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# ACSA COVID ADVISORY GUIDELINES

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ADJUSTED RISK LEVEL 1- FEBRUARY 2022



## 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The ACSA Covid Advisory Team met on Tuesday the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 2022 to do the following:

- a) Examine the current level of infections and information about the pandemic
- b) To review the implications of the adjusted level 1 regulations based on cabinet decisions<sup>1</sup>- see notice Government Gazette guidelines as at 1 February 2022 and subsequent briefings from the Ministers of Basic Education and Health
- c) To analyse the impact of these measures on our life of worship and witness
- d) To determine what the most loving and appropriate response to these development ought to be and how this is translated into the updated guidelines for ministry.
- e) Covid likely to move from being pandemic to endemic and we need to move to living with COVID and taking what steps needed to keep ourselves and each other safe.
- f) We need to continue to be careful and observe the protocols.

The discussion took place against the following backdrop:

- i) We have just come out of the forth wave of infections- with the Omicron variant which is by far largely the most highly infectious variant but resulting in the mildest symptoms and less hospitalisation in the unvaccinated..
- ii) The country is at adjusted Level 1,<sup>2</sup> with calls for the removal of the state of National Disaster <sup>3</sup> following similar calls and intentions from other countries.
- iii) Schools have been fully opened and the need for social distancing has been relaxed. (66A) All other health and safety protocols remain in place.
- iv) Vaccinations remain our best defence against the virus and has to be encouraged- we may want to make vaccination compulsory for all ministers not only ordained ones.
- v) Do the provision infringe on our right of freedom of religion? We must understand that no right is absolute and that a hierarchy of rights have been confirmed by the courts. The right of someone else to life and health takes precedence over freedom of religion and laying our life down for the other is a central tenet of our faith and belief system so we could never in good conscience raise this as a debating point.

## 2. SOME OF THE THINKING THAT WENT INTO THE DECISIONS AS PRESENTED:

All schools are not able to provide the mandatory 1,5m social distance and accommodate the number of learners and hence it was necessary and

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<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.za](http://www.gov.za) Cabinet approves several changes to the Adjusted Level 1 Covid-19 regulations- 30 December 2021 extracted 10 February

<sup>2</sup> Government Gazette No R.1715

<sup>3</sup> Summary of Adjusted Level 1 Regulations as of 01 February 2022 and extracted on 10 February 2022 from [sacoronavirus.co.za](http://sacoronavirus.co.za)

considered appropriate for this provision to be relaxed. It is however still applicable to all other public spaces, including places of worship. The decision for this action is predicated on the need for education of young persons in order for them to have an opportunity to fulfil the fullness of their human potential and the right to universal access and free or affordable education is enshrined

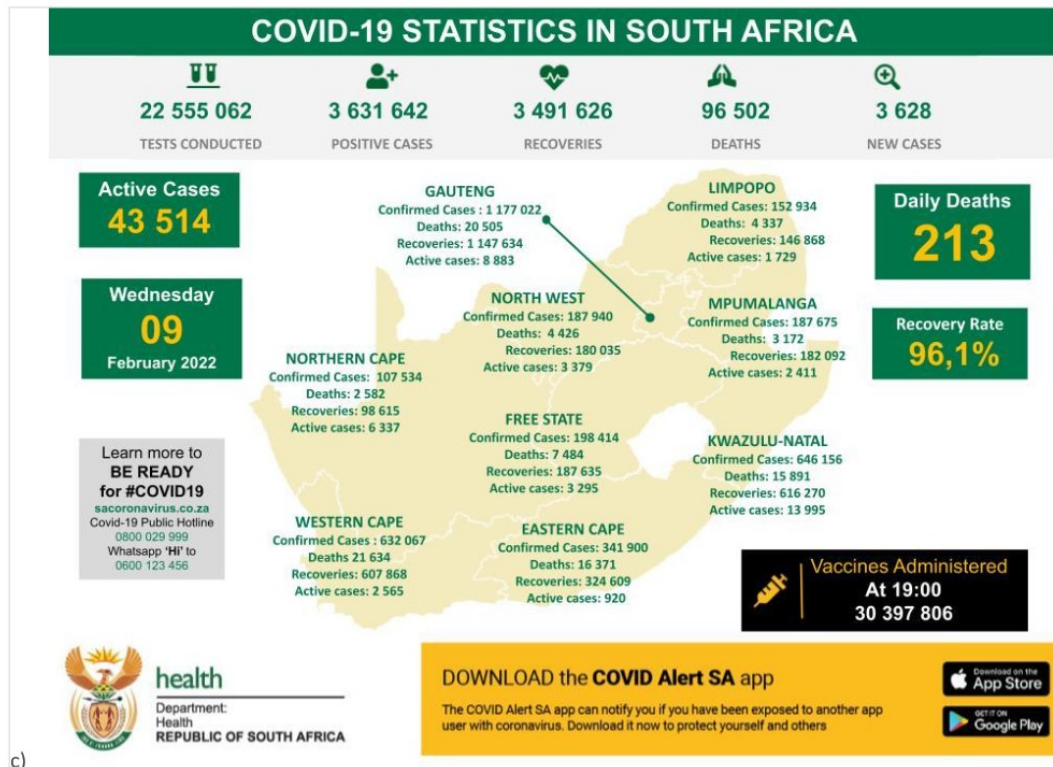
- a. The regulations in terms of faith based gatherings and funerals remain unchanged. (as updated on 30 December 2021 Regulation 69- 4(a)-to 7)
- b. The following are the other national changes that have been made:
  - i. Curfew has been lifted
  - ii. Persons who test positive and are asymptomatic are not required to isolate. Those who test positive and are symptomatic must isolate for a period of seven days or longer as directed by a medical practitioner. Refusal of treatment and isolation if instructed to still an offence.
  - iii. District municipalities are required to, after consultation with local municipalities, alert communities within the district of the increasing number of infections and to publish it in media and on websites.
- c. The requirements for screening and maintaining of registers as published in Government Gazette No. 1052 published on 1 October 2020 has not been repealed or amended and those provisions still apply.<sup>4</sup>
  - i. Singing with masks on has been permitted provided the social distance of 1,5m is maintained.
  - ii. COVID is still an airborne disease and is spread by aerosol droplets.
  - iii. The largest part of our membership is set in densely populated communities and are generally made up of older members who largely may have comorbidities and are dependent on public health services.
- d. The present death rate due to Covid-19 is recorded at 96 502 and the excess death rate is 296 224 <sup>5</sup>.
- e. The daily infection rate is at 3628 and the graphic below sets out the full picture of our current status.

## **Update on Covid-19 (Wednesday 09 February 2022)**

Feb 9th, 2022 | [Daily Cases](#)

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<sup>4</sup> Lawlibrary.org.za Directions Relating to Norms and Standards for Religious Gatherings extracted 10 February 2022



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### 3. GENERAL GUIDELINES

- vi) At present, this means:
  - a. Each parish must determine the maximum capacity of in terms of its size and display this in a prominent place.
  - b. The maximum persons that may attend is to be determined on this basis.
  - c. Our maximum number is 50% of venue size- failure to maintain this occupancy size commits an offence and this is attributable to both the convenor of the faith based gathering as well as any person attending it and is upon conviction, liable to a fine or imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months or to both such fine and imprisonment.
  - d. We must still adhere to all COVID-19 protocols.

The questions on everybody's mind remains in terms of what happens for Vestry, Ash Wednesday, Bible Studies during Lent, Marriages, Baptisms, Confirmations, Ordinations and Licensing, Elective Assemblies and Funerals. We will deal with each of these individually but again here are provisions that

apply throughout.

- All health protocols to be adhered to at all times.
- No touching of priest to worshippers or worshippers to each other. The exceptions and requirements for each of these are detailed in each section.
- Compliance officers to be appointed for each gathering and must be able to enforce the rules.
- Persons who have received a positive test result to please self-isolate and not attend worship services, so we don't spread the virus. This is one way we can be each other's keepers.
- Admission to persons with fever, coughing etc. **must** be denied.
- Venues must be well ventilated despite the cold- ask people who attend to dress warmly.
- Time of gathering to be kept to shortest possible period.
- Spending time in closed spaces and crowded places increases the risk of spread- it is 20 times higher indoor rather than outdoors
- We may therefore want to seriously consider having services outdoors if our set up and logistics make it possible.
- Sunday Eucharist still only to have communion in one form.
- Celebrant to sanitize before communication and each parishioner to sanitize before receiving.
- Singing with masks is permitted, with a physical distance of 1,5 meters between persons, including family members.
- Recorded music may be played
- Where possible, options for live streaming need to be explored. Each Diocese has been provided with a technological hub and creative ways of using this has to be explored.

#### 4. VESTRY MEETINGS

- A. The Canons require that all vestry meetings must be held by no later than the 15<sup>th</sup> of March each year. (Canon 27)
- B. Most dioceses have rules that set out the quorum for a vestry which on average is about 10 persons, it is therefore possible for Vestry to be held. There are some logistical challenges with notice periods and times, and so in order to be practical and responsible, the following principles have been agreed to:
  - a. Annual vestry for 2022 must be held.
  - b. All reports as required to be prepared and if possible, made available electronically and pasted on the notice boards.

- c. If hard copies are to be made available, then proper care needs to be taken in distribution- each person to collect copy for themselves.
  
- d. Voting where needed, to be done by secret ballot and attendees to be encouraged to bring own pen. If pens to be shared, must be sanitized.
- e. All members of the Parish who are in leadership, either as priest, warden, councilor, worship leader etc., also need to complete the Safe and Inclusive Church Declaration. (Found on website under Safe and Inclusive Church heading).
- f. Ordained ministers to provide copy of vaccination certificate to diocesan office.
- g. Please check general notes on protocols and safety set out above.

## 5. ASH WEDNESDAY

- i) In most parishes, Ash Wednesday is usually the service that has the highest attendance.
- ii) This year, any service we have is reduced to maximum 50 or 50% of building size whichever is smaller. This number to include the altar party.
- iii) So, parish councils will have to decide how best this can be done.
- iv) The priest or minister will bless the ashes at the beginning of the service and then say to congregation "turn away from sin and receive the good news or remember oh man that dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return":
- v) The priest or minister then to sanitize their hands and with no words being spoken, administer the ashes to the people through one of the following methods:
  - a. Use **biodegradable** ear buds or cottonwool to ash the forehead, again with no words to be spoken.
- vi) Directives or guidance in this regard to be given by the Diocesan Bishop within the parameters outlined above.
- vii) Regard must also be had to the legal provisions in other jurisdictions, as these may be more or less onerous in places.

## 6. LENT COURSES, RETREAT AND BIBLE STUDIES

- a) Bible and Lent courses can be arranged in person and retreats

are possible provided we stick to the number and health protocols and guidelines.

- b) Technology may also make it possible for councils to be innovative and groups can be organized on-line. Free zoom and team sessions are for 40 minutes so team leaders can be

assigned and helped to plan within this time. This may make at home retreats or quiet mornings also possible.

- c) Every Diocese has been provided with a technical hub and trained operators. Consideration has to be given as to how these can be optimally used for Diocesan and other joint services. Imagine being able to attend morning and evening prayer led by the Bishop or even having a joint Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday and Easter service led by the Bishop and Dean.
- d) Doing things this way will also make it possible for people who don't come out at night or have family responsibilities or those who have never been to a quiet morning or a retreat to participate.
- e) Just requires some planning and creativity on part of parish leadership.
- f) Events can even be planned across archdeaconries and so increase the participation of more in the mission and ministry of the church.

## 7. MARRIAGES

- a) Marriages may be conducted in church under the strict guidelines and protocols as set out.
- b) Given the close proximity between priest and couple, a negative Covid test result not older than 48 hours must be produced by the bridal couple.
- c) The bridal couple to do all the rites/symbols that require touching, the joining of hands with the stole, the lighting of candles etc., under direction of the priest,
- d) The rest of the bridal party to be positioned at least one and a half meters apart.
- e) The couple, if they wish to remove their masks during the service (not recommended in terms of the health protocols) would need to stand at least 2,5 meters from congregation.
- f) Witnesses who need to complete register as well as other parties need to sanitize before and after signing and the pen used to be sanitized after each use. Register also to be wiped down- please don't cross other ink!

don't erase other link:

- g) The photo of the bridal couple immediately after the exchange of vows may be taken without masks with the priest and all other parties to be positioned at least two meters apart.
- h) Marriages to be conducted at venues other than churches require Bishop's permission and guidance as venues may not always be fully observant of regulations and this poses a risk to us at church and so it ought to be discouraged.

## 8. BAPTISM

- a) Baptism may continue to be conducted in the context of the guidelines outlined in terms of number etc.
- b) The parents to hold the child being presented for baptism.
- c) The water of baptism to be blessed once and a special receptacle be used to catch the water that flows from the babies(generally) head into the receptacle, so it does not return to font.
- d) Priest to sanitize hands before and after anointing each child.
- e) Candles to be set out individually for each child so no additional touching or handing out. Parent or god parent to take assigned candle and light it from the Easter candle.
- f) Parents to bring paper towels for use after baptism which will be destroyed after use so special receptacle to be made available for this.
- g) Certificates to follow usual practice.
- h) Photographs as custom dictates but crowding to be avoided so as not to interfere with the reverence of the occasion and adherence to health protocols including physical distance/

## 9. CONFIRMATION, ORDINATION AND LICENSING

- a) Confirmation and Ordination services are permitted under the strictest guidelines and observances as prescribed for the rite of Baptism.
- b) Ordination to take place following the particular culture and practice of the Diocese concerned in terms of some of its customs, but the ordination itself has to follow the rites as prescribe in the Anglican Prayer Book and as part of our apostolic succession.
- c) Care however needs to be taken in terms of the prevailing Disaster Management Act Provisions and under the current alert level, indoor services are restricted to a maximum of 50% of the venue capacity whichever is smaller.
- d) Conditions and circumstances for the retreats of ordination candidates have been set out above.

- e) All ordinands to provide proof of vaccination prior to the start of the retreat.
  - f) Bishops may not ordain unvaccinated persons.
  - g) Venue to be big enough to be able to adhere to social distance and all other health protocols.
  - h) The number of ordinands that can be present at any service is limited to the above restrictions in c) above and are further restricted by the fact that the Bishop, together with Chaplain, legal officers and the minimum number of priests needed for the ordination to be legal, also have to be included in the number present.
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- i) Ordinations may also not be held in secret or discretely as the Canons make provision for an objection to be raised to the ordination by any person who has cause to do so and who then needs to leave the room and taken aside to hear the objection and follow necessary process as required.
  - j) The ordinand is required to prostrate him or herself before the altar and so space needs to be made available for the necessary social distance during this rite too.
  - k) All these requirements would strongly militate against ordinations taking place outdoors.
  - l) The same provisions would apply to Confirmation and the same considerations have to be applied.
  - m) It is suggested that a dropper is used for the oil and kneeling candidates hold outstretched hands. Three drops are posited with the words, "...in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit".
  - n) There is therefore to be no "laying on of hands" under any circumstances.
  - o) Careful planning and logistics is needed to ensure that we do not exceed the maximum number of attendees.
  - p) Licensing of clergy and other ministers of the church need to follow the same protocols and we may need to have more than one service in order to accommodate the numbers and do due justice to this rite.

## 10. ELECTIVE ASSEMBLIES

Elective assemblies are subject to the same limitations as any other gathering i.e., 50% of venue maximum number and all health protocols to be followed.

## 11. FUNERALS

- a. Funerals must be held in full compliance of all health protocols.
- b. A designated compliance officer must be appointed in writing.
- c. Attendance at funerals restricted to **100** if venue can accommodate while maintaining a social distance of 1.5 m between all attendees.

- d. Smaller venues are restricted to 50% of capacity of the venue.
- e. These numbers to include ministers and altar parties.
- f. Masks **must** be worn at all times.
- g. Singing with masks is permitted, although a soloist may perform, observing social distance and health protocols.
- h. Recorded music may be played.
- i. Funerals to be completed within **two hours**.
- j. No night vigils are allowed.

- k. When going to sympathize or express condolences to the family, please keep visit short, observe social distance, sanitize and wear a mask. These are hard asks of us all, but it is needed, to save lives.
- l. Social gatherings are permitted with health protocols being observed.
- m. No after tears gatherings are permitted.
- n. Undertakers may have specific rules, and these can be discussed in advance.
- o. The body of the deceased may/must enter the church unless good cause not to.
- p. This applies to all causes of death, including Covid.
- q. No special PPE needs to be worn to carry the coffin into the church and normal pall bearers may be used. Need to sanitize before and after.
- r. The face of the deceased may be viewed if precautions of a viewing window is available, - so a plastic or glass covering is needed to avoid any touching of the body of the deceased.
- s. Compliance officers need to be strict on this.
- t. At graveside, if at all possible, the last respects in terms of petals or handful of sand also needs sanitizer before and after.
- u. If burial, then, if possible, get a grader to complete the filling of the grave.
- v. If going to use mourners to do so, then spade handles, and the hands of the diggers need to be sanitized before and after digging and filling.
- w. The same number who attended the funeral needs to attend the burial or cremation. Crematoria are often smaller than churches so this needs to be considered when planning.

## 12. COMMUNION

There have been many requests for being able to do communion in both kinds with promises of being safe and doing it carefully. We have also been urged to consider making provision for use of individual communion cups. Issue of intinction have also been raised.

All of these matters have been considered theologically and a paper prepared by Bishop Raphael Hess sets out why communion in one kind is communion.

However, the most important matter we need to bear in mind is that the Government Gazette setting out the norms and standards for religious gatherings has not been amended or repealed. The norms and standards placed a prohibition on the sharing of substances so we **are still confined to communion in one form**.

### 13. IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTERS<sup>6</sup> IN ACSA?

- a. As a church, we commit ourselves to being “one holy catholic and apostolic church”.
- b. At our baptism, certain commitments are made in terms of our life and teaching.
- c. At consecration and enthronement, Bishops take an oath of obedience to the Archbishop.
- d. At ordination and licencing, we make oaths that we consider ourselves believers in this faith and doctrine, we subscribe to the 39 Articles of Faith, the Book of Common Prayer and we swear obedience to our licensing bishop. Clergy also commit to only using those orders of service as are permitted and authorised.
- e. We go on to further affirm our obedience and submission to all Resolutions of Provincial or Diocesan Synods as made and most importantly, still to be made.
- f. We are therefore **not a congregational church** and parish ministers are not free to ignore resolutions of the church, reasonable instructions from its leadership, or guidance from those whose task it is to provide it.
- g. The COVID Advisory Team is a constituted under authority of the Archbishop and all guidelines are approved by the Metropolitan.
- h. A strong directive has been issued around communion in one form only- no using of small cups- we are not congregational.
- i. Use of the common cup is prohibited until the Regulations are repealed or fall away. In terms of our doctrine and teaching, a law of the land is to be followed and observed unless it is inherently unjust or contrary to our teachings. In the present circumstances, there is no grounds to ignore the directive and any minister who is convicted for any offence as it pertains to these regulations, will not be defended by the church, nor will the cost of such defence be borne by it.
- j. All ordained ministers of the church **must be fully vaccinated by 31 December 2021** or return their licences to the authorising bishop. The only exception is a medical exemption and there is a firm process for this to be granted upon application. This exemption cannot be consented to by the diocesan bishop as it pertains to a resolution of this Province. A return will be required from the Diocese under the hand and seal of the Diocesan Bishop by no later than **30 March 2022**.
- k. The guidelines as issued have largely been followed but there are pockets of places

where this is not the case.

- l. Diocesan Bishops (or Vicar Generals as the case may be) are implored to ensure compliance and to issue the guidelines to Archdeacons and parishes within their See.
- m. A discussion with Synod of Bishops to outline the need for this will be held next week.

#### 14. CONCLUSION

Special thanks to the members of the team who continue to research, comment and engage on these matters and have contributed to preparing these guidelines.

MEMBERS: Dr Arthur Manning, Dr Ashley Peterson, Canon Delene Mark, Mr Rob Rogerson, Dr Pampata Mbekeni. Bishop Raphael Hess and Ms Rosalie Manning.

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<sup>6</sup> Minister is expanded definition as set out in Act XV, Pastoral Standards

