

Masks now required in churches across Archdiocese of Edmonton

Everyone must wear a face mask when inside church buildings.

That's the direction the Archdiocese of Edmonton has taken it responds to a new City of Edmonton bylaw requiring masks in public places. The mask requirement for churches comes into effect Aug. 1 and will apply to parishes across the Archdiocese, regardless of whether their local municipality has passed a mask bylaw.

Calgary has passed a similar bylaw, and other Alberta municipalities are considering doing the same.

In a statement July 31, the Archdiocese said the new directive will be reviewed once Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health, updates her guidance on masks or on Dec. 30, whichever comes first.

"As the province continues to reopen, we have witnessed an increase in the number of infections and so it is important that we redouble our efforts to protect our brothers and sisters in Christ," the Archdiocese said.

"We know that volunteers are doing most of the work involved in pandemic protocols, such as greeting and directing Mass attendees, recording contact information, and doing extra cleaning. We are extremely grateful for their faithful efforts."

The mask requirement does have exceptions, including children under two years old, persons who are unable to manage a mask without help, and those with mental or physical limitations that makes them unable to wear a mask. Volunteers are not being asked to police those who refuse to comply, since it may be impossible to tell whether someone has a disability that precludes their wearing a mask.

The priest celebrant will not wear a mask during the Liturgy of the Eucharist, but he will still be required to wear one before Mass, during the distribution of Holy Communion, and after the final blessing. Lectors are permitted to remove their mask when proclaiming/reading at the ambo. They should refrain from touching the microphone.

Until now, masks were encouraged during Mass but only required for those approaching the priest to receive Holy Communion.

The Edmonton bylaw requiring face masks in all public buildings as well as public transit was passed by city council on July 29 in a 10-3 vote.

“We did this because it is now broadly understood that face coverings in public can significantly reduce the spread of the virus,” said Mayor Don Iveson. “If paired with other public health measures... including washing your hands and practising physical distancing, this can help prevent future waves of infection.”

As of July 31, there have been 10,843 cases of COVID-19 in Alberta – 1,386 cases are still active, and 9,261 have recovered. The province reports 196 people have died from COVID-19.