

# Anglican Diocese of Christchurch: Policy Statement for Traffic Lights Framework

This policy statement is issued on 19 November 2021 in order the clergy and churchwardens may be guided in their planning for services and gatherings after the Traffic Lights Framework takes effect. At this point in time the final regulations concerning the Framework have not been issued, and the Prime Ministerial statement about the Traffic Lights Framework is expected on Monday 29 November 2021. The policy statement will be updated if the regulations and/or the statement make that necessary. This policy statement is issued by Bishop Peter and Standing Committee.

Issued: 19 November 2021

## Introduction

Recently the NZ Government introduced the “**Traffic Lights Framework**” (<https://covid19.govt.nz/alert-levels-and-updates/covid-19-protection/>) as part of its management of the Covid-19 Delta outbreak. The new Framework will take effect from a yet to be determined date in early December 2021. For a summary chart, see <https://covid19.govt.nz/assets/COVID-19-Protection-Framework/COVID-19-Protection-Framework-22-October-2021.pdf> .

This policy document is **the response of the Anglican Diocese of Christchurch to the Traffic Lights Framework**.

In our response to the potential of the virus to damage our health, the underlying principle the Diocese of Christchurch is working from is:

“Keeping ourselves and others safe from the COVID-19 virus.”

In this way we are biblically faithful:

“the one who loves another has fulfilled the law ... Love your neighbour as yourself”  
(Romans 13:8, 9).

Our policy here focuses on the situations in which the Government authorities determine that we are in “Traffic Light Green” or “Traffic Light Orange.” We will issue separate Guidance later for when we are in Traffic Light Red.

In the Traffic Lights Framework, the Government invites churches to choose between two options when they hold services (ordinary worship, weddings, funerals) and other gatherings:

**Option 1:** with a limited number of attendees (100, Green; 50, Orange) without requiring attendees to have a vaccination pass or

**Option 2:** with an unlimited number of attendees, providing every attendee presents a vaccine pass.

For clarity: all references to requirements for or expectations about people being vaccinated, are references to people aged 12 and over. Children aged under 12 are unable to be vaccinated at the present time.

## **Principles and concerns shaping our Diocesan Policy**

With Option 1, those who are vaccinated and those who are unvaccinated are almost certain to mingle together, and it is very likely that some vaccinated persons will choose to stay away from such services and gatherings.

With Option 2, those who are unvaccinated must stay away from such services and gatherings.

Either option potentially excludes people from worship and fellowship, and exclusion is the opposite of the inclusion churches generally seek to foster.

With either option, our Anglican understanding of our duty of care for our people is that we will pastorally care for all. Such care includes access to the sacrament of Holy Communion for the baptised and making available pastoral sacramental actions to those in need of anointing or reconciliation.

There is no option by which all worshippers in all ministry units in the Diocese of Christchurch will be happy with all arrangements made by our churches in compliance with the framework.

Our concept of “safety” must include concern for children’s health because children who cannot be vaccinated are part of our worshipping communities.

Similarly, some vaccinated adults are immune compromised or suffer in some other way which increases their vulnerability to the virus, even when fully vaccinated. The concept of “safety” includes concern for the health of our adults.

### **The policy set out here seeks to guide ministry units in our Diocese to maximise three key goals in an imperfect situation:**

- to be as safe as possible;
- to be as inclusive as possible; (where “inclusive” is about welcome, pastoral care, sacramental ministry, and best-effort community participation); and
- to be as adaptive to local circumstances as possible.

### **Our response to the Traffic Lights framework proposed by the NZ Government is that:**

1. All ministry units must follow Government regulations.
2. Policy determination (as permitted within the regulations) for services and other gatherings in each ministry unit is to be made by the vicar/priest in charge **and** vestry/church council.
3. “Gatherings” includes all meetings of groups, children’s ministries, youth ministries, and ministries to the elderly which take place on church premises such as a church, hall or church lounge, or which take place in another venue hired by the church, such as a local community hall or a campsite for the purpose of holding a camp or retreat. They do not include church gatherings held in private homes, which shall follow Government regulations for private gatherings.

4. Ministry units who wish to offer a service or services or other gatherings, for which each attendee needs to present a vaccination pass, are encouraged to do so.

Our recognition is that in some ministry units this decision will enable people to feel safe, and/or this decision will enable services/gatherings to be held at which more than 100 attendees are expected.

**Each ministry unit making such decision has the support of the Anglican Bishop of Christchurch.**

5. Ministry units who wish to offer services, to which both those who are vaccinated and those who are not vaccinated are welcome, are encouraged to do so, and these services will be limited to 100 persons or fewer in Green or to 50 persons or fewer in Orange.

**Each ministry unit making such decision has the support of the Anglican Bishop of Christchurch.**

6. In some cases ministry units will be able to offer within their programme, services and gatherings which require vaccination passes and services/gatherings which do not require vaccination passes;
7. In those ministry units where (6) is not possible, collegial consultation should take place within the local archdeaconry or with (a) neighbouring ministry unit(s), in order to fulfil (8) and (9)
8. Each ministry unit must advertise its own services clearly (e.g. on their website, social media, church noticeboards, newspaper advertising) so that attendees understand whether the service or gathering they are planning to attend will or will not require a vaccination pass to be presented by each attendee; will or will not involve vaccinated and unvaccinated persons being present together in the same event; and will or will not require the wearing of masks by every attendee.
9. Each ministry unit offering only one kind of service must advertise clearly where the nearest service can be attended which is the alternative kind of service, (or, if no alternative is available within reasonable distance, how an online Anglican service from within our Diocese can be accessed).
10. Where people aged over 12 have a Ministry of Health exemption from being fully vaccinated, each ministry unit will need to make a determination as to its local approach to participants in worship who have such exemptions.
11. In some situations (for example when a church is in a co-operating relationship with another church/denomination, or when a church and a school collaborate to offer a school service), the requirements above may be overridden by policy considerations stemming from a relationship with another denomination or institution, providing at all times:
  - a. all actions comply with Government regulations;
  - b. the stricter of the two sets of requirements are followed.
12. In all cases,
  - Mask wearing is strongly recommended; and Vestries are encouraged to decide that mask wearing will be mandatory for some or all services/gatherings within their respective ministry units.

- When a service is held with both vaccinated and unvaccinated persons present, masks should be worn by all attendees.
  - Singing shall only happen when people are wearing masks. Singers in a choir or music group may sing without a mask, providing the choir or music group is at least 2m distant from other persons present in the service.
  - Masks may be removed temporarily by a person leading parts of the service, reading Scripture, leading intercessions, giving notices or preaching; but the presider at communion and any assistant at communion must be masked through the Great Thanksgiving and distribution of communion to the people.
  - Communion is to be in one kind (bread) only when the traffic lights are Orange. It is recommended that when people are masked, they receive the bread and return to their seats to consume the bread.
  - Communion may be in two kinds (bread and wine) when the traffic lights are Green.
  - It is permissible for any president at Communion, with any concerns about the presence of Covid in the community when the traffic lights are Green, to restrict communion to one kind only.
  - Other guidance from the Diocese concerning The Peace, serving of food, hygiene, ministry to children, youth, the elderly, as previously issued for Covid Alert Level 2 or subsequently updated [<https://anglicanlife.org.nz/download/level-2-guidelines-8/>] should be followed.
13. In any situation where doubt as to the application of the policy arises, or difference of viewpoint within a ministry unit cannot be resolved, consultation with the Archdeacon should take place. Where necessary the Archdeacon will consult with the Bishop.
- The Bishop's ruling on any such matter shall be final.**