⚠️ **As of 11:59pm Thursday Dec 23, face masks are again mandatory in all indoor settings, except private residences, for everyone aged 8 and over.**

Restrictions which changed from December 16 are shown in RED.

- **Masks –** Now required in all indoor settings, other than private residences, for all people aged 8 and above. This includes at weddings, funerals and worship. This applies to everyone except people aged under 8 or those with a medical exemption.

- **Friends and Family –** there are no restrictions on numbers of people who can gather in a private home or in a public place. The government recommends that everyone be fully vaccinated if gathering in a home or public place.

- **Religious gatherings and ceremonies (incl Weddings and Funerals) –** If these events are held at places of worship there will not be any vaccination requirements or limits on participants, nor any requirement for organisers to check vaccination status. **All attendees aged 8 or over must wear a facemask at all times indoors.** COVID check-in marshals must continue to ensure all attendees check-in. If the ceremony is at a hospitality venue, vaccine requirements will apply.

- **COVID check-in marshals** are still required to ensure that everyone in attendance checks-in and is wearing a facemask when entering.

- **Work –** All workplaces must have a COVID-safe plan and keep records of everyone attending using the Services Victoria App (QR Code). All workers must be fully vaccinated to attend the workplace. This applies to paid staff and to volunteers.

- **Cleaning –** Workplaces exposed to a positive coronavirus case will no longer need to be deep cleaned, after mounting international evidence that coronavirus is an airborne or droplet-borne disease and the likelihood of becoming infected by touching a surface is low risk.

- **Schools, Childcare and Early Learning Centres** are open to all ages. Masks must be worn indoors at primary schools by all staff, visitors and students in year 3 and above.

- **Adult/Higher Education** is open for fully vaccinated students.

- **Childcare and Early Learning –** Open

- **Pubs/Restaurants/Cafes/Entertainment venues:** are all open for the fully vaccinated with no capacity limits or density requirements. Face masks must be worn. Vaccination requirements do not apply for food and drink venues which are operating only takeaway services. People under 18 are no longer required to provide proof of vaccination at hospitality venues.

- **Retail goods and services –** Vaccination status requirements have been removed for all customers except for hair and beauty services. Mask settings in retail remain unchanged.

- **Community Facilities –** Open with no limits if Covid Check-in marshals ensure attendees check in. For support groups, one person per 4sqm up to 50 people may attend where check-in is not appropriate. Check in not required for essential service delivery, but must operate with the minimum number of people required.

- **Hospital Visitors:**
  - Two visitors at one time (a group may exceed the "two visitors at a time" rule if dependents of a visitor are in the group and care for the dependents cannot be arranged).
  - Do not have to be from the same household.
  - No time limits.
  - No more than two visitors per day. (No daily visitor limit for end-of-life or life-threatening illness.)
  - All visitors are required to wear face masks.

- **Aged Care Visits –** Residents can have up to five visitors, including dependents, per day for any reason. The government strongly recommends that all residents and visitors are fully vaccinated.

THESE COVID FAQs are prepared with great care, based on the best available advice at the time they are written. As Victoria emerges from lockdown, we endeavour to navigate sometimes conflicting advice. Wherever possible we base guidance from multiple authoritative sources. However with the rapidity of change, sometimes the fine detail is either absent or made available at a later date. Where detail is missing, we deliberately err on the side of caution.

Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

For further information visit: https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au. **Should you have any further questions please email Synod's Crisis Management Team.**

MULTI-LINGUAL RESOURCES

Where can I find the current government guidelines in other languages?

Victorian Multi-cultural Commission Coronavirus (COVID-19): In-language advice and information at https://www.multiculturalcommission.vic.gov.au/coronavirus-language-advice-and-information.

Ethnolink have information available in 51 languages at: http://www.ethnolink.com.au/covid-%2019-coronavirus-translated-resources/

The Department of Home Affairs has extensive multi-lingual resources available at: https://Covid19inlanguage.homeaffairs.gov.au/

The Victorian Multicultural Commission have release multi-lingual resources including:

- Audio messages: **https://cloud.think-hq.com.au/s/m9SX3ntGGqr7Sai**
- Posters (JPG / PDF): **https://cloud.think-hq.com.au/s/m9SX3ntGGqr7Sai**
- Social Media banners: **https://cloud.think-hq.com.au/s/m9SX3ntGGqr7Sai**

GATHERINGS & CHURCH COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES

What face-to-face gatherings are permitted at church?

Restrictions easing while there are still COVID-19 cases within the community is something we have not faced previously in Victoria. With an increased likelihood that at some stage an attendee at a gathering will be COVID positive, there are a number of considerations for all Church Councils:

- Have you reviewed and updated your **COVIDSafe Plan?**
- Is all COVID signage up-to-date?
- Have you downloaded the updated **COVID Cleaning Guide**, and considered your cleaning practices or how to deep clean if a Covid-positive person attended?

- Also consider the information in the LIVING WITH COVID section (p4)

WORSHIP SERVICES
Religious gatherings and ceremonies (including weddings and funerals)

If these events are held at places of worship there will not be any vaccination requirements or limits on participants, nor any requirement for organisers to check vaccination status. COVID check-in marshals must continue to ensure all attendees check-in. If the ceremony is at a hospitality venue, vaccine requirements will apply.   *As of 16/12/2021*

Do face masks have to be worn at all times during worship?

Yes. Everyone aged 8 and above must wear a face mask at worship, weddings or funerals unless they have a medical exemption.

As of 24/12/2021

Can we gather for morning tea afterwards?

Yes. Our previous advice was to give careful consideration to how this could be conducted appropriately, including maintaining distance, hygiene and limiting the sharing of utensils etc. With the reintroduction of mandatory mask-wearing indoors, additional consideration should be given to limiting the removal of masks only while eating or drinking.

As of 24/12/2021

Can we sing?

Yes.   *As of 19/11/2021*

Is it permitted to provide transport ("give a lift") to people?

Where possible, treat passengers in your car who are not members of your household as if they were travelling in a taxi:

- Your passenger should sit in the back seat to maintain physical distancing
- Everyone in the car should wear a fitted face mask unless they have a lawful exemption
- Increase ventilation by opening windows wherever possible. Avoid having air-conditioning set to recirculate air.
- High touch surfaces in the vehicle should be cleaned and sanitised regularly (eg door handles, seat belts etc)

Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

It is now mandatory for all workers (including most volunteers) in Victoria to be fully vaccinated, and to provide proof to their workplace, to be able to work anywhere other than from their own homes.

WHO NEEDS TO SEE AND RECORD THE PROOF OF VACCINATION STATUS?

Should proof be required by Health authorities, it is important that this information be available at the place where the work is done, or from where it is coordinated. Therefore, this information needs to be provided to, and recorded by, **the Church Council** for any authorised work activity on any church property or on behalf of the church.

Church councils do not need this information for staff of paid contractors (eg plumbers or garden maintenance companies) as their employer must receive and record this proof.

WHO WOULD THIS APPLY TO AT OUR CHURCH?

Roles which would need to provide proof of vaccination status would likely include the worship leader, cleaner, organist/musician, Covid check-in marshals, those participating in recording/broadcasting live-streamed services, children's leader, food bank workers and anyone involved with building maintenance or gardening.

DOES THIS REQUIREMENT APPLY TO MINISTERS?

While there appear to be some exemptions under certain circumstances from the requirement to gather this information from Ministers and other faith leaders, it is strongly recommended that Vaccination Status information be requested from Ministers to ensure compliance in **all** situations.

WHAT IF THE PROOF IS NOT PROVIDED?

An employer of a worker must not permit a worker who is unvaccinated to work for that employer outside the worker's ordinary place of residence, unless that person is medically exempted from vaccination requirements. If an employer does not hold vaccination information about a worker, the employer must treat the worker as if the worker is unvaccinated.

WHAT INFORMATION IS REQUIRED?

The Vaccination register must record the name of all staff and volunteers working onsite.

Beside each, it must show

► For fully vaccinated (2 doses)– the date of the 2nd dose, the vaccination document number and the type of vaccine received

► For partially vaccinated (1 dose)- the date of the 1st dose, the date due for 2nd dose and the type of vaccine received

► For excepted (medically exempt) – as of Oct 29 a treating practitioner must complete the Australian Immunisation Medical Exemption Form (AIR form) uploaded to the Australian Immunisation Register. A digital certificate can then be downloaded by the person, or by their practitioner. An AIR form, either digital or print, is now the only acceptable proof of a medical exemption to vaccination.

HOW SHOULD THE INFORMATION BE RECORDED?

The Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has produced a simple form to assist all Church Councils to meet the above obligation. **This form can be found here**

WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION?

Synod's Crisis Management Team is recommending that no more than two people at any location have access to that location's staff vaccination records. It may be required at some point that authorised staff from either the Synod or Presbytery be able to verify compliance. At any time, this information may be requested by an Authorised Health Official.

Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

LIVING WITH COVID

Unlike previous post-lockdown reopenings where COVID had been eliminated, we must now learn to live with COVID-19 in the community. This means there is a likelihood that at some point many of us will come into contact with someone who is COVID-positive.

There are currently no specific guidelines available for religious gatherings and ceremonies. The following advice, based on government guidelines and requirements for workplaces, should be followed.

Do we need to notify the Health Department?

Unless there are five or more positive cases within seven days, there is no longer a requirement to notify the Health Department unless you have been asked to do so by the Department or a Local Public Health Unit. You should instead follow your COVID-safe plan requirements to identify people who may have been exposed and encourage them to undertake a COVID test and to self-isolate until a negative result is received.

Is there a difference between positive COVID tests returned for staff, either paid or volunteers?

Yes. There are different requirements, depending on the person's role:

- **Paid staff/contractors –** Immediately after a paid worker returns a positive COVID test, WorkSafe Victoria must be notified. This includes a Minister, any paid employee, an independent contractor, or an employee of independent contractor who tests positive to COVID-19, and if the diagnosed Minister, employee, independent contractor, employee of the independent contractor has attended the workplace within the relevant infections period. If this is the case, please notify the **Synod Safety Officer**, who will notify WorkSafe on your behalf.
- **Volunteer staff –** there is no need to notify WorkSafe Victoria, however please advise the **Synod Safety Officer.**

How do we identify who may have been exposed?

Consider who they may have had close contact with during their infectious period. This could include other workers, contractors, visitors or anyone else at the workplace.

To do you this, you could check rosters, time sheets, sign-in sheets and visitor logs. It is strongly recommended that any attendees who are in any of the COVID-19 high-risk categories be notified, irrespective of their proximity to the COVID-positive person.

What is meant by "the infectious period"?

The infectious period is 48 hours before the person's symptoms start (or if they did not have symptoms, 48 hours before they were tested).

When can someone who has tested positive return to worship?

Anyone who tests positive to COVID-19 must remain in isolation for at least 10 days. After this time, they are no longer considered infectious, so no longer have to quarantine. However, if the positive case was a "worker" they cannot return to the "workplace" until such time as they have received a negative COVID-19 test and presented evidence of that result.

Do we need to undertake a deep clean before re-opening?

Current guidelines no longer require a deep clean to be undertaken unless you are advised to do so by the Department of Health. However, a cleaning log record should be maintained and updated regularly. Please refer to the **DHHS COVID CLEANING GUIDE** (V3 – Nov 2021) for full details on current requirements.

ATTENDANCE RECORD KEEPING

All venues in Victoria must now record visitor information through the Services Victoria app (QR code). This includes churches, restaurants and even supermarkets and shops. There is a $1,652 on-the-spot fine for non-compliance.

QR codes are unique for each venue, but will look something like this:

Please note that QR codes have recently been updated. If you have received your new QR code from Services Victoria earlier in October, you must update your QR check-in signage.

Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

How do we get a QR code and how do they work?

1. Register for a FREE QR code service from the government at **https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/register-to-use-vic-gov-qr-code-service**

2. Once you have your QR Code, you will need to display this prominently, eg at all entry doors. You will find a POSTER link in the email confirming your QR code registration. This unique poster is generated automatically with your QR code.

3. Everyone entering the building can then scan this QR Code using the camera on their smartphone or tablet device. This automatically opens the registration app, which knows that they are registering at your building.

4. They will then be asked to enter their name, phone number and residential postcode, and have the option of providing details of other individuals in their party.

5. A 'greeter' will be required on every door by which the public can enter. Their role is to ensure that everyone entering the building registers via the QR code.

For attendees who do not have a smart phone or tablet device, the greeter will need to register them on the greeter's smartphone or tablet.

The substantial benefit of the use of the Services Victoria app is to assist timely contact-tracing in the event of community transmission of Covid-19.

What if we have a substantial number of visitors who are unable to use the QR code system?

"Kiosk check-in" can be set up on any device (ie Computer, smart-phone, tablet) which will allow a designated person to enter the names and contact phone numbers on behalf of all visitors. For further details or to download check-in kiosk: **www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/checking-qr-codes**

If absolutely necessary, names and contact phone numbers may be recorded manually at the time of entry, but must then be recorded into the Services Victoria app on behalf of those people. This should be done within 24 hours.

However, all venues are required to display the QR code and encourage all visitors to use this. The use of manual recording of visitors should not be seen as an option to replace the QR code self-checkin.

As of 10/06/2021

Face to Face Gatherings away from church

There are no limits on the number of people who may gather in a private residence or public place. The government strongly recommends that all visitors to your home or who gather in a public place are fully vaccinated.

As of 19/11/2021

CHURCH/COMMUNITY HALLS
Under what circumstances can Community/Church Halls be used?

Community facilities may open without the need for density limits or patron caps providing COVID Check-in marshals ensure all attendees check-in. For essential public support groups, check in is not required providing the number of attendees does not exceed the lesser of a density quotient of one person per 4sq, or 50 people. If the premises are being used for essential public relief or health services, there are no check in or capacity requirements, however the operator may only permit the minimum number of persons required to provide that service.

Every venue must have a COVID-safe plan in place. All physical distancing, hygiene and QR code requirements must be met, with appropriate signage displayed.

As of 16/12/2021

RENTED & HIRED FACILITIES – Who is responsible for ensuring properties are COVID compliant?

■ If you rent hire or licence out property to more than one organisation or group on a casual or non-exclusive basis (eg support groups, community groups, classes) using our standard Hire Agreement (Victoria) whether one-off or recurring, the Responsibility for maintaining all COVID-19 compliance, including cleaning to standard remains with the congregation as the responsible body. However, you may pass on the reasonable additional cost of cleaning or other necessary Covid-19 safety measures to the Hirer if you notify them in advance of the additional cost.

Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

- If you rent out property to one organisation or group on an exclusive use basis (under a Lease or Licence), the responsibility for maintaining all COVID-19 compliance falls to the tenant.
- If in doubt, seek advice from your presbytery or contact **uca.legal@victas.uca.org.au**

As of 24/06/2021

COVID-SAFE PLANS

Do we need to complete a CovidSafe plan and/or UCA Covid Recovery Action Checklist?

If you have completed the **Covid Recovery Action Plan Checklist** and are keeping this up-to-date, this can be your Covid-Safe Plan.

HOLY COMMUNION

How can Holy Communion services reflect COVID safe practices?

Careful consideration should be given to how Holy Communion can be conducted appropriately, including maintaining distance, hygiene and not sharing communion ware.

For congregations livestreaming worship, the Assembly guidelines remain in place until May 2021 and can be found at: **https://www.assembly. uca.org.au/news/item/3163-temporary-arrangements-for-holycommunion**

For some thoughts on how to conduct Holy Communion in a COVID-safe manner read Rev Dr Sally Douglas' November 2020 article at **https:// victas.uca.org.au/how-can-we-keep-holy-communion-covid-19-safe/.**

As of 19/11/2021

SAFE (DIGITAL) MINISTRY

What safety measures should be adopted for ministry within the digital space?

The Culture of Safety Unit has prepared some guidelines for leaders and communities, offering commentary and interpretation of how our existing Child Safety resources and policies, and the Uniting Church Code of Ethics, continue to shape our digital ministry practices. To view the guidelines visit: **https://victas.uca.org.au/safe-digital-ministry/**

As of 07/04/2020

MINISTERS IN HIGH RISK GROUPS

Ministers in high-risk groups should discuss with their medical practitioners, presbytery and Church Councils the appropriateness of their involvement in services and what additional safeguards may be required to protect their own health.

High risk groups include people who are:

- aged over 70,
- over 65 with chronic health conditions,
- immune-compromised, or
- Indigenous people over 50 with chronic health conditions

As of 28/10/2021

ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING LICENCES

What does it cost for a Zoom meeting licence?

If you plan on using Zoom frequently and/ or require full functionality, Synod Ministries and Operations along with other Synods have negotiated with Zoom to purchase a bulk deal. As such we are able to provide Zoom licences for a cost of just $7.93 per month. If your presbytery or congregation is interested, please contact: **George.Delice@victas.uca.org.au**

You will need to provide: Number of licences required and the details of the contact person (including their email address)

As of 08/07/2020

OP SHOPS

How do we keep our Op Shop Covid-safe?

Op Shops run by Uniting VicTas must follow guidance issued by Uniting.

All UCA Op Shops should be regarded as any other non-essential retail store, all of which remain subject to restrictions including:

- **Since October 15 all staff, including volunteers, must have received at least one dose of COVID vaccine, unless medically exempt, and must have provided proof of their vaccination status**
- All customers and all staff must wear facemasks unless legally exempt

Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

- All retail stores must now use the Services Victoria app (QR code) to record all staff and customer details, even if in the shop for less than 15 minutes.
- UCA Op Shops, as church workplaces, are required to complete sections A and B of the Recovery Action Plan Checklist to ensure that they are Covid-complient and a copy sent to **elnura.dulakovic@victas.uca.org.au**
- Gloves should be worn when handling cash and any donated goods.
- Donated goods should be received contactless where possible. Donations should be stored in a location where workers won't have contact with them for a period of up to 72 hours. All items should be cleaned in line with COVID cleaning practices as soon as practical. Hands should be washed regularly whilst, and immediately after, handling any donated items. It is also recommended that WARNING signs should be displayed to ensure all staff and volunteers adhere to these precautions.

As of 28/07/2021

VOLUNTEERS:
Since October 15 volunteers must have received at least one dose of COVID vaccine before they can attend any workplace outside their own home, unless they are medically exempt from vaccination. As of November 26, the requirement will be to be fully vaccinated (two doses) unless medically exempt. They must also provide evidence of their current vaccination status to the 'employer' before attending the workplace.

Even with a face mask, you should keep at least 1.5 metres between yourself and others at all times and practice good hygiene. If you are in a high-risk group, you can volunteer, however, consider minimising the number of different people you interact with. High-risk groups include people aged 70 years and over, people aged 65 years and over with chronic medical conditions, people with compromised immune systems and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the age of 50.

As of 08/07/2021

MARKETS
Can we hold garage sales and/or markets?
Markets may operate within the same guidelines as retail stores.

As of 16/12/2021

FIRST AID PRECAUTIONS
In the event of someone needing first aid treatment, are there any additional precautions required?
Anyone administering first aid should use general droplet and contact precautions, namely a face mask for the person they are treating which they should encourage the person to apply themselves, a face mask and gloves for the first aider, and goggles for the first aider (if available).
In the event that a first aider has a reason to suspect a person is infected with COVID-19, they should try to limit their contact with that person as much as they can, meaning they should avoid physical contact (e.g. checking pulses and performing physical assessments) unless absolutely necessary, such as performing CPR or putting people in a recovery position if they are unconscious and/or struggling to breathe.

As of 11/06/2020

SYNOD MINISTRIES AND OPERATIONS STAFF
When staff return from their Christmas/New Year leave in January they will be returning to their regular places of work, either at Wesley Place in Lonsdale Street, or at CTM in Parkville. Please note that any 9251 telephone numbers are no longer valid, as these related to the old Synod offices in Little Collins Street. If you need to contact someone from Synod Ministries and Operations whose phone number starts with 9251, please call Wesley Place UCA Reception on (03) 9116-1400.

Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

WELLBEING

During this time it is important that we all take care of ourselves and of each other. Sometimes we may need help to do this. Below are just some of the places you can turn to if you, or someone you know, may need some assistance coping with COVID restrictions:

Lifeline   ph **13 11 14**

Beyond Blue   ph **1300 22 4636**

Kids Helpline   ph **1800 55 1800**

1800RESPECT   ph **1800 737 732**
(Domestic & Sexual Violence)

SafeSteps   ph **1800 015 188**
(support & planning to escape domestic violence)

LGBTQIA   ph **1800 184 527**
(peer driven support)

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

Centrelink online financial resources for existing customers: **https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/help-emergency**

Centrelink Crisis Payments ph 132 850

Uniting Vic Tas
https://www.unitingvictas.org.au/contact-us/

Uniting Church in Australia
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA