

FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS

COVID-19: TIGHTER SAFE DISTANCING MEASURES FOR RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

The global COVID-19 situation is rapidly escalating. Many countries are reporting steep increases in infections and have imposed total lockdowns as their healthcare institutions are overwhelmed and community health compromised. While Singapore has implemented tighter border controls and stricter safe distancing measures, new COVID-19 infections continue to occur. We need to act decisively to reduce the risks of new clusters emerging rapidly, and severely disrupting our economy and endangering lives.

2. **On 24 Mar 2020, MOH advised that all gatherings outside of work and school will be limited to 10 persons or less with effect from 26 Mar 2020, 2359 hrs to 30 Apr 2020.** This restriction may be extended if the domestic and global situations do not improve.

Restrictions on Faith-based Activities

3. Based on the 24 Mar MOH advisory on tighter measures to minimise further spread of COVID-19, **all congregational worship and religious services will be suspended from 26 Mar 2020, 2359 hrs to 30 Apr 2020.**

4. During this period, places of worship may remain open for essential rites (e.g. weddings and funerals) and private worship, **subject to a cap of 10 persons at any one time and with the precautionary measures listed in the Annex.** Much as we understand the desire of friends and acquaintances to pay their last respects and give comfort to families in their grief, we ask religious leaders to advise their followers on the need to minimise physical interactions even during funerals and wakes.

5. If necessary, non-congregational activities involving 10 or fewer people (e.g. religious classes, cell group meetings) may be held with the precautionary measures in the **Annex**. Religious leaders should advise their followers to adhere to similar measures, even if such activities are not held on the premises of the religious organisation.

6. The limit of 10 persons at any one time does not apply in workplace situations in places of worship where religious and administrative staff/volunteers are performing their duties (e.g. providing pastoral services, setting up live streams of religious services). However, the number of workers involved should be kept to a minimum and limited to essential duties. Those who can telecommute from home should do so. They

must also adhere to the precautionary measures listed in the **Annex** as well as MOM's workplace advisory.

Full Implementation of Measures

7. Religious organisations are to fully implement the safe distancing and other precautionary measures in the MCCY, MOH and MOM advisories with immediate effect. MOH will be promulgating the necessary regulations under the Infectious Diseases Act to legally enforce the safe distancing measures. Persons and organisations who do not comply will face stiff penalties.¹

Social Responsibility is Key

8. Keeping Singapore safe from COVID-19 requires a whole-of-society-effort and everyone must play their part to behave responsibly in their religious and social interactions. This limited suspension of religious services, along with other social gatherings, are necessary to stem the tide of COVID-19 infections in Singapore. Human lives are at stake. We understand these measures are disruptive and will entail adjustments to religious practices. We encourage religious leaders to explore alternative means to support the religious needs of their communities such as teleconferencing, e-learning and live streaming worship services.

9. We appreciate the continued support and commitment of our religious leaders. We must continue to work together to ensure Singaporeans practise their religious life in a safe and socially responsible manner.

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, COMMUNITY & YOUTH
26 Mar 2020

For queries, please contact MCCY's Community Relations and Engagement Division at cpro@mccy.gov.sg

¹ Offenders will face a fine of less than \$10,000 or imprisonment of less than 6 months or both. In addition, existing levers under the Infectious Diseases Act, including the temporary suspension of operations, may be used against errant persons and operators.

Precautionary Measures for Essential Rites and Private Worship
(non-exhaustive list)

<p>i. <u>Baseline precautionary measures</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Register worshipper/devotees to facilitate contact tracing • Administer temperature screening and health/travel declarations of worshippers/devotees • Turn away those who are unwell, have travelled overseas in the last 14 days, or who are serving home quarantine or stay-home notice • Frequent cleaning and sanitisation of premises, including common areas and high-contact surfaces and improve ventilation • Remind worshippers/devotees to practise good personal hygiene and be socially responsible – wash hands regularly, avoid touching their faces, avoid greetings with physical contact, and stay home if unwell • Advise elderly to pray in their homes instead 	<p>ii. <u>Additional measures to ensure safe distancing by reducing Density, Intensity and Duration</u></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td> <p>Reduce Density</p> <p><i>The closer the physical contact between individuals, the higher the likelihood of transmission</i></p> </td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage worshipper/devotee flow by implementing appointment-only prayer slots to minimise queues • Offer alternatives to in-person religious services to minimise crowds <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • e.g. personal prayers to be conducted over telephone or videoconferencing • At least 1m separation between worshippers/attendees </td> </tr> <tr> <td> <p>Lower Intensity</p> <p><i>The more vigorous the activity (e.g. singing), the greater the degree of release of droplets</i></p> </td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No singing • No mingling between worshippers/devotees and religious leaders (i.e. imams, pastors, monks) • No communal meals • Avoid physical greetings and contact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. advocate alternatives to shaking hands, e.g. </td> </tr> </table>	<p>Reduce Density</p> <p><i>The closer the physical contact between individuals, the higher the likelihood of transmission</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage worshipper/devotee flow by implementing appointment-only prayer slots to minimise queues • Offer alternatives to in-person religious services to minimise crowds <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • e.g. personal prayers to be conducted over telephone or videoconferencing • At least 1m separation between worshippers/attendees 	<p>Lower Intensity</p> <p><i>The more vigorous the activity (e.g. singing), the greater the degree of release of droplets</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No singing • No mingling between worshippers/devotees and religious leaders (i.e. imams, pastors, monks) • No communal meals • Avoid physical greetings and contact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. advocate alternatives to shaking hands, e.g.
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	<p><i>demonstrate offering of peace by clasping hands to the chest in church/mosque services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Remove shared prayer items; encourage worshippers/devotees to bring their own bibles, prayer mats
<p>Shorten Duration</p> <p><i>The longer the exposure to others, the higher the likelihood of transmission</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorten on-site prayers and allocate a specific cut-off for worshippers/devotees • Monitor entry and exit times of worshippers/devotees to minimise mingling • Advise worshippers/devotees to leave immediately after