

# MEMORANDUM



ROMAN CATHOLIC  
**DIOCESE**  
*of Calgary*

DATE November 19, 2020

TO Clergy & Religious, Safety Coordinators, Parish Office Staff

FROM Rev. Wilbert Chin Jon

SUBJECT Guidelines for parishes upon notification of a positive COVID-19 test of a parishioner who had been present in the Mass or in the church facility.

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## **These guidelines are provided for use by a parish where a person has attended an event or was in the church facility while infectious with the COVID-19 virus.**

Because of the large number of cases now being identified, AHS has had to focus its contact tracing resources on the highest risk situations and groups. As a result, many individuals will be instructed to inform their contacts themselves, while most organizations, including churches, will be expected to inform their members when a potential exposure has occurred.

### **Principles**

The parish can play a significant role in assisting in the process of contact tracing especially once notified by parishioners who have been in the parish facility and have subsequently tested positive for COVID-19.

The primary task of the parish, in coordination with the Diocese, is in the preliminary assessment of the situation and in aiding in the notification of parishioners who may be potential close contacts to confirmed cases.

### **Reporting, Assessment and Response**

There are several scenarios where a parish may experience a potential exposure to COVID-19, and within each scenario, specific characteristics will inform the determination of how significant the risk of spread might be.

In all the situations, the parish will probably receive the report from the individual directly, rather than Alberta Health Services given their backlog of case follow up or their protocol at the time.

Once you have been informed, please inform me so that we can have a conversation and begin a process of assessment. Fr. Wilbert Chin Jon – [wilbert.chinjon@calgarydiocese.ca](mailto:wilbert.chinjon@calgarydiocese.ca) or 403-218-5529.

The Mass may be the most likely scenario that a parish will have to face, simply because of its frequency and the number of persons involved. Infected individuals might be parishioners, volunteers, priests, or deacons. But in all scenarios, we must go through the same collection of information to determine the potential level of risk and the required action or response.

**Step 1** – Please determine the answers to the following questions to begin the process of assessment.

- Where was the person/couple/family seated in the church during the celebration or event?
- Ask the person/couple/family if they had been in close contact with anyone in the church before, during, and after the celebration or event.
  - Were masks worn?
  - Which area(s) in the church?
  - For how long?
  - Was 2-metre distance observed?
  - Do they personally know these individuals and are they able to contact them to inform them of this development and concern?
- What was the date of the onset of symptoms?

**Step 2** – Please identify any possible break in procedure such as

- non-use or incorrect use of a mask,
- failure to hand-sanitize,
- and failure to maintain two-metre distancing for more than fifteen minutes.

**Step 3** – The general recommendation is for the infected individuals to inform people they had come in close contact with, including those they came in close contact with 48 hours before the onset of symptoms. Close contacts are encouraged to have themselves tested and to self-isolate for 14 days from the day of the reported potential exposure.

If it is determined that the risk of exposure and transmission to parishioners may be high, a notice will be released by the parish in coordination with the Diocese.

## The Public Role of Clergy & Religious

In virtue of their public roles, priest, deacons, and religious are asked to be mindful of their social activities during this time of increased confirmed cases in the Province.

- For house blessings, everyone inside the house including the priest or deacon must wear a mask. The priest or deacon should not share a meal with them but should leave the house shortly after the rite of blessing ends.

**Q: What does it mean to be a close contact of a COVID-19 case?**

A: Close contacts are defined as anyone who was within two metres of a [positive case](#) of COVID-19 for 15 minutes or more of cumulative contact, without consistent and appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE). A close contact is ALSO someone who has had direct contact with bodily fluids of a person who has COVID-19 (e.g., was coughed or sneezed on), or who provided direct care for a person who has COVID-19, without consistent and appropriate use of PPE.

Anyone who falls into any of the above categories is considered a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19.

<https://albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17221.aspx>

- For religious houses that require a priest to celebrate Mass, we ask that we suspend sharing a meal or socialization at this time so as to reduce close contacts.

A report of close contact with individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 may require you to self-isolate or quarantine. This not only affects your ability to carry out your ministry while under quarantine but also requires you to identify the people you have come in contact with and to inform them of possible exposure. As well, in rectories with two or more priests, a priest determined to be a close contact to a confirmed case may force the other priests to quarantine if it has been established that the risk of exposure is high in the rectory.

## **Important Resources**

### **Alberta Health Services main page on the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)**

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16944.aspx>

### **Daily Updates on the Current Situation in Alberta**

<https://www.alberta.ca/coronavirus-info-for-albertans.aspx>

### **Advice for People Tested for COVID-19**

<https://albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17034.aspx>.

### **Contact Tracing Notification Process**

<https://albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17199.aspx>