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Russian Orthodox Church Adopts Sweeping Anti-Coronavirus Rules

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Worshippers will still be able to kiss icons. **Igor Ivanko / Moskva News Agency**

The Russian Orthodox Church is instigating an unprecedented list of measures aiming to combat the spread of the coronavirus in its sacred spaces nationwide, it said in a statement Tuesday.

The Church drew controversy in recent weeks after video showed hundreds of worshippers lining up to kiss a holy relic in St. Petersburg's Kazan Cathedral as a worker stood nearby to wipe it with a cloth after every few uses.

The new orders, approved by Church leader Patriarch Kirill, include new sanitary standards for general liturgy services as well as baptism, communion and other sacraments. They also outline general hygiene recommendations for churches.

Churches are advised to refrain from allowing worshippers to kiss the cross at the end of a liturgy, the document says. Instead, priests should touch the cross to the tops of worshippers' heads. Worshippers will still be able to kiss icons, the document says, but churches are

ordered to disinfect the icons between each use.

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According to the Church document, *zapivka*, the traditional communion drink of hot water mixed with wine, should be served with individual disposable spoons. Church personnel should also wear disposable gloves when serving pieces of bread to worshippers. The document adds that worshippers should refrain from kissing the communion chalice.

Water used for baptism and anointing cannot be reused and the baptismal font must be regularly disinfected, the Church said.

Church staff must also regularly sanitize their hands throughout the day, ensure proper church ventilation and regularly disinfect surfaces like cathedral furniture and door handles.

The coronavirus has infected more than 180,000 people worldwide and 93 within Russia. It attacks the lungs and is primarily transmitted through air droplets produced when an infected person coughs. It can also be transmitted by touching one's face after touching an infected surface. Studies have said that the illness can be transmitted by those who don't show symptoms.

A Church spokesperson previously said it will not be closing churches or canceling religious proceedings. In its latest announcement, the Church said it will temporarily suspend Sunday schools, parish meetings and other club gatherings.

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