

What's the process if COVID appears at our Parish?

This process document is a guideline based on the Public Health information as at 23 December and is provided to assist Parishes to understand what the steps are in order to protect your members and continue with your gospel ministry should a positive COVID case be detected at your parish. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact Vikki Napier, Parish HR Partner on 0414 483 542 during the holiday break.

PUT PLANS IN PLACE NOW!

- It is no longer a matter of if, but when! Don't panic. This is the new norm and learning to live with COVID means being agile and flexible.
- Lead by example. Your parishioners will be looking at how you are responding to the outbreak at your property and most will follow your lead.
- Even before you get a COVID positive incident at the parish, have a plan in place. Things to consider include:
 - Communication – who will communicate to whom? When is it appropriate to notify the whole congregation? Who will notify the Bishop?
 - How are you going to manage privacy and care for those who are directly impacted?
 - Ministry plan – in what circumstances will you revert to online ministry and for how long? Most parishes have only reverted to online ministry where most/all staff members have been identified as close contacts and haven't had time to receive a negative test result. In these circumstances, it is difficult to run an 'in person' service. [Note, this may all change with Rapid Antigen Testing likely to become more easily available in the future].
 - What cleaning products need to be available for cleaning. You are no longer required to conduct a deep clean, however, consideration should be given to how you may achieve better ventilation to clear out the air within the building. Ventilation is an important weapon against the Omicron variant so it will be helpful to cast your minds to creative ways to gain better ventilation as a matter of course.
- Ensure you have plans in place to allow everyone attending your parish property to use the QR code to check in. This is particularly important with such a virulent variant of COVID in our communities.

THEN

- When a positive case is identified at your property, NSW Health will have interviewed the infectious person to identify who could be deemed as a close contact. It is unlikely that congregation members will be deemed close contacts by NSW Health as a close contact is usually someone who resides in the same house or has worked within an office space together for an extended period of time. People sitting nearby in the same church service, for example, are more likely to be considered casual contacts.
- Conduct analysis to see whether you need to revert to online services or if there are enough staff and lay members available to run the service in person. It is recommended that reverting to online services be a last resort in order to assist congregation members to normalize living with COVID.
- Reassure those who are concerned that they are a close contact to take precautions (i.e. stay at home, get tested etc) but recognize that they are a close contact only if NSW Health

identifies them to be such. It is important to take into account the likely delays by NSW Health contacting close contacts due to the sheer volume of cases.

- Implement your cleaning plan. Soap and water is best to wipe down hard surfaces. Air out the property as best you can remembering that ventilation is key to removing the virus from the property.
- Have a post-incident review with key staff and lay members to review your plan and put in place any changes required to improve your response.

FINALLY

- Please email your Bishop when you have a COVID incident.
- Feel free to contact your Bishop or Vikki Napier, HR Partner if you would like any assistance or have any questions in relation to COVID.

SAMPLE SCENARIO

- A congregation member contacts you to notify you that they are positive for COVID. They attended the 10am church service on Sunday and have told you who they sat near and around.
- Contact those people who sat directly near and in front of the infected person and explain that they may have been near someone who was COVID positive. They are unlikely to be declared a **close contact** by NSW Health, but as a precaution, they should consider themselves a *potential casual contact*, and follow the [NSW Health guidelines for Casual Contacts](#). That is, they should self-isolate immediately, and get a PCR test as soon as possible, and on day 6 after their last contact with the COVID-19 positive person. They should remain in self-isolation until they have had the result of the first PCR test.
- Do not advise them of the name of the infectious person in order to respect the privacy of that person.
- Email the rest of the congregation notifying them that
At the 10am service last Sunday a person who has since tested positive with COVID was in attendance, and that the church has already notified the potential casual contacts who had direct contact with this person. If you have not been notified by NSW Health or us, then you should consider yourself not to be a close or casual contact. You should, however, monitor for symptoms and get tested as soon as possible if you develop symptoms.
- Implement your cleaning plan and notify your Bishop.