



The United Church of Canada L'Eglise Unie du Canada

Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council
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Covid-19 Update October 4, 2021 (New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island)

Dear members of Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council (NB and PEI):

Since the last Covid-19 updates, (dated September 24, 2021 for New Brunswick and October 4, 2021 for Prince Edward Island), I have been asked questions about the Vaccination Policies for our churches, and for clarification of some of the recommendations for congregational gatherings.

I have been in touch with our General Council Office legal counsel, with the following question, and offer the following opinion:

Q: *If the government does not make it mandatory to show proof of vaccination for worship, can the governing body (Board/Council) make it policy for their Community of Faith? If they do [make it mandatory to show proof of vaccination], will they be going against the law?*

A: NEW BRUNSWICK

In New Brunswick, it's legal for a congregation [community of faith] to have a mandatory vaccination policy.

Please refer to the September 24, 2021 memo for further details regarding Proof of Vaccination guidelines for New Brunswick.

- Should your place of worship choose to require all participants to show full proof of vaccination, you must: Wear a mask at all times, Social distancing is not required, No capacity issue, Singing while masked is permitted.
- Should your place of worship forego full proof of vaccination, you must ensure: Everyone masked at all times, Operate at 50% or less capacity, and maintain two metres of physical distancing between different households, no congregational singing, record names of all attendees and contact information by row or have a consistent assigned seating plan for contact tracing; and; prevent anyone displaying COVID-19 symptoms or who has been instructed to self-isolate from entering.
- Regardless of which option your place of worship selects, everyone will need to show proof of full vaccination whenever they access the church for other activities, which includes weddings, funerals, parties, conferences and workshops.

Important note:

For those areas of New Brunswick entering a two-week circuit breaker, while you are able to hold worship services, you may wish to consider moving to on-line worship for this time frame. Please consider the most vulnerable in your faith communities in your decision-making.

A: PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

According to the Government of PEI website, the province has set a law requiring vaccination proof for various kinds of events but not for worship services. In short, vaccination passports aren't required under provincial law for people attending worship services. However, just because the government hasn't made it mandatory doesn't mean that a congregation can't do that for itself. Nothing [we] see here prohibits an organization from setting its own internal policy on who it allows to come onto church property or attend worship services.

The risk of legal ramifications for a community of faith that sets its own vaccination policy, even where it's not mandatory, is deemed to be very low. However, governing bodies need to know there's a slight risk that their policies would be held to be illegal. Nobody can say for certain the policies would be legal until there is legislation or civil court decisions confirming that. It is recommended that each governing body should consider all the pros and cons and do what they think is best for their faith community.

I would like to take this opportunity to once again remind you that, as of October 5, 2021, Prince Edward Island introduced its guidelines around Proof of Vaccination:

You will **not** have to ask for Proof of Vaccination for: Worship services, weddings, funerals, and Children's Programs that happen at the same time as church. Wearing a non-medical mask **is required** in most indoor public places, **which includes places of worship and faith gatherings.**

As stated, I requested further understanding of this policy for our churches last week, and am still awaiting a response, however in the reading of the above regulations, and looking at other provinces with the same vaccination policies, I understand the rules to mean:

"Any activities held by a faith organization other than a regular faith service (such as daily/weekly service) weddings and funerals is subject to the proof of vaccine policy. If it is a regular group with the same people then proof of vaccination can be obtained once and does not need to be done each time the group meets."

You are reminded that for activities and settings where proof of vaccination or a Vax Pass is required, public health measures are still required, including an [operational plan](#) outlining the public health measures in place. If there will be multiple cohorts at an organized gathering, a prior approval of the operational plan is required. [Non-medical mask](#) requirements must continue to be followed

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to be in contact at fmaccuish@united-church.ca or at 1-800-268-3781 ext. 6156.

Sincerely,

Faith

Faith March-MacCuish
Executive Minister