

Nelson Diocese Response to Covid Protection Framework

Covid-19 'traffic light' guidelines for the church

(updated 16 December 2021)

Introduction

The introduction of the new COVID-19 Protection Framework or 'traffic light' system requires a rethink on how to minister to all and manage COVID-19 risks in the church.

As a Diocese we respect and follow Government regulations which direct church life concerning Covid-19 in this extraordinary season of pandemic.

In responding to the pandemic this Diocese seeks to be guided by the following principles:

- We welcome all people into the life of the church and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- We seek to care for and keep safe all members of our church family and those to whom we minister.
- We will be guided by the example of Jesus who, taking on the form of a servant, looked not to his own interests but to the needs and interests of others.
- We will provide clear information about the safety measures applying in our ministries, activities and services so that church members and visitors can decide whether they will attend.
- We will be adaptable at local level within the scope of government regulation.
- We will strive to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3)

In doing so, we acknowledge that the decisions we make will affect to some extent the freedoms of both regular worshippers and visitors for an as yet unknown period. We pray that we might accept these limitations with grace and compassion for others.

Summary of our approach

1. Under the 'traffic light system' parish leadership has responsibility to choose whether to hold vaccination pass services/gatherings and/or open services/gatherings which do not require a pass, taking into account their own particular circumstances and having conducted a full risk assessment. Every parish making such decisions has the support of the Anglican Bishop of Nelson.
2. Information about whether or not a vaccination pass is required for a particular service/gathering must be clearly advertised (on website, social media, entrance-ways, church notice boards, etc.) so that those planning to attend understand beforehand whether or not a pass is required.
3. In addition, parishes must assess the degree of risk involved in all their ministries and activities, given their own particular circumstances and environment, to determine whether the risk is such that vaccination is needed in addition to other safety measures that can be put in place. If necessary, the vicar and wardens must consider in good faith whether non-vaccinated people can be redeployed or a particular ministry/activity should cease for a time.

4. A risk assessment is especially necessary where the ministry/activity involves those particularly vulnerable to Covid-19, such as children, the elderly and those with other underlying health conditions. If a vicar is considering ministry to these vulnerable people being provided by a leader, team member or adult helper who is not vaccinated, then consultation must occur with the diocesan Health and Safety Co-ordinator, Russell Nimmo, in carrying out the risk assessment. Should there be disagreement about the degree of risk involved and/or the appropriate measures to put in place to keep people safe, the matter must be referred to the Bishop for decision. The Bishop's decision will be final.
5. Risk assessments and discussion of how risks might be mitigated should also be carried out in consultation with those carrying out the ministries/activities, especially where the person concerned is an employee. Mitigation measures to keep people safe may well be additional to the minimum requirements set out in the Covid Protection Framework Chart under Part B.
6. A risk assessment tool is included in Fact Sheet 6. Of the following four risk factors, at least three must be present before vaccination will be considered a reasonable requirement:
 - *Space* - Ministry/activity is carried out in an indoor space less than 100m².
 - *Proximity* - Ministry/activity is carried out less than 1m apart from other people.
 - *Time* - Those involved in ministry/activity are routinely near others for more than 15 minutes.
 - *Vulnerability* - Those who provide ministry/activities do so with people vulnerable to Covid-19 (for example, those with comorbidities and/or those over 70 years of age).
7. As knowledge of vaccination status may be needed to carry out a risk assessment, those involved in delivering ministries or activities may be asked for evidence of vaccination status. If the person does not wish to disclose their vaccination status, it will be assumed for the sake of safety that they are unvaccinated. A record of vaccination must be kept. All information about vaccination status is private information and must be stored securely and available only to those who need to know.
8. Where discretion is allowed within government requirements, a Parish may wish to impose more stringent measures than government requires (e.g., with regard to mask wearing, distancing or food).
9. The government guidance for places of worship has been incorporated into the advice that follows in Parts B, C and D. The government has made a distinction between 'gatherings' and 'events'.
 - 'gatherings' in a place of worship are defined as "a group of people who are intermingling", so include services, most activities in the life of the church and, notably, prayer groups and other such groups in an individual's home.
 - 'events' are essentially organised in private indoor or outdoor spaces with controlled access of people via ticketing, fee paying, registration or other means of controllable entry. They do not include outdoor community events or gatherings. Examples of 'events' would therefore be ticketed concerts or conferences.