

The Church is the People of God

COVID-19 ROADMAP FOR THE DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG AS OF 15 DECEMBER 2021

On the 27th of September 2021, the NSW Government released a roadmap regarding reducing the current lockdown COVID-19 restrictions. These gradual reduction in restrictions are outlined below. When considering these restrictions and our actions as we move more freely in our church communities, we must always act with a sense of love to our neighbours. The Catechism teaches that “Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good.” (n.2288)

When following these guidelines, the faithful must consider the safety of themselves and others, compliance with the law and strict hygiene practices as core principles. All faithful in the diocese are dispensed from the obligation to physically attend Mass on Sundays. (canon 87 §1, canon 1248 §2)

The following summary documents the key guidelines as we meet each milestone set by the NSW Government. It is important to note that these guidelines include decisions by the Diocese, apart from Government orders, that are designed to maintain the dignity and physical health of all within our church communities.

	70% Vaccination Stage 1	80% Vaccination Stage 2	95+% vaccination Stage 3
Churches open for Masses ¹	✗	✓	✓
Capacity / density limits	n/a	2 sq metres	No limit ²
Public reconciliation	✗	✓	✓
Private reconciliation (by appointment)	✓	n/a	n/a
Baptisms	✗ (unless urgent)	✓	✓
Weddings (see #20)	✓ (max 100 or 5 unvaccinated)	✓ (1 per 2 sqm or 5 unvaccinated)	✓
Funerals (see #21)	✓ (max 100 or 10 unvaccinated)	✓ (1 per 2 sqm or 10 unvaccinated)	✓
Parish gatherings & meetings	✗	✗	✓
Sacramental preparation	✗ (unless online)	✗ (unless online)	✓
Congregational singing	✗	✗	✓
Choirs (see #25)	✗	✓ (up to 10 singers)	✓
Masks	✓	✓	Not required but recommended (see point 5 below)
Strong hygiene practices (see #5-14)	✓	✓	✓
QR Registration (see #23)	✓	✓	✓
Monitors (incl capacity monitoring)	✓	✓	✓
Visitation to Sick and Homebound	✗ (clergy only)	✓ (Double Vax Ministers only)	✓ (Double Vax Ministers only)
Churches open for private prayer	✗	✓ (only if Monitor is available and times are advertised)	✓
Parish offices open	✗	✗	✓

¹ and other devotions held before or after the Mass (or devotions held outside of Mass - that would require a Monitor to be present)

² Parishes can set their own density limits where appropriate to ensure the safety of parishioners. (e.g in holiday times where churches may be overflowing)

Wellbeing of the faithful and staff

1. Visible signage must be in place in all church buildings outlining, as a minimum, conditions of entry, to stay away if unwell and the maximum capacity within the building (if required).
2. Encourage 1.5m physical distancing, when appropriate, including:
 - a. at points of mixing or queuing
 - b. between seated groups and staff.
3. Monitors at entrances are required to ensure capacity/density limits are not exceeded and/or appropriate registration of parishioners (when required).
4. In accordance with Work Health and Safety requirements, it is important to ensure that the parish manages all foreseeable risks, which includes the transmission of COVID. Currently, the medical advice from NSW Health suggests that vaccination is the primary way to decrease transmission. Given this, it is the parish's responsibility to take reasonable measures to ensure the safety of the faithful and staff including:
 - a. all persons in public-facing roles (ie. they have direct face-to-face contact with the faithful) are encouraged to be double vaccinated. They must continue to wear masks and follow the hygiene procedures (outlined below) at all times.
 - b. all persons in ministries with access to children and/or vulnerable people (eg. visiting the sick and housebound, children's liturgy, etc.) are required to be double vaccinated.
 - c. all persons attending nursing homes or schools on behalf of the parish are subject to the relevant Public Health Orders (and are required to be double vaccinated).

Hygiene

5. Face masks must be worn when required by law (unless exempt) for those over 12 years of age and encouraged at other times especially for the vulnerable or where physical distancing is not possible.
6. Face masks are encouraged to be worn by Clergy and special ministers when

dispensing Communion, and by Church Monitors due to limited physical distancing.

7. Adopt good hand hygiene practices. Have hand sanitiser at key points around the church buildings.
8. High touch surfaces to be cleaned and disinfected regularly, (including door handles, pews, lectern, computer, vessels, shared musical instruments, taps, toilets, handrails) per [Work Safe Australia](#) guidelines.
9. Consider minimising the handling of objects by multiple persons where appropriate.
10. Communion of the Precious Blood will be for the celebrant only.
11. All ministers of Holy Communion are to use hand sanitisers before the distribution of Holy Communion commences. Holy Communion will continue to be received in the hand.
12. The Sign of Peace should continue to be given by a simple bow or nod of the head.
13. All Holy Water fonts and stoups will remain empty.
14. Improve ventilation by opening doors and windows. See: <http://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/getting-back-to-work-a-covid-safe-way/ventilation-guidance>

Record Keeping and Compliance

15. Use the NSW Government QR code system to collect an electronic record of the name, contact number and entry time for all the faithful, staff, volunteers and contractors when required by Public Health Orders.
16. Parishes may be required to submit a completed [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#) issued by the NSW Government. When this is required a copy should be submitted to the Office of the Bishop.

Vaccination

17. The faithful are encouraged to receive a COVID-19 vaccination for the care of each other and the common good. An individual's right to choose not to receive

a vaccination is respected and it is acknowledged that some may not be able to receive a vaccination due to contraindications. Where a person has not received a vaccine they must take all reasonable steps to ensure they do not become a vehicle of transmission of COVID-19 (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 21 December 2020).

Pastoral care

18. Live streaming of Masses are encouraged to continue where possible, to allow for people who are vulnerable or who are vaccinated but remain anxious about COVID-19 to continue to attend Mass online.
19. Parishes need to be mindful of those that are vaccinated and are anxious to mix in the general community and ensure that pastoral care opportunities are offered to them in a safe manner.

Further definitions and details

20. **Weddings** | Where unvaccinated persons attend a wedding during stages 1 and 2, the wedding is deemed a “small wedding” and limited to **5 guests** excluding the persons legally necessary for the conduct of the service (e.g. the persons getting married, the person marrying them and the witnesses) and 1 person to record the service. (PHO Schedule 6).
21. **Funerals** | Where unvaccinated persons attend a funeral during stages 1 and 2, the funeral is deemed a “small funeral” and limited to no more than **10 persons**, excluding the person conducting the service and any other person necessary for the conduct and preparation of the service.
22. **Place of public worship** | means a building or place used for the **purpose of religious worship** by a congregation or religious group, whether or not the building or place is also used for counselling, social events, instruction or religious training.
23. **QR registration** | For the period QR registration is required, parishes must ensure that all persons entering the Church premises for worship use the QR

code provided. Where this is not possible, manual records must be kept including name and phone/email for a period of 4 weeks. QR registration for parish offices and meetings is not required but encouraged.

24. **Capacity density limits** | When required, the total capacity limits based upon the 4 or 2sq metre rule should be consistent with the previous methodologies adopted during the pandemic.
25. **Singing** | During stage 1 and 2 of the roadmap, congregational singing is prohibited. Singing can take place with a choir where there are no more than 10 singers and all are vaccinated.
26. **Process of a Positive COVID-19 case** | If a Parish becomes aware a priest, staff member, parishioner or visitor has tested positive to COVID-19, the response plan contained in Appendix A should be followed. The Bishop, Vicar General or Vicar for Clergy will determine appropriate steps for a Church reopening where a priest cannot minister due to isolation requirements.
27. **Parish Offices** | Parish offices should remain closed to the public until Stage 3. The Public Health Order states that an employer **must allow** an employee to work from home and must **require** an unvaccinated person to work from home if it is reasonably practicable to do so during stages 1 and 2. Parish staff who greet parishioners or other visitors in the office must wear a mask.

In accordance with the ‘Covid Safety Plan’ for offices **parishes should:**

- “Consider controls to protect staff and visitors at physical interaction points such as counters or service desks, to maintain social distancing”
- “Review regular deliveries and request contactless delivery and invoicing where practical”.

TEMPLATE PARISH RESPONSE COVID-19 INCIDENT RESPONSE PLAN

- **Positive Case Identified**

- ❑ Parish becomes aware a staff member, parishioner or visitor has tested positive to COVID-19

- **Manager/Team leader confirms positive case**

- ❑ Parish Priest to
 1. confirm name, current location and welfare of affected person,
 2. record date of confirmed result,
 3. ensure that the affected person has contacted health authorities, and
 4. Confirm if any family members (residing in the same residence as the affected person) work in any other parish or agency of the diocese.

- **Alert Public Health Unit and Pandemic Response Team (PRT)**

- ❑ the local Public Health Unit (PHU 1300 066 055) will advise the immediate next steps
- ❑ Greg Parrish on 0439 494 429 or Asante Viswasam on 0408 512 163

- **Council of Priests convene crisis management conference and include the Communications team from OOB**

- **Communication to all stakeholders**

- ❑ Determine who has been in contact with affected person in past # days, and communicate with/direct them.
- ❑ Media response prepared and used if required.

- **Implement Incident Management of Parish**

- ❑ Parish Pastoral Council/Leadership Team to ensure WHS requirements are / have been met
- ❑ Liaise with PHU and authorities
- ❑ Coordinate external services required (including cleaners | [see recommended cleaner panel](#))
- ❑ Keep Office of the Bishop informed

- **Ongoing Incident Management reporting to Council of Priests**

- ❑ Ongoing monitoring of Parish conditions and registering of parishioners particularly those who may have to be in self isolation and that they do not attend Mass or other parish meetings.
- ❑ Regular update to the COP