



# The Diocese of Algoma

## **Advent-Christmas-Epiphany Communiqué re: COVID-19 Protocols**

*Issued on The Feast of the St. Andrew, November 30, 2022*

As we move into the winter months, we also enter a period of increased respiratory illnesses, such as COVID-19, Influenza, and Respiratory Syncytial Virus. These illnesses pose the greatest risk to the most vulnerable in our society (immunocompromised, elderly, in some cases young children).

Within the Diocese of Algoma, evidence from hospitalizations indicates that the spread and risks of COVID-19, particularly among unvaccinated persons, persists. As we move through the holiday season, with people traveling from region to region and experiencing increased exposure, these numbers seem unlikely to drop. The situation, while concerning, is not something we need to fear. Rather, continuing to maintain or resume best practices in terms of prevention greatly reduces the risk of infection.

The growing narrative in our society suggests each of us should be concerned with “keeping myself safe,” emphasizing individual risk assessment and personal freedom to the detriment of taking simple actions to protect and support others. However, the gospel imperative is consistent with the comprehensive approach to Public Health, which is rooted in collective action for the common good. Therefore, in our life and ministry as church, seeking and serving Christ in all persons and loving our neighbour as ourselves, it is important for us to make wise decisions, founded upon our faith, based on the latest insights of science.

Multiple infections increase both the probability and severity of outcomes. While many people experience mild symptoms, the numbers of people with severe symptoms and outcomes is much larger than flu and other common respiratory diseases. Simple actions help to limit exposure at times of high community transmission. In addition to staying up to date with our vaccines, the three most important things we can do to limit the spread of COVID-19 transmission while indoors are:

1. Stay home if feeling unwell. A screening tool is available here:  
<https://www.ontario.ca/self-assessment/>

2. Wear a well-fitted mask in crowded, enclosed, and close-contact settings: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/prevention-risks/about-non-medical-masks-face-coverings.html#a1>
3. Ventilation remains an important way to reduce risk of infection. Keep HVAC system fans running continuously during activities to increase air exchange, or alternatively, open a window and door to the outside.

***The following guidelines are to be followed by Algoma's congregations, effective Friday, December 9, 2022.***

### **Masking**

1. The Ontario Medical Officer of Health is urging all people to resume wearing masks in indoor settings. Therefore in Algoma, masking by all is strongly encouraged, particularly during "coffee time" and other social interactions. Every congregation should review their gathering practices for worship, meetings, work, and social occasions, considering the safety and comfort of all. Congregations may voluntarily choose to re-instate mask protocols as is appropriate for them.
2. Clergy and Communion Ministers (Lay Administrants; Eucharistic Ministers; Lay Readers, etc.) must be masked when administering Communion.
3. Presiders, preachers, lectors, and intercessors must be masked if they are unable to maintain a distance of two metres between themselves and the congregation. Cantors and soloists must remain masked if they are unable to maintain a distance of three metres.
4. Liturgical leaders (clergy, lay readers, lectors, cantors, intercessors, servers and choir members) are to remain masked when not performing their leadership functions in the liturgy.
5. Congregations should also keep a supply of masks on hand for those who may have forgotten their mask.

Asking people to wear a mask is not an affront on their personal freedom. Wearing a mask protects yourself and others. Indeed, wearing a mask even if you don't think it is necessary means that others who should or desire to be wearing a mask will feel more comfortable and supported in doing so. The mandate to wear masks may be reinstated if a new variant wave emerges in the winter.

### **Vaccinations**

1. All clergy, Lay Incumbents, and Licensed Diocesan Lay Readers who preside at public worship or who provide in-person pastoral care are required to have a bivalent COVID-19 vaccination as soon as possible. These vaccines should be received before Christmas, and no later than January 13,

2023. Please forward your proof of vaccination to Archdeacon Jay Koyle, [jay.koyle@dioceseofalgoma.com](mailto:jay.koyle@dioceseofalgoma.com). Once received, the proof of vaccination will be noted and then the copy deleted/destroyed.

2. Influenza vaccinations are strongly encouraged for clergy and others working with vulnerable persons on behalf of the church.
3. Parishioners should be encouraged to keep up-to-date with COVID boosters and flu shots, unless individuals are advised otherwise by their medical professionals.

Keeping up with your COVID-19 vaccines remains one of the best protections against the effects of the virus. The latest data from the Public Health Agency of Canada indicates that unvaccinated Canadians are 7x more likely to be hospitalized and 8x more likely to die compared with those who have received at least one booster.

Early in the New Year, the Archbishop's policy on vaccinations will be reviewed once again. For now the policy remains in place.

### **Self-Assessment and Isolation**

1. Ontario's current public health guidance to manage COVID-19 during the upcoming respiratory illness season this fall and winter is as follows:
  - If you are in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, continue to self-monitor for symptoms. There is no longer a need to isolate but you should wear a mask for 10 days when in public.
  - If you are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 such as fever, cough, or runny nose, stay home from school, work, church and other events until your fever is gone and symptoms are improving, get a rapid antigen test or, if eligible, a PCR test. Wear a mask for 10 days after symptom onset and avoid non-essential visits to high-risk individuals and settings.
2. Ask people to stay home when they are symptomatic. A link to a screening tool is provided in the opening section above. A poster re: self-screening also is available in previous COVID postings on the Diocesan website.
3. Clergy and lay pastoral assistants who have symptoms of COVID-19 or who have tested positive should continue to refrain from providing in-person pastoral care to high-risk persons for a full 10 days after symptom onset.
4. In-person pastoral visits with those who are self-isolating, those who have COVID-19, or those residing in a facility where an outbreak has been declared are discouraged, except in urgent circumstances.

## **The Common Cup**

1. Parishes are to continue offering Communion in both kinds. While some may feel uncomfortable drinking from the common cup, it is to be offered so those who desire to do so may receive the consecrated wine.

The risk of COVID-19 infection during the time of sharing Communion is from breathing air exhaled by an infectious person next to you at the communion rail rather than from sharing a common cup. Therefore, consider how Communion can be administered in a manner that allows adequate distancing between Communicants. To read about the health implications of sharing the common cup: <https://www.ottawa.anglican.ca/images/COVID-19/2022-03-The-Common-Cup-M-Garner.pdf?type=file>

Each of the above is a single layer of protection against respiratory viruses. The more layers that we adopt, the greater the reduction in the risk of viral transmission. As Christians, we are called to first love God and then to love our neighbour. In doing what we can to reduce the risk of viral transmission, we show in our actions our love for our neighbours.

If you have any questions, please contact Archdeacon Jay Koyle at 705.256.5061, x. 22 or [jay.koyle@dioceseofalgoma.com](mailto:jay.koyle@dioceseofalgoma.com)

## **Regional Health Units within our Diocese**

*These sites provide you with updates concerning COVID-19, protocols and regulations, and various helpful resources relevant to your area. Please ensure you know the Health Unit serving the area in which your congregation is located.*

Thunder Bay Regional Health Unit

<https://www.tbdhu.com/>

Algoma and District Public Health

<http://www.algomapublichealth.com/>

Public Health Sudbury and Districts - <https://www.phsd.ca/>

Timiskaming Health Unit - <http://www.timiskaminghu.com/>

Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux (CISSS) de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue - <https://www.ciass-at.gouv.qc.ca/en/>

North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit  
<https://www.myhealthunit.ca/en/index.asp>

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit  
<https://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/>

Map of Health Unit Districts in Northern Ontario  
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-402-x/2015002/maps-cartes/rm-cr06-eng.htm>