



## Diocese of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island

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### COVID-19 Diocesan Guidelines Update

At a time when we had hoped to be able to gather again in larger numbers for Christmas services this year, we share your disappointment — and for many, frustration — at finding ourselves in a place of having to return to stricter protocols for our shared gatherings and celebrations. It remains incumbent upon us, however, to be witnesses to the wider community, showing our neighbours that we hold them at the centre of our caution, care, and regulations. Based on provincial Public Health updates of Friday, December 10, 2021 (PEI) and Monday, December 13, 2021 (NS), respectively, the following changes are being made to our Diocesan Guidelines. If you wish to receive a copy of the letter from Dr. Strang to faith leaders, please contact the Executive Director. Thank you for all you are doing to help keep our communities safe and, as always, please contact Rev'd Ann Turner at [executivedirector@nspeidiocese.ca](mailto:executivedirector@nspeidiocese.ca) (or 902-420-0717, ext 1167) with any questions or concerns.

#### PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

While there is a limited increase in transmission, no new regulations are in effect. We do, however, ask that all parishes re-examine their protocols and revisit these expectations about social distancing, masking, and sanitizing, with your congregations. While there is great concern for children in the province, with school outbreaks increasing, testing and isolation are managing the situation. Three issues are under fresh scrutiny by PEI Public Health at this time:

1. Travel (to or from the Island) is risky. Please reconsider travel. It is advised that you test upon re-entry and 4 days after any off-island travel;
2. Gatherings (keep personal gatherings and numbers of contacts as small as possible, limit visiting with unrelated groups and limit attendance in large gatherings where Proof of Vaccination is unclear);
3. Get vaccinated! It protects you and those with whom you gather from COVID-19, its variants, and severity of symptoms if infected.

At this point in time, there are no plans for Workplace Screening or rapid-testing, although we understand tests have been (and will continue to be) provided to those affected by school outbreaks and other larger outbreaks in the province. We have reached out to Public Health authorities in Prince Edward Island to gather more information about workplace rapid-testing and will share this information once received.

#### NOVA SCOTIA

We had hoped that we might suspend social distancing for any Proof of Vaccine (POV) services offered by parishes during this holiday season. Unfortunately, rising numbers and the spread of the Omicron variant suggest this is not a good idea. What follows are a list of restrictions being reinstated as of December 17, 2021. A primary feature of these recommendations includes that fact that expectation for Proof of Vaccination may not be required for employees for many scheduled events but **POV is required in all cases for volunteers**. Therefore, the following amendment replaces authorization for POV services granted December 8, 2021:

"...we are *encouraging and authorizing* parishes to include in their roster of Christmas services (meaning, not the only service but "one of") a liturgy that requires Proof of Vaccination ***understanding that this does NOT release restrictions on social distancing. Social distancing***, masking, sanitizing, and tracing lists remain mandatory."

It remains an expectation that you work with your parish team to determine the restrictions appropriate to remain in effect according to your context and risk (for example, consider your architecture, ventilation, and the vulnerable populations you serve). Diocesan COVID-19 Guidelines provide the base for parish protocols. Where Public Health and Diocesan Guidelines differ, the more stringent of the two applies. ***Please remember that within the next few weeks, the Diocese will have rapid-testing kits available for parish use.*** Until then, follow this link to secure rapid-testing kits in your area: <https://www.nshealth.ca/coronavirus/covid-19-rapid-testing>

Parishes may also join the workplace screening program. I invite you to review this FAQ for Employers (Nova Scotia Workplace Screening Program) [HERE](#). You may register for the program [HERE](#).

Effective Friday, December 17, 2021, the following restrictions are reinstated by Public Health:

### Physical Distance and Mask Requirements

- **Physical distance of two metres (six feet) is required indoors and outdoors**, except among people in the same household or a consistent social group of up to 20 people.
- **People must be seated to remove their mask for eating or drinking (*this applies to receiving communion*)**; all other mask requirements for indoor public places remain, including wearing them when seated for other activities.
  - Many churches serve communion to parishioners in the pew: this practice is okay.
  - Others allow for movement to receive the Eucharist — whether that be to a central station or to the altar rail — and people communicate where they receive; this practice needs to "tighten up" concerning when and where masks are removed to consume.
    - parishioner proceeds to communion station and receives host, steps away from eucharistic minister before stopping, lifting mask, consuming, re-masking, and then continuing to move back into place (or, alternatively, receive host and return to seat before consuming)
    - the same is repeated if there is a station for wine or a station where wine is placed on the host (pipette)
- **Masks are required in areas of workplaces where physical distance cannot be achieved**, as well as common areas, areas where people are serving the public and areas with poor ventilation
- If your parish is offering mental health and addictions support groups, programs, services for vulnerable populations, food bank services, shelters or meal programs for vulnerable populations (including dine-in), or space for any of these activities, **proof of full vaccination is not required for people accessing those services or for employees providing them, but it is required for volunteers**
- It is **"strongly recommended that singing only be done by the choir or leader(s) of song, and not by the congregation**; due to the highly infectious nature of the Omicron variant, **it is strongly recommended that there not be congregational singing at this time**. If members of the congregation do sing they are required to remain masked." (Dr. R. Strang, December 14, 2021)

### Gathering Limits

- Indoor and outdoor informal gatherings, typically at home, are limited to 20 people from the same household or consistent social group; physical distance and proof of full vaccination are not required; masks are not required except in indoor public places.
- **Gathering limits of 50 per cent of capacity to a maximum of 150 people indoors** and 250 outdoors apply to social gatherings, **regular faith services, weddings, funerals and their associated receptions and visitation**, special events, meetings, training, festivals, and audiences

for sports events and arts and culture events (like performances and movie theatres) that are hosted by a recognized business or organization, including faith organizations.

*For those of you who rent to arts cultural groups...this is a reminder to include COVID-19 restrictions and expectations in a rental or lease agreement.*

- A limit of 60 participants indoors and outdoors applies to professional and amateur arts and culture rehearsals and performances; competitions are not allowed.

#### **Long-term Care Facilities**

- It is strongly recommended that visitors have a rapid test within 24 hours of the visit.
- The requirement for visitors to wear masks and be fully vaccinated, except for end-of-life visits, remains.