The United Church of Canada
L'Eglise Unie du Canada

First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Council
Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Regional Council
Regional Council 15

July 21, 2021

Guidelines and Checklist for Re-Entry: Sunday Schools and Youth Groups- Fall 2021

With many of our Communities of Faith looking at resuming programming for children and youth, and lower numbers of COVID-19 leading provincial health authorities to relax or eliminate restrictions, please see the following as guidelines for operating programs safely. There is a great deal to consider, and while many might be anxiously awaiting the return of these age groups, as always, cautious attention and consideration must be given to protocols and practice in order to safely welcome children, youth, and their families back into places of worship, and to the programs that are offered by our faith communities. The following is offered, remembering that those under the age of 12 cannot yet be vaccinated, and therefore are vulnerable members of our communities:

It is recommended that before any of these activities are started, Communities of Faith include Children and Youth in their operational plans, as well as communicating that plan with leaders and families. As with any gatherings, if participants are unwell, they should NOT participate. Even with restrictions being changed and/or completely lifted, for safety, we are recommending that communities still operate with a plan in place that includes protocols for masking/cleaning. We also want to acknowledge that these are guidelines based on what we know mid-summer—localized public health guidelines and can change at anytime based on local COVID case numbers.

1. We are recommending that programming for children and youth wait for two weeks, following the start of school, before beginning. This allows families to settle into their school routine, while also allowing time to get a sense of what the COVID situation might be, when school is back in session.

2. Currently some provinces have lifted masking orders. Other provinces may decide to do the same in the near future. Communities of Faith may want to consider asking children who are school aged to mask while in their buildings because they cannot be vaccinated. This is especially important in areas where distancing cannot be maintained, and if singing is occurring.

3. During worship, if resuming a "time for children," clergy/worship leaders should consider masking while talking to the children, or physically distancing from them. Children themselves should also be distanced where possible.

4. During program time for both children and youth, please consider the following:
    - Keep weekly attendance/contact information for all of the participants in case of outbreak. Anyone who is showing signs of ANY symptoms of COVID/cold/flu should be strongly encouraged to stay home. Anyone who becomes ill during the program should also be removed from the main area, where possible, and adults notified.
    - Use larger spaces rather than separate classrooms to allow for air circulation where possible. Consider holding programs outside when and where possible/appropriate.
    - Distancing is still encouraged, as much as possible, between participants.
    - Have separate art supplies for each participant that can be cleaned after each session.
    - If snacks are served, they are separate—no buffet style food. Consider having participants bring their own drink containers, or if not possible, have separate juice boxes. Also have participants wash hands before eating.
    - If singing, have everyone masked.
    - For children under school-age in a nursery/play setting, teens/adults providing care should consider masking if they are not members of the children's household/family circle.
    - Hand sanitizer should be in the space.
    - Keep snacks separate.
    - Try not to share toys.
    - Toys should be hard surface only (NO stuffies, pillows, soft cover books) so that proper cleaning can occur following each use.
    - If a participant needs their adult who is in the worship space, please also consider having the adult come to the child, rather than the child go to the worship space, to limit movement among those who cannot be vaccinated.

Please also consider any regulations your local jurisdiction may have for day camps/child care programs. If anything, COVID has taught us that more regular and thorough cleaning is a must to ensure safety and healthy gatherings.

These guidelines are set out, based on many public health documents, and in consultation with The United Church of Canada's emergency response documents. For more information, or if you have any questions, please contact Catherine Stuart, Regional Minister for Children, Youth and Young Adults at cstuart@united-church.ca or at 1-800-268-3781 ext. 6158.