

## FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS

### COVID-19: GUIDANCE FOR RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS ON ENHANCED PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES FOR RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

Religious organisations play a key role in minimising the transmission of the COVID-19 virus. This is because religious activities typically involve social gatherings with a high degree of physical interaction. These religious activities include regular worship services, non-worship activities (e.g. religious classes, cell group meetings), religious events (e.g. Qing Ming, Ramadan, Good Friday) and life events with religious observances (e.g. weddings and funerals).

#### Safe and Socially Responsible Religious Practices

2. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, our religious organisations have taken precautionary measures to allow their communities to continue with their religious life in a safe and socially responsible manner. **Religious organisations should continue to apply the measures indicated in the prevailing MOH advisories.** These measures include the following:

- Suspend senior-centric activities and advising elderly to avoid participating in large gatherings
- Reduce the scale of events to below 250 participants
- Reduce the crowding of participants and improve ventilation
- Registration of participants to facilitate contact tracing
- Temperature screening and health/travel declaration of participants
- Turn away participants 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
- Remind worshippers 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

3. Many religious organisations have taken the evolving situation seriously and have done the responsible thing to modify their regular services and rituals to reduce transmission risk. For example, religious services in churches are being live-streamed as an alternative to on-site worship, which significantly reduces the number of on-site congregants. All mosques and some churches have taken the bold step to suspend regular services for an extended period of time in order to protect the well-being of their congregants. These adjustments may cause disruptions but are necessary to safeguard congregational and community health. These examples are good initiatives of **safe distancing**<sup>1</sup> and are part of the whole-of-society effort needed to protect vulnerable groups – such as the elderly – and the wider community from COVID-19 in Singapore.

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<sup>1</sup> Safe distancing measures are steps that you can take to reduce physical interaction between people. This will help to reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

## FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS

### Stronger Safe Distancing Measures in the Religious Setting

4. Given the global and local COVID-19 situation, it is necessary to take more steps to further reduce the risk of local virus transmission. We must adopt stronger safe distancing measures in our religious practices and other facets of daily life. These principles (“D-I-D”) serve as a guide on how safe distancing measures can be applied:

- a. **Density:** The closer the physical contact between individuals, the higher the likelihood of transmission
- b. **Intensity:** The more vigorous the activity (e.g. singing), the greater the degree of release of droplets
- c. **Duration:** The longer the exposure to others, the higher the likelihood of transmission

5. As per MOH’s advisory on 20 Mar 2020, all events and gatherings with 250 participants or more at any one time, including for religious purposes, must be suspended from 21 Mar 2020 to 30 Jun 2020.

6. As such, **religious activities can continue only if the number of participants are less than 250 and there is separation of at least 1 metre between participants**. These measures are to reduce crowding and lower the *density* of people at the activity.

7. Religious organisations are requested to adopt **additional measures to further lower density, intensity and duration (D-I-D) of physical interactions in their religious activities**. The measures are shown in the table below, but are not exhaustive. As religious practices vary across the faiths, religious leaders are to adapt these in order to achieve the D-I-D outcomes in their respective religious settings.

<b>Additional Measures to ensure Safe Distancing for Religious Activities</b> <i>(non-exhaustive list)</i>	
Reduce Density	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Limit religious services, religious activities and other mass gatherings to below 250 participants at any one time</b></li><li>▪ <b>At least 1m separation between worshippers/ participants</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Families may sit together but &gt;1m apart from other groups</li><li>○ Increase spacing of seats per table, increase distance between tables</li><li>○ Checkerboard seating is ideal</li></ul></li><li>▪ Manage flow and reduce crowding at entrances, exits, corridors and other potential “bottleneck” points such as queues at temperature screening stations</li></ul>

## FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS

<b>Additional Measures to ensure Safe Distancing for Religious Activities</b> <i>(non-exhaustive list)</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Stagger arrival and dismissal times for worshippers</li> <li>▪ Avoid “worship-hopping”, i.e. worshipping at multiple places of worship or attending different services. This makes contact-tracing difficult, and increases the chances of cross-community transmission.</li> <li>▪ Advise families to minimise participants at weddings, wakes and funerals.</li> </ul>
Lower Intensity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No singing</li> <li>▪ Suspension of social activities (e.g. social and meal events) to minimise mingling of worshippers</li> <li>▪ No communal meals so as to minimise mingling               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>e.g. avoid fellowship over refreshments in churches, suspension of food distribution in Sikh temples</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Avoid physical greetings and contact               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>advocate alternatives to shaking hands, e.g. demonstrate offering of peace by clasping hands to the chest in church/mosque services</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Remove shared prayer items               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>e.g. worshippers to bring own prayer mats to mosques to reduce possibility of local transmission through prayer surfaces</i></li> <li>○ <i>e.g. hymnals and bibles in the pews, passing of offering bags</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Minimise mixing of groups               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Participants to remain in their designated seating areas</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Improve ventilation of religious premises               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>e.g. use of fans instead of air-conditioning, conduct ancestral prayers in open-air areas for Qing Ming</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Shorten Duration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Shorten service times               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>e.g. shorter sermons and prayers, limit to essential rituals</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Implement alternatives to on-site services               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>e.g. live-streaming of services, upload videos or full sermon text for online viewing</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Advise worshippers to leave immediately after service</li> </ul>

## FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS

8. We strongly advise religious leaders to review if religious gatherings outside of the place of worship – such as religious classes and cell group meetings – should continue to be held. If they are to proceed, religious leaders should issue further guidance to the organisers on best practices so that they can create a safe environment for those who participate in them. The principles and measures of safe distancing, personal hygiene and social responsibility, should be emphasised in such guidance.

### Implementation Timeline

9. The measures in this advisory are to be implemented with immediate effect. If the religious organisation is unable to immediately adopt these measures, we strongly advise that it suspends the activity/gathering until it is able to implement those measures.

10. This advisory for religious organisations and religious activities will be subject to further review based on the global and local COVID-19 situation.

### Conclusion

11. We understand that some of these measures requested of our religious organisations are not easy to implement, and require a significant change in mindset and behavior in how we go about tending to our religious life. But these are extraordinary times, and overcoming a health pandemic requires strong collective action. We all have a responsibility to adopt socially responsible behavior and uphold safe distancing measures over a sustained period to effectively limit the spread of COVID-19 in Singapore. It is on these occasions that we all look to the leaders of our religious communities to take bold steps to set the tone and shape the response of our communities, so that we can all unite to overcome this situation, and come out on the other side of it a more cohesive and resilient society.

**MINISTRY OF CULTURE, COMMUNITY & YOUTH**

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For queries, please contact MCCY's Community Relations and Engagement division at [cpro@mccy.gov.sg](mailto:cpro@mccy.gov.sg).