

No date yet for resumption of public masses in Alberta

There's no date yet, but Alberta's Catholic bishops are working to develop a plan for the eventual reinstatement of public celebrations of the Mass amid COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

"It is critical that we understand the risks and take steps in minimizing the spread of COVID-19 through prudent planning," said Calgary Bishop William McGrattan, co-chair with Edmonton Archbishop Richard Smith of a task force mandated to develop a plan for gradual reintroduction of Mass in public.

"The health and safety of our parishioners, priests, and church staff are of utmost importance. Each and every life is a precious gift from God, and we are called to do everything in our power to protect them. This has been a tremendous sacrifice on the part of the faithful who strongly desire to celebrate the Eucharist in their parish communities. We are grateful for their cooperation, their patient endurance, and especially for their prayers."

In a May 15 statement, the bishops said they will present a plan to Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Alberta's chief medical officer of health, for feedback. It will take into consideration information from a telephone town hall with Hinshaw and Premier Jason Kenney set for May 21.

Public masses have been cancelled for the past month. The bishops say that any announcement of the date for the gradual reintroduction will be made at least five days before the first scheduled Mass. Parishes by then will have received diocesan guidelines which will help ensure everyone's safety.

As of May 15, [58 new cases of COVID-19](#) were reported for a total of 6,515 active cases in Alberta. The Alberta government reports 5,317 people have had COVID-19 and recovered. There have been 125 deaths.

The bishops' statement came a day after Alberta started the first stage of its three-stage relaunch strategy to allow the public into businesses, schools and churches.

The Alberta government has identified certain types of businesses that can open now, with infection prevention and controls in place.

Places of worship and funeral services are also allowed to open to small gatherings if they follow [sector-specific guidance](#).

Under those guidelines, worship services could be held but attendance would be limited to 50 people or one-third of normal service attendance, whichever is smaller and whichever allows for appropriate physical distancing.

Services shouldn't include handshaking, sharing of food or drink, or singing, which the government says is a high-risk activity because the virus can be transmitted through saliva or respiratory droplets. The government also recommends frequent cleaning and disinfecting.

Based on the success of Stage 1 of its relaunch strategy, the Alberta government says Stage 2 will allow additional businesses and services to reopen as well as the potential for opening of schools, with restrictions. There's no timeline on when Alberta will be ready for that stage or for Stage 3.

In Vancouver, Archbishop J. Michael Miller is preparing to release guidelines on the celebration of Mass in B.C. that will allow the reopening of some churches to public masses with a maximum of 50 people as early as the weekend of May 23-24.

Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island have indicated that they would gradually ease restrictions surrounding coronavirus lockdowns, but do so in stages.