

Wednesday, 10 November 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers

COVID-19 Update for the Period Commencing 8 November 2021

The following changes apply to Religious Places of Worship as from last Monday, 8 November:

- Masks are required in all indoor public settings, including churches (except children under the age of 12).
- Places of worship are open to all, but density limits still apply. The density rule is now one person per 2m².
- Congregational singing with masks is now permitted.
- No singing is permitted for anyone who is not fully vaccinated.
- A choir or singing group of up to ten unmasked singers is permissible. They must be fully vaccinated.
- Wedding ceremonies permitted with no person limit (if an unvaccinated person is present attendance is capped at five). Eating and drinking is allowed while standing, and dancing is permitted, density limits still apply.
- Funerals permitted with no person limit (if an unvaccinated person is present attendance is capped at ten). Eating and drinking allowed while standing, density limits still apply.
- When food and drinks are served at or after worship including at weddings and funerals, unvaccinated persons must be seated when eating and drinking.

Because vaccination status is still relevant to some aspects of Public Worship (singing, attendance at weddings and funerals etc) you are still required to ascertain the vaccination status of persons entering the place of public worship.

For details of restrictions which still apply in various areas of everyday life, please visit the NSW Government COVID website:

www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/easing-covid-19-restrictions/opening-in-november

Many of you have questions about **Ministry with Children and Youth**, including Playgroups, Mainly Music, Youth Groups. This is a complex area which cannot be easily summarised here so once again I offer the helpful link to the Sydney Diocese website:

[COVID-19 Church Worker Frequently Asked Questions \(sydneyanglicans.net\)](http://COVID-19 Church Worker Frequently Asked Questions (sydneyanglicans.net))

As to **Church Halls**, a reminder that masks are required for all staff and visitors/clients in all indoor settings (except children under the age of 12).

Masks are not required in offices, including the **Parish Office** (except for people who are not fully vaccinated).

A special note however with regard to **Opportunity Shops**. As previously advised, in October I sought clarification about the status of Op Shops and was told that because Op Shops serve the vulnerable, they were all considered to be critical retail and that unvaccinated persons were welcome under the Public Health Order. However, in response to a recent enquiry I sought further clarification of this from NSW Health and was told something different, which I quote below:

The Public Health Order states that an unvaccinated individual is not permitted to enter a non-critical retail premises.

However, this clause does not apply if the business premise is operating because of a service to assist vulnerable members of the public, for example a food bank or a service providing for the needs of homeless persons.

If the op shops provide goods directly to the vulnerable or homeless then they are permitted to be open to the unvaccinated. Please be aware that this clause relates to operations such as food banks and donation services [Emergency Relief] which provide goods and services directly to the vulnerable or homeless.

If the op shops are operating as standard op shops that sell goods to non-vulnerable persons then it must abide by the vaccination requirements of the Public Health Order as it falls outside the category of critical retail.

In order to comply with this, you need to decide locally whether what you provide to clients is simply goods for sale (in which case its non-critical retail and customers must be vaccinated) or whether it constitutes welfare assistance which includes free food items from a food bank or pantry, or Emergency Relief (in which case the operation is critical retail and the unvaccinated can enter).

Note that proof of vaccination will no longer be required anyway for Op Shop entry once NSW reaches 95% double vaccination or on 15 December 2021, whichever comes first.

With restrictions lifting and travel from previously locked down areas now possible, it is likely that the virus will be more prevalent in our area than ever before. This is particularly the case in tourist areas along the coast. Combined with the greater capacity allowed under the 2m² rule, we will need to be more vigilant than ever about following all COVID Safe practices in order to keep people safe. It is worth considering that well-ventilated indoor spaces reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. NSW Health has posted advice on **ventilation** here: [COVID-19 guidance on ventilation \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.nsw.gov.au/health-and-care-services/news/all-news/Pages/20210921-covid-19-guidance-on-ventilation.aspx) Please update your COVIDSafe Plans.

The news that we can now sing in church is very welcome. After all, music is the gift of the Creator God and given to us to use and enjoy. I'm reminded of Psalm 33:3, *Sing to him a new song; play skilfully on the strings with loud shouts*. With the return of singing for the first time in almost a year, let's sing with all our hearts in praise to God.

Yours in Christ



Dr Murray Harvey
Bishop of Grafton

