 people can attend each in-person service.

This sets the practical limit to the number of people attending any form of gathering in the sanctuary, including regular worship, weddings, and funerals.

If larger groups wish to gather, hybrid services with some participants in the sanctuary and others online are possible. Larger groups can also gather outdoors, weather permitting.

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## 7. IN-PERSON WORSHIP

WHUC runs 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. Hand sanitizer and non-medical masks will be provided by both entrances and worshipers will be encouraged to use the sanitizer upon entry and exit.

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.

There will be no sharing of food or close conversations in the sanctuary. Communion may be conducted in the sanctuary with individual glasses and precut bread. Fellowship time before and after the service will be held outside.

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. We are also live streaming our services to YouTube. Our online presence is intended for anyone unable or unwilling to attend an in-person service. We are also aware that we may be forced back to online-only worship if the pandemic flares up again.

To join us via Zoom, please contact the church office at [whuc.office@gmail.com](mailto: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 well before the start of the service at 10:30 AM.

To view our service on YouTube, search for **willingdonheightschurch** within YouTube and subscribe to our channel. Beware that Willingdon Church is an unrelated congregation in a different denomination that has had an active online presence for many years.

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. Airflow

The main door and windows on the south side of the sanctuary will be opened during worship services, weather permitting, to encourage airflow from outside. Worshipers are encouraged to bring their jackets and keep them on during the service (as is done in many ancient, unheated churches in the UK). The ramp door will be unlocked as an emergency exit during the service and will be opened before and after the service.

The board room is an enclosed space with poor circulation. Meetings with more than a few people should take place in the fellowship hall or the sanctuary.

## 10. Masks and Hand Sanitizer

We require everyone in the sanctuary to wear masks except very young children, our minister, pianist, readers, and soloists. The latter may remove them while at the piano, pulpit or lectern.

WHUC will provide non-medical masks and unperfumed hand sanitizer at both entrances for our members. (Other congregations will provide their own supplies.)

**Greeters will wear masks.** They will encourage the use of hand sanitizer by everyone entering and leaving the sanctuary. They will supply disposable masks for those who do not bring their own. They will point out the safety instructions which will be posted by both doors and on the WHUC website.

The greeter will ask each person whether they have any contagious illness (including symptoms of COVID-19) and will deny entry to those who do, encouraging them to join us online.

**Worshipers with medical conditions that prevent them from wearing masks will be denied entry for their own protection and will be encouraged to join us online instead.**

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## 11. Barriers and Partitions

The building is normally partitioned into two sections:

- 1) Upper: Sanctuary and offices
- 2) Lower: Daycare, Fellowship hall, Boardroom and Gymnasium

These two sections are physically separated by pre-existing iron grills at the top of the stairwells that join them. The grills are padlocked closed most of the time. The grills were installed for security reasons, but also provide a significant physical separation between activities in the upper and lower parts of the building. The internal doors to the church office and the minister's office are normally kept closed and locked for security reasons. WHUC does not currently foresee a need to partition the upper section any further.

## 12. Cleaning and Hygiene

### **High touch areas:**

- Light switches – individual to wipe with Lysol wipes every time someone touches them. Cleaning service to clean with bleach and water before and after each service
- Bathroom toilet seat, toilet flusher, sink taps – individual to wipe with Lysol wipes after each use. Cleaning service to clean with bleach and water before and after each service
- Outside and inside door knobs/handles – cleaning service to clean with bleach and water before and after each service
- Outside and inside railings – cleaning service to clean with bleach and water before and after each service
- Pews where people sit and the top and back of the pew in front – clean before each service
- Tables and pulpit – cleaning service to clean before and after each service

### **Normal areas cleaning:**

- Bathroom floor – cleaning service to sweep and mop before and after each service
- Bathroom (inside the toilet, in and around the sink, walls) – cleaning service to clean before and after each service
- All carpeted areas – cleaning service to vacuum before and after each service
- Window ledges and walls – cleaning service to wipe down areas that appear dusty or dirty before and after each service.
- Window cleaning

### **Other congregations**

- WHUC will ensure that the sanctuary, fellowship hall, board room, washrooms and offices are cleaned each week before Sunday worship starts
- Other congregations will clean the high-touch surfaces before their services.

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## 13. 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. Violation of this duty might result in the entire church being closed by the provincial authorities and would be grounds for WHUC to cancel permission for future gatherings by that group.

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 requires that people wear masks when not alone in the building, except when actually 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. In a restaurant, people are supposed to stay at their tables and to wear masks when not at a table. The server takes each order and brings the food, so the public has no need to wander around. 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

One possible solution is to ask that people at a gathering bring their own food and drink and refrain from sharing.

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 single-serving communion packs. As the pandemic subsides, it may be possible to use precut bread and individual cups of juice, as has been common in many churches over the years.