

30 November 2021

To all Clergy, Secretaries and Diocesan Councillors

COVID-19 Update 26

Dear Friends in Christ,

With the South Australian border reopening last week, and now a new variant of Covid-19 being detected around the world, this comes to ask people to remain vigilant as we continue to navigate this ever changing environment. Part of this navigation is the varying degrees of “contact” that have been determined by the state Government should a Covid-19 case become known. To assist everyone locally, I share with you the SA Health document “Assessing and Managing the Risk: Covid exposures in general businesses and venues” attached with this letter. The document can also be accessed via their website;

<https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/conditions/infectious+diseases/covid-19/testing+and+tracing/test%2c+trace%2c+isolate+and+quarantine>

As I have already said directly to the Clergy, the Government has so far declined to mandate vaccinations for most people and places. Similarly, I am not going to mandate vaccination certificates be shown before entry into our churches. Let me be clear; I am double vaxxed and intend to get my booster when I am eligible. I have also expressed my thoughts around the clergy being vaccinated so that they can continue to love and protect the communities in their care. I do, however, recognise that there are differing views on vaccination throughout the Diocese and so I encourage Parish/Pastoral District Councils to discuss this at their next meeting. I encourage you to make an informed decision remembering that the church should be open to all, but at the same time people should be safe. How we balance this will take some wisdom, and a bit of trial and error.

Vaccination, along with the density requirements, cleaning regimes and wearing of masks, remains our best defence towards keeping ourselves and each other safe. As a reminder, I provide the current directions for you all again below.

With prayers and good wishes,



The Right Reverend Keith Dalby
Bishop of The Murray



Density Rule

The density requirements will move to 3 people per 4 square metres (equivalent to 75% capacity) for seated activities, including our church services. People should still attempt to keep their physical distance from other members of the public (1.5m), however, this does not apply to people who live together, who are friends or family members, or who regularly associate with each other.

Masks

Wearing face masks will remain required in all indoor public places, including our worship spaces. They will also remain required in high risk settings such as health care facilities, Residential Aged Care Facilities, allied health, and when providing personal care. It is also recommended to wear a mask when out in other public places where it isn't possible to keep your physical distance.

Singing

Singing is allowed, but everyone must be wearing their masks while doing so.

COVID-Safe Plan

Religious Ceremonies, weddings and funerals are classed as “defined public activities” and so we must have a COVID-Safe Plan. Existing plans will be updated automatically and emailed out by the Government as changes come in to force. Remember, the current plan must be available on your premises otherwise fines may apply. If you do not yet have a COVID-Safe plan for an activity, the link to create one and more information is available on the Government's website; <https://www.covid-19.sa.gov.au/recovery/create-a-covid-safe-plan>

COVID Marshals

Religious services are required to have a COVID Marshal on duty. People can complete the relevant online training as prescribed by SA Health, at no cost via this link; <https://marshal.clickontraining.com.au/>

COVID Safe Check-in and Contact Tracing

The COVID SAfe Check-in was introduced to enhance contact tracing and a unique QR code is issued as part of your COVID-Safe Plan. The QR code needs to be printed and displayed prominently so that when people arrive at a venue, they can check in by scanning the QR code using their smart phone through the mySA Gov app. Remember that this applies for worship spaces, halls and/or op-shops. If people don't have the app they can use their smart phone camera and a secure web form will open to check in.

If people don't have a smart phone then paper recording can still be used as a back-up. Continue to note the date and time of the activity along with the person's name and contact details. All paper Contract Tracing Records must still be kept in a secure location after the occasion that they have been obtained. They should then be destroyed after 30 days – not simply put in the bin. Remember that it is important to encourage all who attend our premises to check-in. Asides from the fines that can be issued for not complying, if someone tests positive to Covid-19, the COVID SAfe Check-In enables SA Health to quickly contact others who may have been exposed to the virus and help to stop the spread.

Aged Care Facilities

Restrictions on visitors to Aged Care facilities may vary from site to site so please check with the facility before making any pastoral visits. Masks will be mandatory as noted above.

Weddings and Funerals

The maximum attendance permitted at a wedding or funeral is 150 people. Check the Government's Covid-19 website for more information on the capacity and rules for people attending these events. Masks should be worn if held in an indoor public place, with the exception of the bridal party during the ceremony.

Op-shops and Soup Kitchens

Our Op-shops and soup kitchens are permitted to open. Please note that the 1 person per 2 square metres rule still applies within Op-shops (non-seated activity/retail). Soup Kitchens may have 3 people per 4 square metres providing that everyone is seated for the consumption of food and beverages. Everyone will need to check in and wear a mask as per the directions, unless they are eating as above.

Holy Communion

The medical advice is that we do not allow the Common Cup, but it has not been legislated. The heads of churches felt that it was prudent to preclude the use of the Common Cup in the early stages as it was clear that transmission of the Covid-19 was through touch. With the milestone of 80% of South Australians being fully vaccinated, I am content to allow the return of the Common Cup provided; there has been Parish/Pastoral District consultation highlighting the risks, the people administering Communion are masked and parishioners are reminded that it is still permissible to continue to receive in one kind if they so choose.

Passing of the Peace

There should be NO passing of the peace during the service. The phrase, "the Lord be with you" should simply be responded to with "and also with you." Similarly, any greeters/welcomers should not be shaking hands when people arrive, and neither should the Priest at the conclusion of the service.

The Collection

Taking a collection during a service is fine but the plate should not be passed from person to person. If possible, the plate should be available for people to use on their way into or out of the service. People counting money should use gloves and ensure that they wash their hands. Continue to encourage people to give electronically where they are able.

Morning Tea

Morning tea may be held after services but people must be seated to consume any food or beverages. All food and drink should be single served portions and not shared portions from communal containers. It is also important that people do not share utensils so this should be considered.

Cleaning after services and other gatherings

This should be continued as recommended by the authorities and outlined in your COVID-Safe plans.

Vaccination

Getting vaccinated when you become eligible is one of the best ways to protect yourself, your loved ones and your community. To check your eligibility and make a booking, visit the Australian Government Department of Health website: www.health.gov.au

Also, continue to follow the other Covid-safe principles as well – washing or sanitising hands regularly and staying home and seeking testing if feeling unwell.