



Diocese of Christchurch

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15 January 2022

Dear Colleagues,

Our Covid-19 journey as a nation and as a church continues into its third year!

We are now in the Red Traffic Light. The optimistic view is that we will be in this mode for several weeks. I think a more realistic view (observing life in NSW, UK etc) is that it will be for two months or more.

Some significant changes to our manner of gathering as churches is mandated by the Government.

The key information we need is set out in the following NZ Government Covid-19 webpages:

On gatherings and visits at Red: <https://covid19.govt.nz/traffic-lights/life-at-red/gatherings-and-visits-at-red/>

On private and public gatherings at Red: <https://covid19.govt.nz/traffic-lights/life-at-red/gatherings-and-visits-at-red/public-and-private-gatherings-at-red/>

On places of worship in the Traffic Lights Framework, including Red: <https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/COVID-19-Protection-Framework/COVID-19-Protection-Framework-Guidelines-for-places-of-worship.pdf>

On funerals and tangihanga at Red: <https://covid19.govt.nz/traffic-lights/life-at-red/gatherings-and-visits-at-red/funerals-tangihanga-and-last-rites-at-red/>.

While **all details** in these documents are important and should be read and, as appropriate, applied to our gatherings, I wish to emphasise the following matters:

OMICRON'S INFECTIOUSNESS

All news of Omicron from overseas emphasises its virulency as an infectious, contagious disease. While some news talks about its (relative) mildness, nevertheless the power of Omicron is such that we are likely to see many vulnerable persons needing hospital care, and significant disruptions to society because many people must stay at home due to having Omicron or being a close contact of someone who has Omicron. What the Government is asking of us in the Red Light is that we work together to mitigate the potential of Omicron to destroy lives and to disrupt daily life. Let's play our part as churches to mitigate the effects of Omicron.

For some words of wisdom on how we mitigate the spread of Omicron, you may like to read this (longish) article: <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/long-read-how-to-prepare-for-omicron> .

GATHERINGS INCLUDING SERVICES OF WORSHIP

Vaccine Pass services now limited to 100 persons, plus staff* associated with such services (provided those 100+ persons can be seated 1m apart). Where a lesser number can be seated in a church or hall at 1m social distancing, the maximum number is less than 100.

“Gatherings at a place of worship (e.g. weddings, funerals) up to 100 people based on the maximum number of people who could occupy the space if each person was 1 metre apart.” (From <https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/COVID-19-Protection-Framework/COVID-19-Protection-Framework-Guidelines-for-places-of-worship.pdf>).

Non Vaccine Pass services now limited to 25 persons, plus staff* associated with such services (provided those 25+ persons can be seated 1m apart). Where a lesser number can be seated in a church or hall at 1m social distancing, the maximum number is less than 25.

“Gatherings at a place of worship (e.g. weddings, funerals) up to 25 people, based on the maximum number of people who could occupy the space if each person was 1 metre apart.” (From <https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/COVID-19-Protection-Framework/COVID-19-Protection-Framework-Guidelines-for-places-of-worship.pdf>).

Our thinking needs to shift from “appropriate social distancing” (Level 2) to “1m apart distancing” (Red Light).

**Staff: i.e. the front of house team (e.g. vicar, deacon, organist) and the back of house team (e.g. sidespersons, welcomer). If the staff count for your service is more than 6 then numbers 7, 8, 9 etc should be counted within your 100 or your 25 maximum.*

COMMUNION

In Red Light we remain in “Communion Bread Only” mode, as previously.

MASKING

I have previously said that it is now my expectation that everyone in church (whether for a Vaccine Pass service or non Vaccine Pass service or other gathering) wears a mask. That expectation remains in place (notwithstanding the fact that the Government talks about “encourage” rather than “expect.”) I do not see how masking is required for (e.g.) shops, and not for church gatherings. The virus does not distinguish between spaces.

Note the following (from <https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/COVID-19-Protection-Framework/COVID-19-Protection-Framework-Guidelines-for-places-of-worship.pdf>):

“Face coverings are required for workers and volunteers at gatherings (excluding performers and formal speakers, such as a person leading a service, provided they are 2m apart from others), and encouraged for others.”

That is: everyone participating in a service, whether as a leader, performer or worshipper, should be masked, except that Masks may be removed for the purpose of leading worship, leading singing (music group/choir), leading intercessions, preaching, reading lessons. When not actually speaking/singing in such roles, masks should be worn.

EXCEPT: the direction by me remains in force that **presiders at Communion** must be masked during presidency (on account of mouth/nose being so close to that which will soon be received by the congregation) – as well as during preparation of the elements and the communion table.

NOTE: Note now the requirement that All such leaders/performers should be **2m away** from the congregation.

Further: when the congregation steps forward to receive communion, masks must remain on and must not be taken off. After receiving the communion bread, the bread should be placed discreetly in one's mouth with minimal lifting of the mask to do so.

Also: it is not acceptable to wear a mask which does not cover both mouth and nose. All masks must cover mouth and nose at all times that masks are worn.

Please review the standard of mask wearing in your services. Some parishes – putting it bluntly – are not yet up to standard.

SINGING

Singing is permitted for services in Red Light mode. Masks should remain on, except for those leading the singing (choirs/music groups/cantors).

REFRESHMENTS

If you are operating as a gathering, you can serve food and drink at green, orange or red. (From <https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/COVID-19-Protection-Framework/COVID-19-Protection-Framework-Guidelines-for-places-of-worship.pdf>).

The specifics of how food and drink are to be served for a gathering (compared to an “event”) are not well defined but some common sense should prevail: the common sense that keeps asking whether what we are doing is minimising the possibility of infection spreading. So:

- Those serving: Workers and volunteers must wear a face covering when serving and handling food at orange and red (from <https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/COVID-19-Protection-Framework/COVID-19-Protection-Framework-Guidelines-for-places-of-worship.pdf>).
- Recommended here that those serving food and drink also wear disposable gloves.
- Food should be served from a server or table to people who will consume food and drink (that is, food should not be placed on a plate for many hands to access).
- Hand sanitiser should be available.

CHILDREN

- children do count towards numbers counted
- children are welcome at Vaccine Pass services
- children's leaders should be vaccinated
- children's leaders must wear masks during children's gathering (similarly to directions given above re leaders/performers in worship services)
- sanitiser should be available and be used
- social distance rules (such as 1m distancing) should be followed
- communication with parents about Covid/Red Light requirements and measures being taken is essential
- shared toys and resources should be sanitised regularly (or not used)
- when a gathering re children is in a separate meeting space to others meeting in another space, with each space counted separately, there should be separate toilet facilities for each space. (If separate toilet facilities are not available then the site counts as one space in respect of the limit of 25 or 100.

- where children go straight to a gathering space separate to the gathering space for a service of worship, that children's space is a separate gathering space and number limits apply separately to that gathering.

VACCINATION OF CHILDREN AGED 5-11

Children aged 5-11 can now be vaccinated. For the time being it is not required that children in that age category need to present a Vaccine Pass to participate in church gatherings.

MINISTRY UNIT STAFF

Working from home is encouraged by the Government in the Red Light mode.

QUESTIONS

In the first instance please work through questions with your Archdeacon. Otherwise Edwin Boyce, Diocesan Manager, DMT staff and myself are available to assist.

We remain in challenging situations as each ministry unit of the Diocese of Christchurch engages with the new challenges of our third year living with Covid-19. Nothing is easy or simple for churches in the Red Light mode. Thank you for all you are doing. We need to keep going. As the Prime Minister said of her own changing circumstances (re the postponement of her wedding): "such is life."

Arohanui,

Peter

Bishop Peter
Rt Rev'd Dr Peter Carrell
Bishop of Christchurch

