

Resumption of more religious activities in Phase Two

18 Jun 2020 - This advisory by MCCY provides guidance to religious organisations on the gradual resumption of more activities in places of worship during Phase Two.

1. On 15 Jun 2020, the Multi-Ministry Taskforce announced that Phase Two will commence after 18 Jun 2020 2359hrs. This advisory provides guidance to religious organisations (ROs) on the gradual resumption of more activities in places of worship during Phase Two.

Phase Two: Safe Transition

2. During Phase One ("Safe Re-opening"), places of worship could re-open for private worship for up to 5 households at a time, in addition to the conduct of marriage solemnizations as well as wakes and funerals.
3. From **19 Jun 2020**, places of worship can gradually resume more religious activities, with the necessary precautions to safeguard public health. In particular, places of worship have to put in place safe management measures that reduce the density, intensity and duration of physical interactions during religious activities.

Marriage Solemnizations and Funerals

4. Places of worship may continue to conduct **marriage solemnizations, as well as wakes and funerals. Families may also continue to install niches for their loved ones in columbaria in places of worship.** In Phase Two, these activities can involve up to **20 persons¹** (up from the previous limit of 10 persons), excluding the solemnizer for marriage solemnizations, and excluding religious and supporting workers who must be kept to a minimum for funeral-related activities.
5. While in-person marriage solemnizations are allowed, we encourage couples to solemnize their marriages via video link, so as to better protect themselves and their loved ones from the risk of infection.
6. Persons attending marriage solemnizations and funeral-related activities must observe safe distancing of at least 1 metre between individuals. Where not feasible or practical to apply 1 metre safe distancing between individuals, this 1 metre requirement can instead be enforced between groups, with each group made up of not more than 5 persons. Attendees must leave the place of worship immediately after the event. There may not be any reception with food and drinks, or wedding celebrations that are not essential religious rites.

7. **Columbaria in places of worship may re-open to visitors**, who should maintain a safe distance of at least 1 metre at all times. **Families who visit in groups are limited to no more than 5 persons in a group**, with safe distancing of at least 1 metre between groups. These visits should be kept as short as possible, with no mingling between groups.

Non-Congregational Religious Activities

8. Places of worship may conduct **religious rites for groups of up to 5 persons**, subject to safe distancing and other safe management measures appropriate to the nature of the rite.
9. Places of worship may also conduct **other religious activities** (e.g. pastoral services, religious classes for adults and children). These activities can involve groups of up to 5 persons (excluding the religious worker / teacher²). Where necessary, there can be multiple groups of 5 in the same activity, so long as each group of 5 is separated by at least 1 metre with no mingling across groups. As a best practice, we encourage a greater separation of 2 metres between groups of students attending religious classes.

Recording and Broadcast of Religious Services and Prayers

10. ROs are encouraged to continue supporting the religious needs of their communities via remote means such as recording and broadcast of religious services and prayers. In Phase Two, we will allow **up to 10 persons on-location** for these productions, of which **up to 5 persons can temporarily remove their masks when speaking or singing**. Those who are unmasked for speaking / singing are strongly encouraged to maintain at least a 2 metres separation from other persons. All other persons present must remain masked and maintain a 1 metre separation. The time spent on-location for this activity should be kept as short as possible. The production team must also put in place safe management measures, including no-cross deployment between locations (where practicable), no socialisation during breaks and thorough cleaning of technical equipment.

Worship Services

11. Places of worship may **resume congregational and other worship services, starting with up to 50 persons at a time** (excluding religious and supporting workers, which should be kept to a minimum), subject to safe management measures.³
12. Places of worship should observe the following safe management measures for worship services:
 - a. Worshippers have to observe **1 metre safe distance** between others if they are worshipping individually. Worshippers may also worship in groups of no more than 5 persons, with 1 metre safe distancing between groups.

b. Keep worship services to **as short a duration as possible**. Worshippers should leave immediately after performing their worship. There should be no reception or mingling between worshippers, before, during or after each worship service.

c. All persons present must **wear a face mask at all times**.⁴ Those who are involved in the conduct of the worship service (e.g. preachers, prayer leader, scripture reader) may wear a face shield when performing their speaking duties and must be at least 1 metre away from any other individual.

d. **Singing and other live performances are not permitted during the worship service**. Singing is considered a higher risk activity as it could potentially release a larger amount of droplets. Places of worship may consider alternatives to singing and other live performance components in their worship services.

e. There should be **no sharing of prayer and other common items** (e.g. holy books, passing of offertory baskets, prayer mats) as this increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Worshippers are to bring along their personal prayer items instead, where required.

f. Places of worship with reduced air circulation (e.g. enclosed prayer spaces, air-conditioned worship hall) should, where possible, open doors and windows to naturally **ventilate the space after use**.

13. We hope to gradually increase the congregation limit beyond 50 persons at a later time, if COVID-19 community transmission remains low and stable, and ROs are able to implement the safe management measures. In the event congregations are allowed to exceed 50 persons, the worshippers have to be divided into zones holding no more than 50 persons each. As there should be no mingling of individuals across zones, these zones have to be clearly demarcated and separated by barriers / partitions, with separate points of entry and exit or staggered arrival and departure timings. MCCY will provide further guidance when we are ready to allow larger congregations.

Safe capacity in the place of worship

14. All the permitted religious activities in **paragraphs 4 to 10** (i.e. excluding congregational and other worship services) can take place concurrently at the place of worship subject to a **total cap of 50 persons**⁵, and only if these activities can be conducted safely at separate locations within the place of worship. There must be sufficient signs and directions to guide the different parties such that they do not interact or meet each other while entering, exiting, or while in the premises.

15. **ROs who wish to resume congregational and other worship services, can do so with no more than an additional 50 worshippers in the premises.** For example, if there are 50 persons in a worship service, as well as religious classes involving 2 groups of 5 students, there can be at most another 40 persons taking part in other permitted religious activities (i.e. not worship services) at the same time. However, we strongly urge ROs to consider reducing other concurrent activities when congregational and other worship services are ongoing, so that there is a smaller total number of people on the premises at any one time, which will help to minimise the risk of large clusters from forming.
16. ROs must establish a one-way flow for entry and exit points for all the permitted activities, and manage the arrival of worshippers to avoid queues from forming.

Deployment of manpower

17. ROs should **primarily engage their religious workers and staff to support the permitted religious activities but can deploy volunteers to support if necessary.** The number of personnel involved in conducting each permitted activity should be kept to a minimum.
18. In Phase Two, ROs can **resume their workplace activities at their registered premises** without the need to apply to the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) for a Time-Limited Exemption. Telecommuting must remain the default where feasible, so as to minimise the number of on-site religious workers and staff. There should also be no cross-deployment⁶ or interaction between workers in different shifts, teams or worksites, even outside of work. The religious workers and staff should comply with safe distancing and other prevailing workplace safe management measures stipulated by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM).⁷

Mandatory submission of Safe Management Plans

19. ROs must submit their Safe Management Plans (SMPs), including manpower deployment, **at least 3 days** before commencing Phase Two activities. The detailed requirements and format for submitting these SMPs can be found at www.cpro.gov.sg.
- a. For private worship, marriage solemnizations, funeral-related activities and recording / broadcast sessions that ROs are already allowed to conduct in Phase One, they may continue to do so under Phase Two parameters for these activities.
- b. For the religious activities in **paragraphs 8 and 9** that are newly-permitted under Phase Two, ROs with SMPs that comply with the parameters set out in this advisory may commence these activities from **19 Jun 2020**, or 3 days after the SMP is submitted, whichever is later.
- c. Congregational and other worship services may resume from **26 Jun 2020**, as ROs require more time to prepare the safe management measures. Similarly, these should only proceed no sooner than 3 days after the SMP is submitted, whichever is later.

20. ROs requesting deviations from the parameters set out in this advisory will require MCCY's approval **before** proceeding with their activities.
21. MCCY reserves the right to suspend a RO's activities if there are gaps in the SMP submitted and until the necessary rectifications are made. Should there be any confirmed COVID-19 cases linked to a RO's premises or place of worship, the premises may be closed for a period of time as determined by the authorities.

Working together to make Singapore COVID-safe

22. As we resume more religious and other activities, there will be more physical contact between persons, which increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission. We will therefore have to remain vigilant and regularly refine our safe management measures in order to safely conduct religious activities. MCCY will continue to work with our ROs to ensure a COVID-safe environment for religious activities.

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For more information and FAQs on COVID-19 for the religious sector, please visit www.cpro.gov.sg or contact MCCY's Community Relations and Engagement Division at cpro@mccy.gov.sg.

¹ Guests need not be limited to immediate family members.

² Persons who are speaking to a group in a classroom or lecture-style setting, where they largely remain at the spot from which they are speaking, may wear face shields in lieu of masks, and must be at least 1 metre away from any other individual.

³ Places of worship that are located in residential units may re-open, subject to prevailing restrictions on homes and households, where visits are limited to any 5 visitors at a time.

⁴ Children twelve years and below, as well as persons who have health conditions that may result in breathing or other medical difficulties when a mask is worn for a prolonged period of time, may wear a face shield in lieu of a face mask.

⁵ This total cap is the combined number of persons participating in the various permitted activities (excluding congregational and other worship services) on the premises at any one time, excluding the religious and supporting workers.

⁶ If cross-deployment cannot be avoided (e.g. due to the nature of the job), additional safeguards must be taken to minimise the risk of cross-infection (e.g. systems are in place to ensure no direct contact with the cross-deployed personnel).

⁷ Refer to: <https://www.mom.gov.sg/covid-19/requirements-for-safe-management-measures>