



Infection control supervisor

Industry standard for services and ecclesiastical acts in member churches Christian Council of Norway

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1. Introduction

This guide shall provide advice and guidance for the infection control-related conduct of services and other gatherings under the auspices of churches during the covid-19 pandemic.

Church services and ecclesiastical acts are the core activities of the churches. They have a central role in many people's lives. In line with the government's Covid-19 regulations, all services were cancelled as of March 12, 2020.

The member churches of Christian Council of Norway's have reopened their churches and carried out church services and ecclesiastical acts as society at large has opened. This happened gradually, in controlled forms under compliance with the Covid-19 regulations. This infection control guide from NKR will assist churches and congregations in joint efforts to prevent contagion in connection with services.

Church services are defined as a public event. Therefore, the legal general regulations for these kinds of events are always applicable. If the church is rented or loaned to closed private events, there are guidelines and number restrictions for private events that apply.

NOTE:

1. THIS GUIDE IS BASED ON THE NATIONAL INFECTION CONTROL RULES.

Municipalities can, if the situation of contagion requires, introduce even more restricting rules. It is therefore important that local churches and congregations comply with local regulations and measures. Municipal authorities are not allowed to introduce rules more liberal than the national rules, just the opposite.

In addition, central authorities can use Covid-19 Regulations Chapter 5A, 5B and 5C to introduce regional austerity.

It is therefore urgent that local churches follow and comply with regional and local regulations and measures.

2. GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATIONS SHOULD BE COMPLIED WITH.

The authorities can make recommendations that are not regulated in the form of legal regulations. Assessments are therefore subject to a certain discretion. Current recommendations that have relevance to events this guide is designed for, are the following:

a. It is recommended not to cross the municipal border to attend events.

The recommendation has a two-fold target group:

1. Organizers targeting an audience beyond their own congregation and the municipal boundaries with their event, should cancel or postpone the event.
2. Individuals should avoid crossing the municipal border to attend an event.

The recommendations apply to participation in events and not travel to serve as a priest or preacher. This is defined as necessary travel and is not covered by the recommendation.

Briefly about COVID-19

SARS-CoV-2 is the name of the virus that is causing the outbreak of COVID-19 disease. The virus can cause respiratory tract infection of varying severity. The virus transmits mainly via droplet and contact infection when viruses in the respiratory tract are transmitted from the respiratory tract of a sick person on to another person. Contagion can therefore occur either when coughing or sneezing at another person, or if you get airway secretions on objects touched by others. Some people may have Covid-a9 without noticing symptoms. It is currently unclear how much of a role these individuals have in the spread of infection. WHO estimate the incubation time (from infection until symptoms appear) to be 5-6 days, but this can vary from 0 to 14 days. The virus does not tolerate soap and water, nor disinfection with alcohol or temperatures above 60 degrees.

The church represented by the board, is responsible for assessing whether they have met basic requirements for infection control in a satisfactory manner. This guide provides advices and guidance that will help churches and congregations in this work. The individual assembly must consider for itself how the measures should be adapted according to local conditions. In order to ensure the safeguarding of infection control measures, good coordination and cooperation between the various actors involved in the implementation of meetings and services, are of essential importance.

Information from Norwegian Directorate of Health

You will find information materials and posters about covid-19 on the website of Norwegian Directorate of Health:

<https://www.helsedirektoratet.no/brosjyrer/vaner-som-forebygger-smitte>

Print them and place them visibly at the entrance and other suitable places in the building where you gather.

You will find further information in english here: <https://www.fhi.no/en/op/novel-coronavirus-facts-advice/facts-and-knowledge-about-covid-19/facts-about-novel-coronavirus/>.

About this guide

Christian Council of Norway has prepared this infection control guide. It is general by form and you have to consider it in light of various church arrangements and terminology used in different churches. The guide will be updated in accordance with the changed advice of national health authorities. New versions will then replace previous editions. The guide is located on CCN WEBSITE: <https://norgeskristnerad.no/informasjon-om-corona/> and should be clearly marked with "last updated dd.mm.yyyy"

2. Liability and decision-making authority

In order to ensure a proper and gradual implementation of the reopening of ordinary church service in churches in Norway a good coordination is required between the management, priests/pastors and others who will have a role in the implementation of the service. The different churches use various concepts on responsible management. The board, the parish council, the elder's councils are widely used. One single person manages some communities.

This supervisor consistently uses management as an expression of the responsible management. To simplify, the term church is also consistently used. It includes both the church building, the church house and the congregation using the building. Management is responsible for enforcing the operation, implementation of services and other activities in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. The management is responsible for ensuring the proper operation of the church with respect to infection control, and placing responsibility for various tasks in connection with the infection control advice.

Management must provide the necessary training and information for employees, volunteer staff and participants/users. Contagion prevention plans must be adapted to local conditions according to advice given in this guide.

The priest/pastor is responsible for the conduct of the service and ecclesiastical acts. This person shall ensure that the necessary instructions have been given to participants/relatives before, during and after ceremonies/ecclesiastical acts.

3. Infection prevention measures

3.1. Overall guidelines for ensuring good infection control

In all sections of society many measures have been taken to limit the spread of infection. It is important to use measures that are adapted to different situations. SARS-CoV-2 virus mainly transmit via droplet and contact infection. The virus is mostly spread by coughing and sneezing – and less by normal speech/talking. It has not been proven that the new coronavirus infects via food, drink or water.

The four pillars for slowing the spread of infection are:

- A. Sick persons shall not attend church events
- B. Good hygiene
- C. Good distance and minimum contact between persons
- D. Minimum common use and touching of fixtures and equipment

Despite well-implemented measures, cases of Covid-19 and other infections can occur. If the infection control measures in this guide are properly carried out, the spread of infection will be limited. The measures below are a description of what infection control measures must be in place to successfully reduce infection risk to a minimum.

3.1.1. Sick persons shall not attend church events

- Use the church website and the contact with relatives, participants etc. to inform clearly that those who may be corona-sick, have symptoms of respiratory infection or are in quarantine cannot attend church events.
- All employees and volunteers who have symptoms of respiratory infection should not go to work or participate in the preparation and implementation of services/meetings.
- Employees and volunteers have a particular responsibility to follow the authorities' advice on quarantine and isolation when developing their own symptoms or in case of close contact with people with proven infection.
- The management are responsible for informing volunteers and participants that they shall notify the management if they develop disease after 1-2 days.
- Individuals who have had close contact with a person later than 48 hours before the person experienced the first symptoms of infection, and who afterwards has been confirmed infected by SARS CoV-2 should stay in quarantine for ten days after the contact. For the definition of close contact, see [§ 3](#) of the Covid-19 Regulations. (Only in Norwegian)
- The municipal health service is responsible for monitoring cases of confirmed covid-19 (infection tracking) and shall notify the church if users or employees are confirmed covid-19. The municipal health service shall decide further measures and define quarantine for persons with close contacts to the sick person.

3.1.2. Good hygiene

- Ensure proper information at the entrance, etc. for participants and employees with advices to avoid infection. (Cf. posters mentioned above available from the website of Norwegian Directorate of Health.)
- Provide for easily accessible hand washing or hand disinfection facilities for employees, volunteers and participants.
- The hand hygiene regulations should be carried out as a minimum on arrival, between different tasks (for example, if you move or change equipment), after toilet visits, and before and after kitchen work and eating. Ensure enough paper towels at the hands washing facilities.
- Avoid handshaking, hugging and unnecessary physical contact.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Avoid coughing or sneezing directly onto others. Try to cough/ sneeze into a paper tissue (carefully disposed of afterwards), or into the crook of your elbow if you do not have tissues available.

3.1.3. Registration routine prior to service

- According to the COVID-19 regulation § 13, the management should register the attendants and phone numbers on a list in fall there should be a need for infection tracking afterward. The list is to be kept in a safe manner and destroyed after fourteen days.
- Information on the preconditions for registration should be presented at the registration spot. Registration can take place by the participants entering a list at the entrance. If a common pen is used, hand liquor must be used after each use.
- After arrival and registration, participants must go directly to the directed place.

3.1.4. Maintain required distance and minimum contact between individuals.

As of 2021.04.15 the Government has introduced new number restrictions for indoor events in public places such as church services and meetings.

Please check local Municipalities possible stricter regulations and observe the minimum distance requirements mentioned below.

- As general rule maximum of 10 people present at the indoor event
- A maximum of 100 people present at an indoor event when everyone in the audience sits on designated seats.
- A maximum of 200 individuals at an outdoor event; -however 600 individuals where everyone in the audience sits in designated seats.

At outdoor events where more than 200 people are present at the same time, those present shall be divided into groups of up to 200 people. There should always be at least a distance of two meters between the groups.

- Contributing personnel and staff is excluded from those amounts. They shall not be seated among the rest of the congregation during the service.
- The main precondition for such congregations is that they should be organised in such a way that the attendants could keep at least two-meter distance to another person. This can be organised by information, organizing chairs and benches or other physical facilitation. This applies both in the assembly hall itself, at the entrance/exit and any collection in the open air.
- The minimum distance requirements do not apply to people from the same household.
- The size of the church room overrides the maximum number. That means if the size of the room makes it impossible to meet with the distance requirements, a lower number of participants should be allowed.
- Please observe that due to local conditions there can be municipal regulations concerning both quantity and seating restrictions.
- The organizer should consider physical measures to contribute to enough distance between attendants: Refurnishing the premises, shutting down every other bench/chair row, marking with tape on the floor, etc.
- Avoid joint rigging. Refurnishing and necessary equipment must be put of forward in advance of the service.
- Articulation when performing singing by soloists or smaller groups may result in an increased risk of infection spreading. For this reason, any additional distance is recommended in such cases.
- Common singing at events, such as in churches, can lead to increased droplet excretion and an increased risk of infection. Therefore, a particular attention is therefore required for compliance with the distance requirement.
- Reduce the possibility of contact that may occur in case of congestion at exit, communion, music performance etc.
- Pay attention to the need for organizing by exit, communion, music performance etc. in order to comply with the distance requirements and avoid congestion.

3.1.5. Minimum common use and touching of fixtures and equipment

- Instruments, microphones, books etc. shall not be shared and not touched by anyone other than the person who will use them.
- Song books and hymn books can be used if not shared and it takes more than 24 hours to reuse
- Keyboard of any instrument or other equipment used by several people must be disinfected between every change of performer/user.

3.1.6. Serving food, church coffee etc.

According to information from Norwegian Food Safety Authority there is no indication that the coronavirus is transmitted through food and drink. It is the handling, preparation and conditions surrounding the serving that can contribute to increased risk of infection. Therefore, sharpened attention to the general infection control measures such as hand hygiene and cleaning of surfaces in the kitchen is required. *However, if an increasing spread of infection in the population occurs, the necessity of church coffee or other serving in connection with the service should be considered.*

- When preparing and handling food in the church kitchen, only those who prepare the food should have access to the zone in the kitchen where food is prepared/handled.
- If necessary, a separate pick-up point should be established in the kitchen where those who serve the food can pick it up to deliver. These persons should, if possible, not have access to the zone in the kitchen where the food is prepared.
- Avoid buffet.
- Facilitate for the serving of ready-made portions/pieces, or if necessary, ordered from catering wrapped in plastic or other packaging.
- Use suitable equipment such as a sausage pinch or cake shovel when handing out smaller pieces such as sausages in bread/lompe (a potato pancake), buns, rolls, cakes, etc.,
- Serving coffee and other drinks should take place by one or more people bestowing in cups. Avoid self-service with carafe, cans etc. that are touched by members of the congregation in general.
- One person should supervise that the distance rules are maintained in any food queue.
- Mingle should be avoided.

3.2. General cleaning

Clear and good general cleaning procedures are required. These routines ought to be published by posters in the church/office apply to all rooms used.

- Good general cleaning of the premises is necessary. Ordinary cleaning agents can be used.
- Door handles stair railings, washbasins and other objects or surfaces frequently touched should be cleaned frequently.
- Ethanol-based disinfectant can be used on clean surfaces, but please note: This is not enough in the case of visible dirty surfaces. Therefore, dirty surfaces must be cleaned before any use of disinfectants as well.
- Clean equipment used prior to the next use. This also applies to organ, piano, keyboards, pulpit, microphones, wires, speaker systems, altar tables and surfaces in other rooms used in connection with the service if more people use them.

- Performers on wind instruments in the church room must have their own routines for use and cleaning.
- If the church's toilets are to be accessible, there must also be routines for cleaning. Toilets in daily use should be cleaned daily.

4. Ecclesiastical acts

With the assumption that the described measures for infection control are followed, the local church can find solutions for services and other organized activity in churches and other parish premises in line with this guide. This also includes ecclesiastical acts such as holy communion, baptisms, wedding ceremonies, and funeral ceremonies.

Please note that the Government by an addendum to § 13 of the Covid-19 regulations, has decided an exemption in the distance requirements for "persons participating in religious ceremonies requiring short-term close contact." (§13g) See also this infection control supervisor 3.1.1. penultimate bullet point.

4.1. Holy Communion

- Those who prepare and hand out wine and bread/wafers, or break the bread should maintain prescribed hand hygiene immediately before the ceremony begins.
- Communion is to be carried out in such a way that there is no direct contact between administrator, the elements and the communicant.
- This can be achieved with the use of separate cups. Where you use wafers, these can be placed in each cup, preferably before the communion meal begins.
- The communicant brings the separate cup with a wafer, even takes the wafer in the mouth and holds the cup (as usual) forward.
- Using broken bread, place the broken bread on a platter or tray with a cloth of paper. It is assumed that the amount of pieces is sufficient according to the numbers of communicants and that distance between the pieces of bread is sufficient that one piece can be picked without being touched by other communicants.
- The communicant receives separate cup and bread, takes the bread in his mouth and holds the cup.
- Please note: Keep at least one-metre distance between the administrator, the communicant, and other communicants.
- The church must have satisfactory procedures to ensure disinfectant cleaning of the equipment used, or using disposable cups.
- Those who prepare and administrate the communion should maintain good hand hygiene prior to the ceremony and afterward.

4.2. Baptism

There are both different baptismal practices and different baptismal rituals in Christian churches in Norway.

4.2.1. Baptism of infants can be performed in the ordinary manner

- The baptismal companion standing at the baptismal font with the priest should consist of few persons.
- The baptismal action is carried out in the usual way without the use of gloves: marking the sign of the cross on the forehead, pouring water over the child's head, wiping the child's head and laying on the hand. This requires thorough hand washing in advance.
- Use paper napkin to wipe the baptismal baby's head. A napkin of clothes can be used if the baptismal companion brings this with and handles it. Other solutions that maintain of infection control measures may be considered.
- If possible, the child should be held by the same person through the service/baptismal act and possibly lift the child before the congregation after the baptismal act.

4.2.2. Baptism of adults by Baptist form

- Baptism of adults following baptistic form may, according to the recommendation of 13.07.2020 from the Directorate of Health, now be carried out. General infection control measures such as thorough hand washing and adherence to the one-meter distance rule in the pre- and aftermath of the baptismal action should be observed.

4.3. Marriage ceremonies

Churches should help to find good solutions for marriage ceremonies. General regulations on infection control must be maintained. Ceremonies outdoors, where the bridal couple is responsible for facilitating, may be an alternative to the church premises.

- Only the bridal couples and the witnesses should stand at the altar together with the priest/pastor.
- The marriage ceremony and intercession with the laying of hands can be carried out in the ordinary manner. The precondition is the maintaining of good hand hygiene in advance and after.

4.4. Funeral ceremonies

- Funeral ceremony takes place within normal deadlines after death.
- Det kan være både generelle og lokale antallsbegrensningene for gravferd. Dette kan gi grunnlag for å tilby en minneseremoni i kirken/menigheten i forbindelse med et utsatt minnesamvær, urnenedsettelse el.lign.

There may be both general and local restrictions on allowed number of attendants for burials. A memorial ceremony in the church with limited attendants and a postponed more open commemoration could be considered.

- If possible, we recommend streaming the ceremony according to the guidelines that apply to this.

- Forrettende prest/pastor bør ha løpende kontakt med begravelsesbyrå slik at de er kjent med lokal fleksibilitet i forbindelse med seremonier.

The conducting priest/pastor should have ongoing contact with the undertaker so that they are familiar with local flexibility in connection with ceremonies

- I forkant av begravelsen anbefales det å redusere antall berøringspunkter, ved å ha åpen inngangsdør, benytte trykte salmeark, ikke benytte puter i benkene og lignende.

Prior to the funeral, reduce the number of touch points, by having an open front door, using printed hymn sheets, not using pillows in the benches and the like.

- It is a precondition that those present do not have an acute respiratory infection, and that general regulations on infection control are maintained. This also applies to relatives or others who carry the coffin.
- Information about general infection control routines should be made visible by posters at entrance of chapel/church rooms.

5. Checklist for infection control in church activities

Measures	Responsible	Conducted Date	Note
The overall responsibilities of Management			
Training employees and others by making them aware of the content of this guide			
Information for members and church visitors upon posting at the entrance to the church, on websites and social media about routines during church visits.			
Plan for hygiene measures and cleaning			
Establish dialogue with any employees, users or others who are at risk and who may need accommodations			
Sick people should not participate in the services			
Information to employees, volunteer staff and users that sick people should stay at home, even in case of mild symptoms.			
Good hygiene			
Ensure that there is enough soap and paper towels available at all sink stations and toilets.			
Henge opp plakater om håndvaskrutiner og hostehygiene			

Wash hands frequently and thoroughly (use hand disinfection if necessary)			
Plan for cleaning including frequency and method			
Routines for reinforced cleaning in exposed areas that are affected frequently (door handles, stair rails, tabletops, etc.)			
Place alcohol-based disinfection where no hand washing facilities is available and at places recommended in this guide.			
Contact between individuals is to be reduced			
Keep at least a minimum of one meter distance between individuals.			
Establish routines and assign responsibility for the organising of seating, clearly marking which chairs, benches to be used.			
Plan to organize queue and ensure sufficient distance between participants at communion and more.			
Plan to ensure that there is recommended distance between people in common areas such as hallway, changing rooms, waiting rooms, toilets and the entrance of the premises.			
Procedures for marking on floors to ensure distance in areas where congestion may occur, if necessary.			