

29 May 2020

UPDATED COVID-19 LEVEL 2 GUIDANCE

New Zealand moved to Alert Level 2 on 13 May 2020. Since then there has been some changes to the rules and accompanying guidance, most significantly at midday on 29 May 2020 when the number of people permitted in gatherings increased to 100 and for the first time, faith based activities were referenced in the COVID-19 Public Health Response (Alert Level 2) Order 2020.

The purpose of this document is to summarise the recent changes and answer frequently asked questions.

29 May 2020 Changes

1. Faith based gatherings are now expressly excluded from the rules that apply to businesses and services. However, the rules for social gatherings do apply. In summary these rules are:
 - a. Gatherings must be limited to 100 people (not including workers) per defined space.
 - b. A contact tracing register must be kept, unless every person knows and can identify for the purposes of contact tracing, every other person at that gathering.
2. The concept of “defined space” is introduced. A “defined space” is an internal or external space separated by walls with systems and processes in place to prevent intermingling. Intermingling means coming within 2 meters of each other.
3. Because a faith based gathering is not a business or service, physical distancing rules and rules for the serving of food and drink do not apply. However, if a church has a business or service operating on church property, they must comply with the applicable rules. For example, it is the responsibility of the person in charge of an op shop, café, or other external group which amounts to a business or service to comply with the applicable rules. These rules do not extend to faith based gatherings even if they are operating within the same building.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Do we need to physically distance when meeting for church activities?** No. Faith based activities are not required to physically distance.
2. **I have an external group using the church building, do I need to make sure they are following the rules?** It is the responsibility of the person in charge of that group to follow the rules. As a responsible “building owner”, you could speak with them to satisfy yourself they are adequately prepared, but it remains their responsibility.

3. **What about funerals?** The specific rules for funeral services have been removed. A faith based funeral service is a faith based gathering. If a funeral director wants to use the church building for a secular service, it is their responsibility to follow the applicable rules.
4. **What about singing?** Singing was an activity that was used by the government as an activity with heightened risk. There is no ban on singing, but it should be considered along with other risk factors when planning how activities can be conducted safely. If you do decide to include singing in services, you might consider limiting the duration of singing.
5. **What about childcare services?** A Sunday school or cheche held during a church service would be a faith based gathering and not subject to the business and services rules. If an early learning service is not connected with a faith based activity or is run by an external group, they must comply with the rules that apply to all early learning services. There is good guidance on the Ministry of Education website.
6. **Can I serve food and drink at services?** Yes. The rules about food and drink do not apply to faith based gatherings. You should consider how to do this safely, for example avoiding a buffet and having heightened food safety measures.
7. **Do I still need a safety plan?** It is recommended that you do have one. A safety plan will help you to plan as safely as possible and can be used to communicate your plan to your congregation.
8. **Are there still hygiene rules and rules for at-risk people?** There are no specific rules for these matters. The separate issues of at-risk people and hygiene measures should form part of your general safety planning, and a commonsense approach taken.
9. **Who decides whether we go ahead with services and other church activities?** Decisions must be made locally, after considering local conditions and other factors.
10. **Who can I speak to if I have any questions?** Speak to your local health and safety representative in the first instance. If you still have questions, contact Matthew Hague (matthew@presbyterian.org.nz).

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