



Clarifications for places of worship

4 messages

<email address removed>
To: publichealth@toronto.ca

Wed, Dec 16, 2020 at 1:15 PM

Good afternoon,

I am serving as an imam and coordinator at a small Islamic community center in the GTA, and I was hoping to clarify a few matters in relation to religious services during the current lockdown in the Toronto area.

After reaching out to a few other places of worship within the city, I was told that it would be legally permitted for multiple religious services to be conducted simultaneously within the same building, provided they are separate services, with completely separate entrances.

I tried verifying this via government websites, but can not seem to find adequate clarity. As such, are these details authentic? If so, are they applicable to all places of worship in the lockdown areas, or are there special allowances that have been made for specific centers? If this is the case, how can a center qualify for similar allowances? What exactly are the limitations?

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,
<text removed>
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TPHLiaison <TPHLiaison@toronto.ca>
To: <email address removed>
Cc: TPHLiaison <TPHLiaison@toronto.ca>

Thu, Dec 17, 2020 at 8:08 AM

Good morning <text removed>,

Thank you for your e-mail and sharing your concerns with us. These are extraordinary times.

As you may be aware, on November 23, 2020, Toronto moved to the **Grey - "Lockdown" stage** of the Province of Ontario's colour coded reopening framework. Accordingly, **Ontario Regulation 82/20** under the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act* is now applicable law in Toronto. These recent measures contained many restrictions for businesses and organizations in Toronto. In particular, these measures also contained restrictions for religious services, rites and ceremonies. Given the current situation and epidemiology in Toronto, Dr. de Villa supports these new provincial directives to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our community.

With respect to your question, under the grey lockdown stage, religious services are limited to up to 10 persons per service. Toronto Public Health (TPH) is hoping that faith-based leaders, along with their congregation can identify ways to meet these current restrictions while maintaining the same level of spiritual prayer, guidance and healing.

For further information, TPH has made available guidance for [Faith-Based Organizations](#) which may be helpful in better understanding the current restrictions.

Thank you again for your e-mail and please continue to visit the [Toronto COVID-19](#) site to learn more about the current health situation, affected City services, and economic support.

Kind regards,

Covid-19 Liaison Team

Toronto Public Health

[City of Toronto](#)



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<email address removed>

Thu, Dec 17, 2020 at 2:31 PM

To: TPHLiaison <TPHLiaison@toronto.ca>

Cc: TPHLiaison <TPHLiaison@toronto.ca>

Thank you for your timely response.

I am well-aware of the general information that you have provided, as our center is very diligent in adhering to the law despite the many difficulties and drawbacks - it is an inherent part of our religion to do so, with the greater good at heart.

As mentioned in my initial message, I am inquiring about the specific details related to the current lockdown stage - an elucidation of the specific application of what has been generally mandated.

If a place of worship has completely separate floors and/or rooms that have their own points of entry, is it legally acceptable to accommodate 10 people in each of these separate areas? For example, if a place of worship has three floors, can separate groups composed of ten worshipers occupy each floor, thereby making the total number of occupants on the premises 30 people at one giventime?

The reason for such an important clarification is because a number of religious centers seem to be accommodating more than ten people at a time, but I would never imagine such devout people to go against the mandated restrictions - thus I doubt my own understanding of the law itself. After researching thoroughly, I can not find these clarifications mentioned on any of the government websites provided.

Also, upon reaching out to other religious centers within the GTA, it seems that an email allegedly sent by a health inspector by the name of Mr. David Baines has been in circulation stating further clarifications that appear to allow a scenario similar to the example given above. Because there is so much misinformation surrounding the pandemic, I wanted to clarify and verify the matter. I have emailed him and called his number, but it seems his department has been closed.

Thank you for your help. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Regards,

<text removed>

TPHLiaison <TPHLiaison@toronto.ca>
To: <email address removed>
Cc: TPHLiaison <TPHLiaison@toronto.ca>

Fri, Dec 18, 2020 at 4:01 PM

Hello <text removed>,
Thank you again for your e-mail.

Ontario Regulation 82/20 under the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act* limits a wedding, a funeral or a religious service, rite or ceremony to 10 persons. This limit is per service, rite or ceremony and includes officiants and parishioners. If more than one service is offered, the services must be independent of each other with its own officiant. The persons in the service should not have to interact with persons from the other service in any way, shape or form.

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