**Safety from COVID-19 Plan when Returning to Church Buildings**

Government authorities have lifted some restrictions allowing churches to reopen. There are however many safety requirements that need to be followed. This is to help prevent church members and visitors from contracting Coronavirus from others. People may not know that they are carriers of this nasty life-threatening virus. Listed below are some simple steps recommended by government authorities and medical professionals and what we have put together for SDA churches. We strongly recommend every SDA church adheres to these necessary precautions.

Posters

We suggest each church prints their own signage, which are freely available online.

SafeWork Australia website on COVID-19 has free posters that can be printed and displayed in churches and workplaces. We recommend each church prints these and displays them. The posters are:

* Simple steps to help stop the spread,
* How to hand wash poster,
* How to hand rub poster – (for use of sanitisers),
* Keeping your distance poster,

Other sources for free posters are:

* Coronavirus (COVID-19) campaign resources / Australia
* Free Printable Coronavirus Signage / Signs.com
* COVID-19 (Coronavirus) resources – NSW Health – NSW

**RETURN TO CHURCH BUILDINGS ACTION PLAN**

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| When to commence? | Each individual church board will decide when members return to services at their church. To help the churches remain a safe place from COVID-19, the following actions are recommended. |
| Preparing the church, other buildings and Sabbath School rooms | Posters:   * Display posters (as noted above) at locations where people will see and read them. Best have posters in various locations.   Sanitiser bottles:   * Locate plunger bottles of sanitizer in locations where church members need their use. Ensure bottles are full at start of function. The church might elect to obtain a battery powered sanitiser station.   Sign in sheets and pens:   * Provide sign-in sheets to record date, name of person, their contact phone number, time in and time out. Have one at each main activity area. This is important because if someone comes down with COVID-19, we can let members who mingled wiith that person, know. * Provide pens. Have two bottles, one for unused pens and one for used pens. Use disinfectant wipes to clean the used pens from time to time as need arises. * In the church it would be best to have the sign in sheet at one entry, closing off other entry doors so everyone records their name and details. * After the service, sign in sheets should be kept at a central location. They provide a record of who was in attendance should someone come down with COVID-19. It is important that everyone place their details on the sign in sheet.   Four metre square rule:   * Work out the number of square metres of each room of the church building. Divide your findings by four and this will give you the number of people that you can have in each individual room. Do this for the main church hall as well. Place signs on the entry doors to advise the number of persons allowed in each room for safety against COVID-19.   **Note:** Although families can sit closer together, the four square metre rule still applies for the total number of people allowed in a room or church hall.  Seating in the church and other rooms   * After determining the number of person who may be in a room or church hall, mark the suggested places where people should sit, so as to keep social distancing of 1.5 m and maintain the four square metre rule. * Remove any excess seating from Sabbath School rooms and store them once the number of seats has been determined. You can’t remove pews from the church but you can determine where people will sit.   Signs forbidding singing in church or Sabbath School rooms   * When people sing, their breath projects much further than when just talking or natural breathing. To prevent any probability of spreading COVID-19, in case someone has it, and doesn’t know, singing inside the building is banned until further notice.   Sanitise all surfaces   * Sanitise toilet areas, kitchen areas, seats, door handles and areas of doors that people breath or touch apply, and all areas where people may tend to touch such as the tops of the backs of seats.   Children’s play areas and equipment   * Parents of children in Sabbath School classes to sanitise the children’s play equipment after use so it is cleaned against COVID-19 for other users. |
| Person health & Wellbeing | Hand sanitizing and social distancing procedures to be followed at all times. Maintain 1.5 m distance from other persons.  If you become unwell:   * Cold and flu symptoms – don’t come to church. Remain at home. * Other symptoms – stay at home: sore throat, fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficult breathing, chills, runny nose, body aches, headache, muscle pain * If someone becomes unwell while at church, notify a Deacon or Elder or the Pastor and * Isolate the unwell person, and those helping should wear a mask. * Get the unwell person home, or if serious, to a medical centre or hospital. * All involved in helping the unwell person must then wash hands thoroughly and then sanitize them. * Let your Pastor know what was done. |
| Church and Sabbath School rooms Hygiene | When cleaning the church in readiness for church and Sabbath school lessons, ensure that all surfaces are sanitised.   * Sanitise where people normally tend to place their hands on. Each church may appoint members to do the sanitizing using disinfectant wipes or spray sanitizer and wipe with a cloth all areas where people’s breath can land. Ensure disposable gloves are provided when sanitising. Additional help over and above the normal church cleaning will be needed for sanitising. |
| Kitchen areas | Refrigerator   * Any half-used food or drinks left in refrigerators before COVID-19 should be disposed of and refrigerator cleaned out. Anything placed in the refrigerator for Sabbath activities should be used and the refrigerator left empty before going home. All external surface areas of refrigerator to be wiped with sanitized cloth or disintectant wipes before and after use.   Crockery & Cuttlery   * Avoid shared use of crockery and cutlery. Best to tape these cupboards and drawers closed while threat of COVID-19 is with us. If need of plates, cups, knives, spoons and forks, use disposable type.   Kitchen appliances   * Jugs, toasters, oven handles, refrigerator handles, microwaves, warmers, urns and any other appliance needs to be wiped down with disinfectant wipes or cloths.   Cupboards/cabinets, shelves, sinks and disposal bins   * All surfaces need to be wiped down after use with disinfectant wipes of cloths after use before closing up the church. |
| Church Lunches. Handling of food and drink either hot or cold. | * It is recommended that while COVID-19 remains a threat to peoples health, that all pot-luck and/or prepared meals be avoided. * If members want to enjoy each other’s company over a lunch, have each family bring their own food and drinks from home. * If staging a church lunch, the four square metre rule must apply so tables and chairs need to be properly spaced maintaining the 1.5 metre distancing as well. If it is a fine day, it might be preferable to stage a church lunch/picnic outdoors. * At end of lunch wipe down all tables and sanitise them and the chairs when putting them away or leaving stand for another day. * If anyone uses an appliance in the kitchen then follow the guidance provided for kitchens. |
| Toilets and bathrooms | The normal hygienic cleaning of toilets and bathrooms needs to continue according the church requirements. However as this is a high usage area for many attending church, all surfaces need to be sanitised before people come to church.   * The number of persons who can be in the toilet room at any one time is noted on the door. If when you enter you are increasing that number, go outside and wait until you can safely enter with the four square metre ruling. * In each toilet have a dispenser so that people can sanitise their hands after thoroughly washing them. Where needed due to activities throughout the day, have people wipe all surfaces in toilets at agreed intervals. * Provide signage that wipes must not be flushed down the toilet, but put in the garbage bin. |
| AV Equipment | As AV equipment is maintained and operated by different church members, the equipment, keyboards, desk/bench, chairs, and any microphones need to be thoroughly sanitized before and after use before locking up the AV equipment. This task might be appointed to the people operating the AV equipment. |
| Musical instruments | Piano, Keyboard and organ instruments   * On removal of cloth covers and setting up the piano, keyboard and/or organ, each instrument’s keyboard needs to be wiped with disinfectant wipes. Avoid any liquid form of sanitising so-as-to avoid any electrical faults. Sanitise the keyboard and surfaces again before closing and covering them.   String and percussion instruments   * Have each musician arrange the sanitizing of their own equipment. If such instruments are shared by others, sanitise the instrument before use by another person.   Wind Instruments   * Avoid use of all wind instruments during the COVID-19 pandemic system of returning to normal. When normal then re-assess the situation. |
| Light switches and power point switches | * Use disinfectant wipes to sanitise all light switches and power point switches and ends of electrical leads used during the service before locking up the building. |
| First aid equipment | * Ensure disinfectant wipes are available with the first aid kit as many people may have use of it. Keep some sanitised wipes with the kit to help protect against COVID-19. Provide a sign advising persons to wipe down the first aid kit immediately after use. |
| Shared equipment | * Printers, guillotines, scissors, glue sticks etc need to be wiped down with disinfectant wipes after use by each person. |
| Tithe and offerings | * Due to COVID-19, tithe and offerings will **NOT** be collected in the traditional way of passing around the offering bag. * We will still have an offering prayer (even if 100% of the offerings are given by eGiving * Members and visitors are asked to place their tithe and offering into a secure collection box. A collection box will be placed in each Sabbath school room and one next to the AV desk in the church. * We promote eGiving and a PowerPoint slide will enable the congregation to either donate their tithes and offerings in the offering box or use the eGiving app. * Offering boxes will be secured and treasury officers will take custody at the end of the service. * Treasury officers who count the offering will be provided with PPE – gloves, sanitizer etc. * We will shortly schedule a Zoom meeting to discuss these options – advantages and pitfalls. |
| Church library, bibles and hymn books | * To prevent transmission of COVID-19 from persons who may be carriers and not know it, the library will remain locked with no entry during this initial return to church from COVID-19 lockdown. Hymn books and Bibles will be placed in the library during this period. |
| Church board and business meetings | * Consider continuing church board and business meetings via Zoom as this has resulted in increased attendance and input from more church members. |