

COVID-19 VICTORIA

FAQS

METRO MELBOURNE AND REGIONAL VICTORIA | FEB 24, 2022



As of 11:59pm Friday Feb 25, 2022 the face mask mandate will only apply to limited indoor settings including public transport, hospitals and primary schools and for workers in specified sectors. The recommendation for people to work and study from home will also be removed.

As of 6pm Friday Feb 18, 2022 QR Code check-in is now only required in venues that may only admit people who are fully vaccinated, such as hospitality (restaurants, bars, cafes etc) and entertainment venues.

- **Masks – as of 11:59pm Friday Feb 25, masks will only be required to be worn by students in year three or above at primary school and workers at early childhood centres and primary schools; on public transport, taxis and rideshare vehicles, planes and indoors at the airport; by people working in or visiting hospitals and indoor areas at care facilities; and by workers in hospitality, retail, courts and prisons. In special circumstances, such as if you have COVID-19 or are a close contact you will need to wear a mask whenever leaving home. However, masks are no longer required to be worn in Church or in most workplaces as of 11:59pm Feb 25.**
 - **QR Code check-in is no longer required at churches or community halls unless they are being used as hospitality or entertainment venues. Covid-safe plans are still required.**
 - **Close Contacts and Isolation:**
 - If you have COVID-19, or you are a contact of someone who does, read the government's [COVID Checklist](#) for what to do. You must follow this checklist.
- If you have COVID-19 symptoms or are a household contact of someone with COVID-19:**
- Get a rapid antigen test.
 - If you are unable to access a rapid antigen test, get a PCR test.
 - If you can't get a PCR test, stay isolated until you can access either type of test.
 - If you do not have symptoms and you are not a household contact, monitor for symptoms.

If you test positive on a rapid antigen test you must:

- [report your result online](#) or call 1800-675-398 as soon as possible.
- Immediately isolate for 7 days from the day you took the rapid antigen test.
- Follow the government checklist and tell your contacts you have COVID-19.
 - Your household contacts must isolate for 7 days and take regular tests
 - Your social contacts must get tested if they have any symptoms
 - Advise your workplace or education facility that you have COVID-19.

See also LIVING WITH COVID (p4)

- **Friends and Family –** there are no restrictions on numbers of people who can gather in a private home or in a public place. The government recommends that everyone be fully vaccinated if gathering in a home or public place.
- **Religious gatherings and ceremonies (incl Weddings and Funerals)**
 - If these events are held at places of worship there will not be any vaccination requirements or limits on participants, nor any requirement for organisers to check vaccination status. **COVID check-in is not required unless the ceremony is held at a hospitality venue.**
 - If the ceremony is at a hospitality venue, vaccine requirements and venue density quotients will apply.
- **COVID check-in marshals are no longer required.**
- **Work – The government recommendation to “work from home if you can” is removed as of 11:59pm Friday February 25, 2022.**

All workplaces must have a COVID-safe plan. All workers must be fully vaccinated to attend the workplace. This applies to paid staff and to volunteers. Employers are no longer required to report positive COVID cases in the workplace to WorkSafe.
- **Cleaning –** Workplaces exposed to a positive coronavirus case will no longer need to be deep cleaned, after mounting international evidence that coronavirus is an airborne or droplet-borne disease and the likelihood of becoming infected by touching a surface is low risk.

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- **Schools, Childcare and Early Learning Centres** are open to all ages. Masks must be worn indoors at primary schools by all staff, visitors and students in year 3 and above.
- **Adult/Higher Education** – The government recommendation to “study from home if you can” is removed as of 11:59pm Friday February 25. **QR code check-in required by all staff, students and visitors. Masks recommended, but not compulsory.**
- **Childcare and Early Learning** – Open
- **Pubs/Restaurants/Cafes/Entertainment venues** are all open for the fully vaccinated. Face masks must be worn. Vaccination requirements do not apply for food and drink venues which are operating takeaway services only or in food courts. People under 18 are no longer required to provide proof of vaccination at hospitality venues.
- **Retail goods and services** – Vaccination status requirements have been removed for all customers except for hair and beauty services. **As of 11:59pm Friday February 25, only staff are required to wear facemasks.**
- **Community Facilities**, including libraries, halls and creative art spaces, may open without restriction to the fully vaccinated. There are limited circumstances where vaccination status does not apply, including to host essential public support groups, support services and health services, however numbers should be limited to only those necessary.
- **Hospital visitors** must be fully vaccinated or show evidence of a negative result from a rapid antigen test taken on the day of the visit. All visitors aged 8 and over must wear a face mask indoors, unless exempt. Hospital visitors (aged 18 and over) who are not fully vaccinated must specifically wear a N95 respirator face mask for the duration of their visit.

You can visit a patient at a public, private, or denominational hospital, day procedure or multi-purpose health services centre:

- if it is an end-of life visit
- if the patient is ill with a life-threatening condition
- to provide essential care and support necessary for the patient’s emotional and physical wellbeing
- if the patient is under 18 and you are the patient’s parent or guardian
- if the patient has a mental illness or is living with dementia and you are their nominated person
- if you are required to provide interpreter services
- if you are required to support the patient upon their discharge
- if the patient is pregnant or giving birth and you are their partner
- if you are accompanying the patient to the emergency department, or
- if you are accompanying the patient to an outpatient appointment.

Each patient can have up to two visitors at a time unless the dependants of a visitor (or patient in hospital) are in the visitor group and care for the dependants cannot be arranged. You should contact the hospital before visiting as they may have additional requirements, conditions, or restrictions for visitors.

You must not visit a hospital if you:

- have tested positive for COVID-19 or are waiting for a COVID-19 test result
- have had contact with someone who has COVID-19 in the previous 7 days if fully vaccinated and not a close contact, or in the previous 14 days if not fully vaccinated or a close contact
- have COVID-19 symptoms
- are under 16 unless you’re providing end-of-life support

- **Care Facility visits** - Residents can have up to five visitors per day if the visitors show evidence of a negative result from a rapid antigen test taken on the day of the visit. If rapid antigen tests cannot be obtained, the resident may have up to two visitors a day. You must wear a mask, unless excepted.

You may be exempt from entry requirements if you are:

- a person visiting for the purpose of end-of-life support
- an essential carer of a resident, or a person nominated by the director of the of the care facility where undertaking a rapid antigen test is not practicable
- providing professional patient care as an emergency, healthcare, or an ambulance worker

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- able to provide evidence of a negative result from a PCR test taken within 24 hours of visiting
- Visitors must sign a declaration upon entry to state that they have not been in contact with a confirmed case in the past 7 days if fully vaccinated and if not a household contact, or the last 14 days if not fully vaccinated or if a household contact.

You must not visit a care facility to see patients if you:

- tested positive for COVID-19
- are a household contact
- have COVID-19 symptoms
- are waiting for a COVID-19 test result
- are an overseas traveller or an international aircrew service worker who just arrived in Victoria.

Care facilities include residential aged care facilities, alcohol and drug residential services, homelessness residential services, disability residential services secure welfare services, short-term accommodation and assistance dwellings, Supported Residential Services.

THESE COVID FAQs are prepared with great care, based on the best available advice at the time they are written. As Victoria emerges from lockdown, we endeavour to navigate sometimes conflicting advice. Wherever possible we base guidance from multiple authoritative sources. However with the rapidity of change, sometimes the fine detail is either absent or made available at a later date. Where detail is missing, we deliberately err on the side of caution.

For further information visit: <https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au>. **Should you have any further questions please email [Synod's Crisis Management Team](#).**

MULTI-LINGUAL RESOURCES

Where can I find the current government guidelines in other languages?

Victorian Multi-cultural Commission Coronavirus (COVID-19): In-language advice and information at <https://www.multiculturalcommission.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-language-advice-and-information>.

Ethnolink have information available in 51 languages at: <http://www.ethnolink.com.au/covid-%2019-coronavirus-translated-resources/>

The Department of Home Affairs has extensive multi-lingual resources available at: <https://Covid19inlanguage.homeaffairs.gov.au/>

The Victorian Multicultural Commission have release multi-lingual resources including:

- Audio messages: <https://cloud.think-hq.com.au/s/m9SX3ntGGqr7Sai>
- Posters (JPG / PDF): <https://cloud.think-hq.com.au/s/m9SX3ntGGqr7Sai>
- Social Media banners: <https://cloud.think-hq.com.au/s/m9SX3ntGGqr7Sai>

GATHERINGS & CHURCH COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES

What face-to-face gatherings are permitted at church?

Restrictions easing while there are still COVID-19 cases within the community is something we have not faced previously in Victoria. With an increased likelihood that at some stage an attendee at a gathering will be COVID positive, there are a number of considerations for all Church Councils:

- Have you reviewed and updated your [COVIDSafe Plan?](#)
- Is all COVID signage up-to-date?
- Also consider the information in the LIVING WITH COVID section (p5)

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WORSHIP SERVICES

Religious gatherings and ceremonies (including weddings and funerals)

If these events are held at places of worship there will not be any vaccination requirements or limits on participants, nor any requirement for organisers to check vaccination status. COVID QR code check-in is no longer required. QR Check-in codes may be removed, but should be stored safely in case these are again required in the future.

As of 26/02/2022

Can we gather for morning tea afterwards?

Yes. As with previous advice, careful consideration should also be given to maintaining physical distancing as much as possible, and to limiting the sharing of utensils etc.

As of 26/02/2022

Can we sing?

Yes.

As of 19/11/2021

Is it permitted to provide transport (“give a lift”) to people?

Where possible, treat passengers in your car who are not members of your household as if they were travelling in a taxi:

- Your passenger should sit in the back seat to maintain physical distancing
- Everyone in the car should wear a fitted face mask unless they have a lawful exemption
- Increase ventilation by opening windows wherever possible. Avoid having air-conditioning set to recirculate air.
- High touch surfaces in the vehicle should be cleaned and sanitised regularly (eg door handles, seat belts etc)

It is now mandatory for all workers (including most volunteers) in Victoria to be fully vaccinated, and to provide proof to their workplace, to be able to work anywhere other than from their own homes. Fully vaccinated is defined as having received at least two doses.

WHO NEEDS TO SEE AND RECORD THE PROOF OF VACCINATION STATUS?

Should proof be required by Health authorities, it is important that this information be available at the place where the work is done, or from where it is coordinated. Therefore, this information needs to be provided to, and recorded by, **the Church Council** for any authorised work activity on any church property or on behalf of the church.

Church councils do not need this information for staff of paid contractors (eg plumbers or garden maintenance companies) as their employer must receive and record this proof.

WHO WOULD THIS APPLY TO AT OUR CHURCH?

Roles which would need to provide proof of vaccination status would likely include the worship leader, cleaner, organist/musician, those participating in recording/broadcasting live-streamed services, children's leader, food bank workers and anyone involved with building maintenance or gardening. A Church Council meeting is regarded as a 'work' event – all attendees must be fully vaccinated (at least two doses).

DOES THIS REQUIREMENT APPLY TO MINISTERS?

While there appear to be some exemptions under certain circumstances from the requirement to gather this information from Ministers and other faith leaders, it is strongly recommended that Vaccination Status information be requested from Ministers to ensure compliance in **all** situations.

WHAT IF THE PROOF IS NOT PROVIDED?

An employer of a worker must not permit a worker who is unvaccinated to work for that employer outside the worker's ordinary place of residence, unless that person is medically exempted from vaccination requirements. If an employer does not hold vaccination information about a worker, the employer must treat the worker as if the worker is unvaccinated.





WHAT INFORMATION IS REQUIRED?

The Vaccination register must record the name of all staff and volunteers working onsite.

Beside each, it must show

- ▶ For fully vaccinated (at least 2 doses)– the date of the latest two doses, the vaccination document number and the type of vaccine received.
- ▶ For partially vaccinated (1 dose)– the date of the 1st dose, the date due for 2nd dose and the type of vaccine received
- ▶ For excepted (medically exempt) – as of Oct 29 a treating practitioner must complete the Australian Immunisation Medical Exemption Form (AIR form) uploaded to the Australian Immunisation Register. A digital certificate can then be downloaded by the person, or by their practitioner. An AIR form, either digital or print, is now the only acceptable proof of a medical exemption to vaccination.

HOW SHOULD THE INFORMATION BE RECORDED?

The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has produced a simple form to assist all Church Councils to meet the above obligation. [This form can be found here](#)

WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION?

Synod's Crisis Management Team is recommending that no more than two people at any location have access to that location's staff vaccination records. It may be required at some point that authorised staff from either the Synod or Presbytery be able to verify compliance. At any time, this information may be requested by an Authorised Health Official.

LIVING WITH COVID

Unlike previous post-lockdown reopenings where COVID had been eliminated, we must now learn to live with COVID-19 in the community. This means there is a likelihood that at some point many of us will come into contact with someone who is COVID-positive.

There are currently no specific guidelines available for religious gatherings and ceremonies. The following advice, based on government guidelines and requirements for workplaces, should be followed.

Do we need to notify the Health Department?

Unless there are five or more positive cases within seven days, there is no longer a requirement to notify the Health Department unless you have been asked to do so by the Department or a Local Public Health Unit. You should instead follow your COVID-safe plan requirements to identify people who may have been exposed and encourage them to undertake a COVID test and to self-isolate until a negative result is received. **The requirement to notify the Health Department and close or social contacts is now with the person who tested positive.** (see *requirements for individuals - below*)

Do we need to notify anyone if there has been a positive COVID case at our church or building?

Whilst there is no longer a government-mandated requirement to notify either WorkSafe Vic or the DHHS, Synod's Safety Officer still needs to be notified. Email: Elnura.Dulakovic@victas.uca.org.au.

How do we identify who may have been exposed?

The government has redefined who is a "close contact". This now only applies to household contacts (the people you live with). Social contacts (anyone other than someone in your household) are asked only to get tested if they show any symptoms. See Requirements for individuals with COVID-19 (below) for further information.

Do we need to undertake a deep clean before re-opening?

Current guidelines no longer require a deep clean to be undertaken unless you are advised to do so by the Department of Health. However, a cleaning log record should be maintained and updated regularly. Please refer to the [DHHS COVID CLEANING GUIDE](#) (V3 – Nov 2021) for full details on current requirements.

REQUIREMENTS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH COVID-19

If you have COVID-19 symptoms or are a household contact of someone with COVID-19:

- Get a rapid antigen test.
- If you are unable to access a rapid antigen test, get a PCR test.
- If you can't get a PCR test, stay isolated until you can access either type of test.

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- If you do not have symptoms and you are not a household contact, monitor for symptoms.

If you test positive on a rapid antigen test you must:

1. [report your result online](#) or call 1800-675-398 as soon as possible.
2. Immediately isolate for 7 days from the day you took the rapid antigen test.
3. Follow the [government checklist](#) and tell your contacts you have COVID-19.
 - Your household contacts must isolate for 7 days and take regular tests
 - Your social contacts must get tested if they have any symptoms
 - Advise your workplace or education facility that you have COVID-19.

As of 10/01/2022

ATTENDANCE RECORD KEEPING

QR Code check-ins are no longer required for churches or church/community halls unless these are being used as entertainment venues (eg to hold a concert or dance) or as hospitality venues (eg café or coffee shop) both of which are only open to the fully vaccinated.

QR Code signage may be removed, but should be kept somewhere safe and easily accessible, should check-in requirements ever be reinstated.

Should any gathering (including worship, weddings, funerals) be held in a venue which is only open to the fully vaccinated (eg café, entertainment venue) all normal requirements of that venue apply, including the need for QR Code check-in by all attendees.

As of 19/02/2022

Face to Face Gatherings away from church

There are no limits on the number of people who may gather in a private residence or public place. The government strongly recommends that all visitors to your home or who gather in a public place are fully vaccinated.

As of 19/11/2021

CHURCH/COMMUNITY HALLS

Under what circumstances can Community/Church Halls be used?

Community Facilities, including libraries, halls and creative art spaces, may open without restriction to the fully vaccinated. There are limited circumstances where vaccination status does not apply, including to host essential public support groups, support services and health services, however numbers should be limited to only those necessary.

Every venue must have a COVID-safe plan in place. All physical distancing and hygiene requirements must be met. As of 11:59pm Friday Feb 25, face masks are no longer required.

As of 26/02/2022

QR Code Check-in is no longer required unless these are being used for as an entertainment or hospitality venue (eg café or coffee shop).

As of 19/02/2022

RENTED & HIRED FACILITIES – Who is responsible for ensuring properties are COVID compliant?

- If you rent hire or licence out property to more than one organisation or group on a casual or non-exclusive basis (eg support groups, community groups, classes) using our standard Hire Agreement (Victoria) whether one-off or recurring, the Responsibility for maintaining all COVID-19 compliance, including cleaning to standard remains with the congregation as the responsible body. However, you may pass on the reasonable additional cost of cleaning or other necessary Covid-19 safety measures to the Hirer if you notify them in advance of the additional cost.
- If you rent out property to one organisation or group on an exclusive use basis (under a Lease or Licence), the responsibility for maintaining all COVID-19 compliance falls to the tenant.
- If in doubt, seek advice from your presbytery or contact crisismanagement@victas.uca.org.au

As of 25/01/2022



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COVID-SAFE PLANS

Do we need to complete a CovidSafe plan and/or UCA Covid Recovery Action Checklist?

Having completed the Covid Recovery Action Plan Checklist, <https://victas.uca.org.au/download/668/faq/8852/recovery-action-plan-checklist-v5> if you are keeping this up-to-date, This can be your Covid-Safe Plan.

You must be able to provide a copy immediately if requested by any authorised Health officer. There are substantial fines for every breach of current COVID-safe requirements, for which the congregation will be liable.

HOLY COMMUNION

How can Holy Communion services reflect COVID safe practices?

Careful consideration should be given to how Holy Communion can be conducted appropriately, including maintaining distance, hygiene and not sharing communion ware.

For congregations livestreaming worship, the Assembly guidelines remain in place until July 2022 and can be found at: <https://www.assembly.uca.org.au/news/item/3163-temporary-arrangements-for-holycommunion>

For some thoughts on how to conduct Holy Communion in a COVID-safe manner read Rev Dr Sally Douglas' November 2020 article at <https://victas.uca.org.au/how-can-we-keep-holy-communion-covid-19-safe/>.

As of 19/11/2021

SAFE (DIGITAL) MINISTRY

What safety measures should be adopted for ministry within the digital space?

The Culture of Safety Unit has prepared some guidelines for leaders and communities, offering commentary and interpretation of how our existing Child Safety resources and policies, and the Uniting Church Code of Ethics, continue to shape our digital ministry practices. To view the guidelines visit:

<https://victas.uca.org.au/safe-digital-ministry/>

As of 07/04/2020

MINISTERS IN HIGH RISK GROUPS

Ministers in high-risk groups should discuss with their medical practitioners, presbytery and Church Councils the appropriateness of their involvement in services and what additional safeguards may be required to protect their own health.

High risk groups include people who are:

- aged over 70,
- over 65 with chronic health conditions,
- immune-compromised, or
- Indigenous people over 50 with chronic health conditions

As of 28/10/2021

ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING LICENCES

What does it cost for a Zoom meeting licence?

If you plan on using Zoom frequently and/ or require full functionality, Synod Ministries and Operations along with other Synods have negotiated with Zoom to purchase a bulk deal. As such we are able to provide Zoom licences for a cost of just \$7.93 per month.

If your presbytery or congregation is interested, please contact: George.Delice@victas.uca.org.au

You will need to provide: Number of licences required and the details of the contact person (including their email address)

As of 08/07/2020



COVID-19 VICTORIA

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METRO MELBOURNE AND REGIONAL VICTORIA | FEB 24, 2022

OP SHOPS

How do we keep our Op Shop Covid-safe?

Op Shops run by Uniting VicTas must follow guidance issued by Uniting.

All UCA Op Shops should be regarded as any other non-essential retail store, all of which remain subject to restrictions including:

- **All staff, including volunteers, must be fully vaccinated (at least two doses), unless medically exempt, and must have provided proof of their vaccination status.**
- **As of 11:59pm Friday Feb 25 customers are no longer required to wear face masks, however all staff and volunteers are required to wear a face mask whilst working indoors unless medically exempt.**
- UCA Op Shops, as church workplaces, are required to complete sections A and B of the Recovery Action Plan Checklist to ensure that they are Covid-compliant and a copy sent to elnura.dulakovic@victas.uca.org.au
- **Failure to comply with all current COVID restrictions and requirements, including those above, may incur substantial fines if compliance audited by Health officials.**
- Gloves should be worn when handling cash and any donated goods.
- Donated goods should be received contactless where possible. All items should be cleaned in line with COVID cleaning practices as soon as practical. Hands should be washed regularly whilst, and immediately after, handling any donated items. It is also recommended that WARNING signs should be displayed to ensure all staff and volunteers adhere to these precautions.

As of 26/02/2022

VOLUNTEERS:

Since November 26, 2021 all volunteers are required to be fully vaccinated (at least two doses), unless medically exempt before they can attend any workplace outside their own home. They must also provide evidence of their current vaccination status to the 'employer' before attending any workplace.

Even with a face mask, you should keep at least 1.5 metres between yourself and others at all times and practice good hygiene. If you are in a high-risk group, you can volunteer, however, consider minimising the number of different people you interact with. High-risk groups include people aged 70 years and over, people aged 65 years and over with chronic medical conditions, people with compromised immune systems and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the age of 50.

As of 08/07/2021

MARKETS

Can we hold garage sales and/or markets?

Markets may operate within the same guidelines as retail stores.

As of 16/12/2021

FIRST AID PRECAUTIONS

In the event of someone needing first aid treatment, are there any additional precautions required?

Anyone administering first aid should use general droplet and contact precautions, namely a face mask for the person they are treating which they should encourage the person to apply themselves, a face mask and gloves for the first aider, and goggles for the first aider (if available).

In the event that a first aider has a reason to suspect a person is infected with COVID-19, they should try to limit their contact with that person as much as they can, meaning they should avoid physical contact (e.g. checking pulses and performing physical assessments) unless absolutely necessary, such as performing CPR or putting people in a recovery position if they are unconscious and/or struggling to breathe.

As of 11/06/2020





SYNOD MINISTRIES AND OPERATIONS STAFF

The removal of government recommendations to 'work from home if you can' will see most SMO staff begin to return to the office at Wesley Place and CTM in Parkville from Monday Feb 28. It is expected that this will be achieved gradually.

If you need to contact someone from Synod Ministries and Operations whose phone number starts with 9251, please call Wesley Place UCA Reception on (03) 9116-1400.

As of 26/02/2022

WELLBEING

During this time it is important that we all take care of ourselves and of each other. Sometimes we may need help to do this. Below are just some of the places you can turn to if you, or someone you know, may need some assistance coping with COVID restrictions:

Lifeline ph **13 11 14**

Beyond Blue ph **1300 22 4636**

Kids Helpline ph **1800 55 1800**

1800RESPECT ph **1800 737 732**
(Domestic & Sexual Violence)

SafeSteps ph **1800 015 188**
(support & planning to escape domestic violence)

LGBTQIA ph **1800 184 527**
(peer driven support)

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

Centrelink online financial resources for existing customers: <https://www.servicessaustralia.gov.au/individuals/help-emergency>

Centrelink Crisis Payments ph **132 850**

Uniting Vic Tas
<https://www.unitingvictas.org.au/contact-us/>

