

**RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES FOR COVID-19**  
**Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada**  
**March 2020**

Our world is currently impacted by the spread of the COVID-19 virus (coronavirus). How should Canadian Seventh-day Adventist entities prepare, especially if it continues to expand? Each church should develop a plan for this World Health Organization pandemic. Following are proposed guidelines, thought questions, and ideas. Please keep in mind these points in developing your plan:

- Simple/short plans are best
- Balance and common sense are critical
- Each entity should respond according to the local threat, keeping in mind your own unique situation

This document contains recommendations based on various threat levels, identified as Phase 1, 2, 3, or 4. Please read and apply these suggestions carefully based on the current threat level.

### **Phase 1**

*General preparations that are good to follow before a crisis develops*

### **Prevention**

- We suggest a hugging and handshake free zone. Elbow-bumps or bowing work well while foot-taps may cause balance issues.
- Have waste baskets by bathroom doors so doors can be opened using paper towels rather than hands
- In children's areas every Sabbath, sanitize children's boxes, props, etc. (these first two ideas are good year-round)
- Supply hand sanitizer by sanctuary doors
- Conduct routine but comprehensive cleaning of all surfaces commonly touched by hands such as tabletops, the backs of pews, doorknobs, offering receptacles, etc. with an antiviral solution according to instructions between use of these facilities
- Provide tissues in pews (visual reminder besides practical use)
- Have hand sanitizer available during potluck and other meals
- Questions to consider:
  - Are there special supplies that need to be purchased in bulk such as hand sanitizer, disinfectants, or tissues?
  - Will the janitorial staff need special instruction in appropriate sanitizing?

### **Communication/Education**

- Health Canada recognizes that any place people congregate is a wonderful opportunity for education. A bulletin insert can be powerful with prevention tips such as:
  - Sneeze into crook of arm rather than hands and wash your hands afterward's
  - "Do unto others" – ***please stay home if you are sick***
  - Wash your hands with soap and warm water often for 20 seconds (the length of time it takes to repeat John 3:16, 17)

- Educate, educate, educate by voice, newsletters, email, and inserts.
- Establish policies of redundancy so that backup individuals will be available if first line individuals are ill. For example, if the church secretary was ill or if the phone tree committee couldn't function who could step forward and keep the church operating? Who could fill in for the head elder or the head deacon?
- Strongly recommend to our members that they put together at least a Two-Weeks Ready Kit (including food, water, medication).
- Questions to Consider
  - How will updated information be distributed to church members?
  - Use Health Canada's information and your local health officials.  
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>

## **Phase 2**

*When a potential health crisis is developing with future potential of impacting the local level*

1. Identify who will keep watch
  - Each entity should identify an individual or team who will monitor recommendations from Health Canada and public health departments to process these recommendations to pass along to the church.
2. Identify who will decide
  - Each church should identify who will be responsible for making strategic decisions during a crisis. The church board may serve as a crisis oversight committee or the board may choose to appoint a separate committee. This committee would have the authority to cancel church, potlucks, specific Sabbath School classes, or to enlist organized help from the church for members struggling to care for themselves or their families.
  - If you establish a separate committee, consider including the pastor, head elder, head deacon, disaster response coordinator, and health care providers or health care personnel.
3. Establish a means to monitor the number of cases in your church to enable the oversight committee to have the necessary knowledge to advise the church and to make their decisions especially if you rent a facility.

## **Phase 3**

*When an immediate health crisis is unfolding within Canada, but not yet immediately effecting your local community.*

1. Practice Social Distancing
  - Find creative alternatives to shaking hands
  - Maintain a six-foot distance from other individuals when talking
  - Self-quarantine if feeling ill
  - Temporarily suspend potlucks and other group meals
2. Update members on existing crisis response plans

- Remind people of safe health practices.
  - Ensure basic Phase 1 health practices are being followed
3. Identify official channels of communication for the congregation to minimize rumor and panic

#### **Phase 4**

*When an outbreak is happening in your local community.*

##### 1. Suspending worship services

- Prepare for spiritual feeding of members by
  - Providing sermons on-line
  - Planned daily Bible reading guides/blogs
  - Sabbath School lesson blogs
  - Communication through Facebook/Twitter accounts
  - TV: HOPE Channel, 3ABN, LLBN, etc.
  - Call the pastor
  - The pastor/elders call members
  - Other creative ways...
- Communicate any closures to the members through all available communication channels
- Identify ways essential functions can be done from home or online
- Do members know how to pay tithes and offerings online? Or do they mail tithes/offerings to the treasurer?
- Should members be encouraged to pay extra offerings to help members economically affected by the pandemic and can church bills be met if offerings are substantially down?

##### 2. Provide basic spiritual care for those in crisis

- Prayer chains – either online, by phone or both
- Phone trees for members to daily call one another (especially older members)
- Who will provide grief counseling in case the pandemic turns deadly?

##### 3. Inform renters of facility closure

- If the church decides to close the facility due to a health crisis, inform all renters of the facility closure and plan for adjusting rental fees due to lost usage

#### **Church Board Considerations**

- Is the pastor expected to physically visit the critically ill? ICU units would provide protective wear; however, the more an individual is exposed, the more likely they are to catch and spread the illness to others.
- How will church members respond if they know all members of a family are very ill?
- How will church members respond if there is a death and funerals are not allowed?

## Conference/Church/School/HR Office procedures

1. Novel viruses develop from time to time—some more contagious than others, some more severe than others, but often some are harmful to only certain persons (e.g. those who have other conditions such as lung disease).
2. The experts from Health Canada and the World Health Organization (WHO), say that the same universal precautions used for battling the flu are the same methods necessary to use to avoid the coronavirus.
  - a. **WASHING YOUR HANDS** is the number one thing you can do to help prevent the coronavirus from spreading and getting it yourself.
  - b. Use a hand sanitizer when you can't use running water. At least a 60% alcohol base is what is needed to be effective.
  - c. Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze. If you don't have a tissue, use your forearm if you have a sleeve. If you don't have a sleeve, pull your collar up to cover your mouth. Wash your hands as soon as possible after coughing or sneezing.
  - d. Masks that the general public have access to mostly will help to prevent you from spreading the virus. If you have a travel kit, you already have an N95 mask in it. These masks are reusable for 3 days if it hasn't become saturated with fluids.
3. You can routinely disinfect the items around you that are touched most often by people. You may use rubbing alcohol for immediate disinfecting. Hydrogen Peroxide 3% or higher is effective but must remain on for longer than 5 minutes before washing off. The best method and most economical disinfectant is a cap full of bleach in one liter of water. Items to disinfect often are:
  - a. Cell phones
  - b. Desk phones
  - c. Keyboards
  - d. Door handles
  - e. Copier keypads
  - f. Refrigerator handles
  - g. Light switches
  - h. Similar items as a.-g. in the home
4. If you have a fever, cough, shortness of breath—call your doctor, the urgent care center or ER **BEFORE** you go in so they can triage you appropriately. Remember, for the vast majority, this virus is causing no symptoms or only cold-like symptoms.
5. If you are ill—**STAY HOME!!**

### *Recommended strategies for employers to use now:*

- **Actively encourage sick employees to stay home:**
  - Employees who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness are to stay home and not come to work until they are free of fever (100.4° F [37.8° C] or greater using an oral thermometer), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants). Employees should notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
  - Ensure that your sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies.

- Talk with companies that provide your business with contract or temporary employees about the importance of sick employees staying home and encourage them to develop non-punitive leave policies.
- Do not require a healthcare provider's note for employees who are sick with acute respiratory illness to validate their illness or to return to work, as healthcare provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide such documentation in a timely manner.
- Employers should maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Employers should be aware that more employees may need to stay at home to care for sick children or other sick family members than is usual.
- **Separate sick employees:**
  - Health Canada recommends that employees who appear to have acute respiratory illness symptoms (i.e. cough, shortness of breath) upon arrival to work or become sick during the day should be separated from other employees and be sent home immediately. Sick employees should cover their noses and mouths with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or an elbow or shoulder if no tissue is available).
- **Emphasize staying home when sick, practicing respiratory etiquette and maintaining hand hygiene by all employees:**
  - Place posters that encourage [staying home when sick](#), [cough and sneeze etiquette](#), and [hand hygiene](#) at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.
  - Provide tissues and no-touch disposal receptacles for use by employees.
  - Instruct employees to clean their hands often with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60-95% alcohol, or wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Soap and water should be used preferentially if hands are visibly dirty.
  - Provide soap and water and alcohol-based hand rubs in the workplace. Ensure that adequate supplies are maintained. Place hand rubs in multiple locations or in conference rooms to encourage hand hygiene.
  - Visit the [coughing and sneezing etiquette](#) and [clean hands webpage](#) for more information.
- **Perform routine environmental cleaning:**
  - Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces in the workplace, such as workstations, countertops, and doorknobs. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the label.
  - No additional disinfection beyond routine cleaning is recommended at this time.
  - Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down by employees before each use.
- **Advise employees before traveling to take certain steps:**
  - Check the Health Canada for the latest guidance and recommendations for each country to which you will travel. Specific travel information for travelers going to and returning from affected areas, and information for aircrew, can be found on Health Canada website
  - Advise employees to check themselves for symptoms of [acute respiratory illness](#) before starting travel and notify their supervisor and stay home if they are sick.
  - Ensure employees who become sick while traveling or on temporary assignment understand that they should notify their supervisor and should promptly call a healthcare provider for advice if needed.
  - If outside Canada, sick employees should follow your company's policy for obtaining medical care or contact a healthcare provider or overseas medical assistance company to assist them with finding an appropriate healthcare provider in that country. A Canadian consular officer can help locate healthcare services. However, Canadian embassies, consulates, and military

facilities do not have the legal authority, capability, and resources to evacuate or give medicines, vaccines, or medical care to private Canadian citizens overseas.

- **Additional Measures in Response to Currently Occurring Sporadic Importations of the COVID-19:**
  - Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and refer to Health Canada guidance or WHO for [how to conduct a risk assessment](#) of their potential exposure.
  - If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19, employers should inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality. Employees exposed to a co-worker with confirmed COVID-19 should refer to Health Canada guidance for [how to conduct a risk assessment of their potential exposure](#).
  
- **Additional Information**
  - <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf>
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixPVQpO-eiA&feature=youtu.be>