



COVID-19

GUIDANCE NOTE

25 February 2022

Pastoral Note from Associate Secretary

There is a condition between flourishing and depression which the New York Times names as languishing.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/19/well/mind/covid-mental-health-languishing.html>

Languishing is described as the neglected middle child of mental health, and it can dull motivation and focus.

As we move out of restrictions and try and figure out what life will be like into the future, many people are feeling 'blah'. Reports of low energy, weariness, lack of joy with little creativity are common. Some are feeling compassion fatigue, burn out and a bone-deep weariness.

I found an article written by Daniel Ritchie constructive.

<https://www.pastorscenter.org/blog/a-plea-to-exhausted-pastors-and-their-people>

Daniel writes in support of tired and exhausted ministry leaders. I commend it to you as a way of caring for the people who have carried your congregation/agency/Presbytery through the time of Covid, regardless of whether lay or ordained.

Things are not yet fully clear, and confusion is rife. Just because we no longer 'have to' doesn't mean we should cease being cautious and prioritising health and well-being.

As things open up and we begin the return to face to face activities, I urge you to go carefully, embrace what joy you can, and think about who the people of your wider community need your congregation to be - now and into the future. Together, may we resist the temptation of returning to what is familiar and comfortable - and so follow God into the future.

NSW and ACT COVID-19 Restrictions

Both the NSW and the ACT Governments have announced further easing of COVID-19 restrictions which come into effect from Friday 25th February 2022.

For **NSW** Congregations, these changes essentially mean there are no legally enforceable restrictions, while for **ACT** Congregations the only remaining restriction is the requirement for COVID-19 Safety Plans. Except for Safety

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Plans, the information in this Guidance Note applies to both NSW and ACT Congregations.

The easing of restrictions places responsibility for risk management with each congregation. Congregations have a responsibility under Work Health and Safety legislation to manage the risk of COVID-19 within their places of oversight. COVID-19 cases are still active in the community and congregations continue to report cases, so the risk is still very real.

As Congregations look towards easing restrictions, Synod is urging careful consideration of all relevant risks within each context. As with any safety risk, the congregation should seek to reduce the risk as far as reasonably practical.

As a guide, the following can be considered:

Demographic of gathering: Consider the type of gathering and whether there is a large proportion of people who would be more vulnerable to Covid.

Ventilation: Consider the level of ventilation within your building and the amount of fresh air able to be brought in. Please be guided by:

[COVID-19 guidance on ventilation.](#)

[Safe Work Australia improving ventilation.](#)

Number of people in available area: Density limits no longer apply; however, consideration should be given to how crowded an area would be given that physical distancing of 1.5m is still a government recommendation.

Masks: Are no longer required to be worn indoors, although both the NSW and the ACT Governments continue to recommend the wearing of masks. There are certain high-risk areas (e.g. public transport, health care facilities) where the wearing of masks is still mandatory. Although masks are no longer mandated for places of worship, Congregations may still ask participants to wear masks inside.

See the following for further information:

[NSW Government update on restrictions](#)

[ACT Government update on restrictions](#)

Singing: (and dancing) is allowed, however it is a high-risk activity. Consider the risks particular to your situation. For example, the ability to socially distance, vulnerability of people, are masks still being worn, etc.

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COVID-19 Safe Check-in: Is no longer a requirement, however continuing this practice enables a Congregation to be quickly notified of all positive cases on their premises. If check-in facilities are not utilised, then Congregations will be relying on those who have tested positive and been on site to advise them. Informing others they may have been exposed will also be far more challenging without clear records.

COVID-19 Safety Plans

For **NSW Congregations**, these are no longer mandatory, but will enable a Congregation to demonstrate their duty of care in taking all reasonably practicable steps to protect people. The plans contain worthwhile guidance and links to further information.

For **ACT Congregations**, Covid Safety Plans are still required.

[COVID-19 Safety Plans](#)

Morning teas, refreshments, and suppers: These may again be enjoyed, but criteria such as the space, potential numbers and mingling should be considered. Serve refreshments outside, wherever possible. How food and drink might be served requires careful thought. What are the risks of multiple hands touching food plates, etc., as opposed to a single person providing service?

Communion, Baptism, and collections: Consider the current risks that apply to your situation and how they might be minimised. For example, can the collection plate remain at a single location rather than passed from hand to hand; being mindful of physical distancing during a Baptism; and what covid safe practices should still guide the serving and receiving of Holy Communion.

Cleaning: There has been no indication that cleaning requirements have been relaxed. Please be guided by the following:

[Safe Work Australia – how to clean and disinfect.](#)

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What to do if you have a positive COVID-19 case onsite: If you become aware of a case, please advise all those who have been in attendance to monitor for symptoms and to consider testing. Attend to cleaning of the premises as per above. Please be guided by your [Response Plan](#) and report any cases to Synod to enable support and monitoring: [Report a Covid Case](#).

Further information and guidance from the Government for responding to an onsite positive case can be found [here](#).

Vaccinations: It is not a requirement for people to be vaccinated in order to attend a Place of Worship or church related activity. However, if a Congregation identifies this as a significant risk, or if there are potential participants in the high-risk category, alternate means of participation can be provided. The Congregation has the right to determine whether non-vaccinated people and people who are highly vulnerable should participate face to face or via an online forum.

[NSW Vaccinations and businesses](#)

[ACT Vaccination status guidance for business](#)

Third Party Hirers

It is expected that for most hirers, no restrictions will apply. If unsure, please check the COVID-19 rules for further information.

[NSW COVID-19 Rules](#)

[ACT COVID-19 Rules](#)

As always, you are encouraged to:

- Maintain 1.5m physical distancing, where possible and wear a mask if distancing is impractical
- Maintain hand hygiene
- Practice respiratory hygiene (cough and sneeze into elbow)
- Stay home when sick
- Maintain strict Covid safe cleaning regime
- Get tested if unwell

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Uniting Church
SYNOD OF NSW & ACT

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The information for NSW in this Guidance Note has been compiled based on information contained in a [Ministerial media release](#) prior to eased restrictions coming into effect on Friday 25th February 2022.

The NSW Government has yet to update their website with the new restrictions but if they differ from these, advice will issue accordingly.

The information for ACT has been sourced from the [ACT Government media release](#) and the [ACT Governments website](#).

Should you require further information, please contact:

Covid19@nswact.uca.org.au

kingsleym@nswact.uca.org.au

Regards and blessings,

Rev. Bronwyn Murphy
Associate Secretary

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