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Guidance

COVID-19: guidance for the safe use of places of worship

Updated 19 January 2021

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This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-2-december>

This guidance is of a general nature and should be treated as a guide. In the event of any conflict between any applicable legislation (including the health and safety legislation) and this guidance, the applicable legislation shall prevail.

This guidance is national guidance that applies across England.

This guidance is only applicable in England. For guidance in Scotland (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/>), Wales (<https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus>) or Northern Ireland (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-and-what-they-mean-you>), please refer to guidance from the relevant national governments.

We have also published guidance on Celebrating religious festivals during coronavirus (COVID-19) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/celebrating-religious-festivals-during-coronavirus-covid-19>).

Introduction

The UK is experiencing a public health emergency as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The transmission of COVID-19 occurs mainly through respiratory droplets generated by coughing and sneezing, and through contact with contaminated surfaces.

Places of worship play an important role in providing spiritual leadership for many individuals, and in bringing communities and generations together. However, their communal nature also makes them places that are particularly vulnerable to the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

The government continues to work with its Places of Worship Taskforce and faith leaders to review and amend this guidance, as necessary, in line with the changing situation and to enable the safe opening of places of worship for as broad a range of activities as possible when it is safe to do so.

This guidance applies to places of worship only. It does not apply to private dwellings.

It applies in England alongside the relevant associated changes to the law.

National lockdown

On 4 January the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown for all of England. There is different advice for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

These restrictions:

- require people to stay at home, except for specific purposes
- prevent people gathering with those they do not live with, except for specific purposes

- close certain businesses and venues

Where possible, when visiting a place of worship you should stay local and avoid travelling outside your local area, meaning your village or town, or part of a city.

See further information (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home#detailed-guidance-on-the-national-lockdown>).

Under the national lockdown, places of worship remain open for communal worship. This is now one of the very few legal exemptions that allow larger numbers of people to gather. It is therefore crucial that places of worship and those attending comply with both law and the COVID-19 Secure guidance.

Under these restrictions, places of worship in England must only open for the following purposes:

Individual prayer

A person, or single household, entering the venue to pray on their own.

The number of individuals or households permitted in a place of worship at any one time will be dependent on the size of the building and ability to socially distance therein.

Communal worship, including prayers, devotions or meditations led by a Minister of Religion or lay person

Limits for communal worship should be decided on the basis of the capacity of the place of worship following an assessment of risk.

Funerals

Funerals must have no more than 30 people.

Anyone working is not included as part of the 30 person limit. Please refer to COVID-19: guidance for managing a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>).

Commemorative events to celebrate the life of a person who has died

These are events which commemorate or mark the deceased's passing. Examples include the scattering of ashes and stone setting ceremonies. Such events must now have no more than 6 people in attendance. Anyone working is not included as part of the 6 person limit. These limits on attendance do not typically apply to communal worship services, where prayers for the deceased may be said.

Significant life cycle events, outside of marriage ceremonies and funerals

Where such events are an element of communal worship they may continue, but they are subject to the requirements for communal worship set out above.

Weddings and civil partnership ceremonies

Weddings and civil partnership ceremonies must only take place with up to 6 people. Anyone working is not included. You should only consider booking a wedding or civil partnership (or continuing with one that is already booked) in exceptional circumstances. This may be for example, an urgent marriage where one of those getting married is seriously ill and not expected to recover, or is to undergo debilitating treatment or life-changing surgery. Please refer to the guidance for small marriages and civil partnerships.

Broadcasting or filming an act of worship

Attending a place of worship for broadcasting or filming an act of worship is permitted but should only involve those people working or volunteering who are essential for the content of the service, and for technical support to enable people to watch and worship online or via a television or radio.

If musicians or singers usually form part of the act of worship that is being broadcast, they may participate but only if they are essential to the delivery of that act of worship. The numbers or people involved should be kept as small as possible to minimise risks and participants should follow social distancing guidance.

Childcare and education

For registered childcare:

- where this is provided by a person registered on the Early Years Register under Part 3 of the Childcare Act 2006
- where the child concerned is eligible to attend (as the child of a critical worker or a vulnerable child)
- where the place of worship is used as part of a school

For supervised activities for children:

- These activities are permitted to continue where the child concerned is eligible to attend (as the child of a critical worker or a vulnerable child)
- Numbers should be limited to the number of people who can safely socially distance in the venue in line with COVID-19 Secure guidance. See guidance on providers of out-of-school settings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/protective-measures-for-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>).

Essential voluntary and public services

These will include the provision of food banks or other support for the homeless or vulnerable people, blood donation sessions, or support in an emergency. See COVID-19 guidance for voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-guidance-for-voluntary-community-and-social-enterprise-organisations>).

Support groups

Support groups that have to be delivered in person can continue with up to 15 participants where formally organised to provide mutual aid, therapy or any other form of support - but they must take place at a premises other than a private home.

Where a group includes someone covered by an exception (for example, someone who is working or volunteering), they are not generally counted as part of the gatherings limit.

Examples include support to:

- (a) victims of crime (including domestic abuse)
- (b) those with, or recovering from, addictions (including alcohol, narcotics or other substance addictions) or addictive patterns of behaviour
- (c) new parents
- (d) those with, or caring for persons with, any long-term illness or terminal condition or who are vulnerable
- (e) those facing issues related to their sexuality or identity including those living as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender
- (f) those who have suffered bereavement
- (g) vulnerable young people, including to enable them to meet youth workers.

The limit of 15 does not include children under 5 who are accompanying a parent or guardian. Anyone working would also not be included.

Purpose of this guidance

Definitions

“Place of worship”

A place of worship refers to a building used for regular religious ceremonies, communal worship or similar gatherings by religious organisations. It includes the use of surrounding grounds, for example, adjoining car parks, courtyards or gardens for which the venue managers are also responsible.

The guidance also covers premises when being used for religious gatherings, even when their primary purpose is not for religious gatherings, such as a community centre. These premises will only be able to be used where they are permitted to be open and additional guidance may be applicable.

This guidance does not cover educational establishments public parks, private homes, cultural sites or other open spaces, such as woodlands which may be used for religious purposes. If people do want to engage in worship in these spaces, then the guidance relevant to that place should be adhered to.

This guidance applies to places of worship only, and does not apply to private dwellings.

“Significant life cycle events”

Events to mark or celebrate a significant milestone in a person's life, according to their religion or belief, such as events to celebrate a person's birth (other than a birthday) or coming of age. Examples would include a christening, or a naming ceremony. They do not include 'celebrations' or parties to mark these events.

“Worshippers” or “Visitors”

Those entering the place of worship to engage in worship or other activity for which the place of worship may be used.

“Venue managers”

The person or persons responsible for the management of an individual place of worship, including assessment of compliance with the following guidelines and relevant law. This may be a religious leader or volunteer.

“Household” and “Support bubble”

A household is a person or a group of people who live together in the same accommodation.

A support bubble is a support network which links two households. You have to meet certain eligibility rules to form a support bubble.

The 2 households that form a support bubble count as one household for the purposes of this guidance.

“Must”

Where the guidance states that an activity must or must not take place this is because it is a requirement under the law.

“Should”

Where the guidance that an activity should or should not take place this is not a legal requirement under law. However, it is strongly advised that consideration is given to following the advice being given to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

Key principles

Each individual place of worship is strongly advised to apply this guidance with reference to its own specific circumstances, including its size and type of activities, how it is organised, operated, managed and regulated.

Venue managers of places of worship will have discretion over when they consider it safe to open and should decide to remain closed if they are not able to safely adhere to the guidelines outlined below.

Venue managers should take all possible steps to secure the safety of the public, ensuring that gathering limits are adhered to. While places of worship will not be mandated to implement any further restrictions that a Local Authority may suggest to control the spread of the virus. Individual

venues should work with local authorities, neighbouring businesses and travel operators to assess this risk and apply any additional actions to reduce the risk of transmission. These could include:

- Further lowering capacity - even if it is possible to seat a larger numbers of people inside a venue safely, it may not be safe for them all to travel to and from, or enter and exit, the venue.
- Staggering entry times with other local venues and taking steps to avoid queues building up in surrounding areas.
- Establishing pre-booking arrangements so that, at particularly busy times, no more than can be safely accommodated arrive at the venue.
- Arranging one-way travel routes between transport hubs and venues. Advising visitors to avoid particular forms of transport or routes and to avoid crowded areas when in transit to the venue.

Many places of worship are also workplaces and should therefore be aware of their responsibilities as employers under health and safety law (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>). Places of worship also have a duty of care to volunteers, to ensure that as far as reasonably practicable they are not exposed to risks to their health and safety.

Consideration should be given to how fair and equal access can safely be provided for all users to be able to undertake faith practices within a place of worship, in line with government guidelines and considering requirements under the Equality Act 2010 where these apply.

To help decide which actions to take, we advise that a COVID-19 risk assessment is completed by each place of worship and for some events or gatherings this will be required by law. This may be done in addition to any risk assessment already in place or as a separate assessment.

This link provides generic guidance on completing a risk assessment (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/risk-assessment-template-and-examples.htm>). Assessments should be done in consultation with unions or workers (including volunteers and contractors) if relevant. It may also be beneficial to discuss the risk assessment with worshippers or other stakeholders (such as neighbouring tenants or property owners) to assist understanding among faith communities and local communities and improve reopening design and execution.

Failure to complete a risk assessment that accounts for COVID-19 could constitute a breach of Health & Safety legislation and could also lead to a breach of law.

Having a risk assessment with insufficient measures set out could also constitute a breach of the above legislation. Places of worship are encouraged to make their risk assessments available online where possible.

Venue managers are strongly advised to take action to minimise the potential for spreading of COVID-19 among worshippers, and those working or volunteering within the building and surrounding grounds. You may want to engage worshippers in co-designing an informal community behaviour agreement.

Adapting practices to reduce the spread of infection

Religious leaders should adopt the guidance below and seek to include additional changes that could be made to their religious rituals that usually involve close contact and shared items between individuals.

Places of worship and faith communities should adapt religious services, especially where ceremonies would otherwise have taken place over a number of hours or days, to ensure the safety of those present and minimise spread of infection. It is advised that the ceremonies and services should be concluded in the shortest reasonable time.

Once completed, participants should be encouraged to move on promptly, to minimise the risk of contact and spread of infection. If appropriate, you should reconfigure spaces to enable worshippers to be seated rather than standing which reduces the risk of contact.

It is recommended that, where possible, places of worship continue to stream worship or other events to avoid large gatherings and to continue to reach those individuals who are self-isolating or particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

The use of shared items

- Individuals should be prevented from touching or kissing objects that are handled communally. Barriers and/or clear signage should be put in place where necessary to avoid this taking place.
- Individuals should also avoid touching property belonging to others such as shoes which, if removed, should be placed and collected by their owner while adhering to social distancing principles.
- Reusable and communal resources such as prayer mats, service sheets, religious texts or devotional material should be removed from use. Single use alternatives should be provided as long as they are removed and disposed of by the worshipper.
- Items owned by the individual to aid worship such as a prayer mat or religious text, can be brought in but should be removed again by the worshipper.
- In circumstances where worshippers cannot bring their own books, places of worship should keep a selection of clean books for individuals to use. Clean books should be quarantined for 48 hours since their previous use and should be quarantined for 48 hours again after use. Items which cannot be easily cleaned should also be subject to the 48-hour quarantine after use.
- Please also refer to specific cleaning advice below.

Food and drink

- Where food or drink ('consumables') are essential to the act of worship, they can be used, however the sharing of food should be avoided, as should the use of communal vessels.
- If it is necessary to handle consumables as a part of a faith practice, those giving and receiving food items should wash their hands thoroughly before and after consumption, or wear gloves.
- The person distributing the consumable should release it, into the hand only, in such a way to avoid any contact between them and those receiving it, or wear gloves. If accidental contact does occur, both people should cleanse their hands immediately.

- Other actions taken to reduce the risk of transmission should also be considered, for example, foodstuffs should be prewrapped, and a system should be in place to prevent individuals from coming into contact with consumables and any dishes and/ or cutlery other than their own (for example the use of shared bowls).
- Speaking, singing and chanting should not happen across uncovered consumables (other than consumables to be used by the celebrant alone). Instead consumables should be securely covered, and prior to the receptacle being opened, it should be cleaned, hands should be washed or gloves worn.
- Hospitality spaces within a place of worship, such as cafes, are permitted to open but should be limited to service for consumption off the premises. Social distancing should be observed, and with minimal staff and customer contact in line with the hospitality guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/restaurants-offering-takeaway-or-delivery>).

Essential voluntary and public services

Under the national lockdown, a place of worship that is being used to provide food to the homeless or vulnerable can continue. Activities that are 'reasonably necessary' for the provision of voluntary or charitable services are permitted.

Please ensure that those attending do not mix or mingle with other households. All reasonable steps should be taken to minimise risks around transmission by cleaning equipment and utensils thoroughly between uses and avoiding the use of shared items. For further information on food preparation, please refer to the guidance for food businesses.

A place of worship may be used for essential voluntary and public services such as the provision of food banks or other support for the homeless or vulnerable people, blood donation sessions, or support in an emergency. See COVID-19 guidance for voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations.

Singing, chanting and the use of musical instruments

COVID-19 spreads from person to person through small droplets, aerosols and through direct contact. Singing, playing some musical instruments, shouting and physical activity increases the risk of transmission through small droplets and aerosols. Safeguards should be put in place to minimise opportunities for the virus to spread.

- Where singing or chanting is essential to an act of worship, this should be limited to one person wherever possible. Exceptionally, where it is essential to the service, up to three individuals should be permitted to do so. Strict social distancing should be observed and the use of Plexi-glass screens should be considered to protect worshippers, and each other.
- Communal singing should not take place. This applies even if social distancing is being observed or face coverings are used.
- Chanting, shouting and/or playing of instruments that are blown into should also be avoided in communal worship and in rehearsals.

Where communal singing plays a big part in worship, and recordings are available, we suggest you use these as an alternative to live singing. If a place of worship hosts a professional group for rehearsing you should follow the performing arts guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts>).

- Avoid playing recorded music at a volume that may result in people using raised voices or shouting to communicate when arriving or leaving for worship.
- Spoken responses during worship should not be in a raised voice.
- Good ventilation plays a crucial role in reducing transmission. Do what you can to improve ventilation whenever possible.

Weddings, funerals and commemorative events

- It is strongly advised that only essential aspects of these ceremonies take place at this time.
- No food or drink should be consumed as a part of the event unless required for the purposes of solemnisation.
- Those attending should socially distance from anyone they do not live with (or have formed a support bubble with).
- For further information on weddings and civil partnership ceremonies, please refer to the guidance for small marriages and civil partnerships (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/covid-19-guidance-for-wedding-and-civil-partnership-receptions-and-celebrations>).
- For further information on funerals and commemorative events, please refer to the guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>).

Outdoor worship

In the grounds of a place of worship:

- The law allows for multiple groups to pray in a place of worship or its grounds.
- People must adhere to social distancing between households.
- A risk assessment must be conducted and COVID-19 Secure measures implemented. The number of people who are able to gather will therefore be dependent on the size of the space available.
- A risk assessment should also consider the security of worshippers. This may require involving local partners such as the police.

Public outdoor spaces

Acts of worship should not take place away from the place of worship or its surrounding grounds.

Use of water

- Any pre-requisite washing/ablution rituals should not be done at the place of worship but carried out prior to arrival.
- In rare circumstances where it is necessary, washing facilities within the place of worship should be used in line with social distancing guidelines and hygiene measures applied.
- People should not wash the body parts of others.
- Where rituals or ceremonies require water to be applied to the body others present should move out of range of any potential splashing.
- Where an infant is involved a parent/guardian or other member of the infant's regular household should hold the infant.
- All individuals involved should thoroughly wash their hands before and after and ensure good hygiene.

Full immersion

- Where full immersion in water is necessary as part of a ritual or ceremony, this should be very carefully planned following the rules below.
- Those being immersed should be at least 2 metres away from the congregation and officiants at all times, except while they are being immersed.
- Only one person should be immersed at any time and they should only be attended by a single officiant/clergy member.
- During the immersion, clergy/the officiant can place their hands on the head of the person being immersed, but they should not 'cradle' the person or touch them in any other way
- Clergy/the officiant should wash their hands after each person is immersed, or if this isn't possible they should use hand sanitiser.

Cash donations

- Where possible faith leaders should discourage cash donations and continue to use online or contactless giving and resources.
- Where this is not an option, cash should be collected in a receptacle that is set in one place and handled by one individual, as opposed to being passed around. Regular cleaning and hygiene should be maintained, and gloves worn to handle cash offerings where giving continues.

Young people and children attending places of worship

- From 6 January, under the national lockdown, for education and childcare - you can only leave home for education, registered childcare, and supervised activities for children where the child is eligible to attend (as the child of a critical worker or a vulnerable child). Access to education and children's activities for school-aged pupils is restricted. See further information on education and childcare.

- Where eligible to attend, young people and children should wash hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with running water and soap and dry them thoroughly or use hand sanitiser ensuring that all parts of the hands are covered.
- Places of worship can help remind children and young people, and their parents and guardians, of the important actions they should take during the COVID-19 outbreak to help prevent the spread of the virus. Posters on general hand hygiene can be found on the eBug website (<https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/schools>).
- Specific guidance for out-of-school settings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/protective-measures-for-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>) has been published and should be followed when providing tuition, training, instruction or activities outside normal school hours (such as evenings, weekends, school holidays) for those who are eligible.
- For formal childcare and educational settings refer to the relevant guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-educational-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020>)
- Any shared facilities for children, such as play corners, soft furnishings, soft toys and toys that are hard to clean, should be removed and/or put out of use.
- Outdoor playgrounds are permitted to open where venue managers risk assess that it is safe to do so, see guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms>). Particular attention should be paid to cleaning frequently touched surfaces by children and those that are at child height.

General actions to reduce the spread of infection

Test and trace

The NHS Test and Trace service (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/>):

- provides testing for anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 to find out if they have the virus
- gets in touch with anyone who has had a positive test result to help them share information about any close recent contacts they have had
- alerts those contacts, where necessary, and notifies them they need to self-isolate to help stop the spread of the virus

Further information can be found online including for contacts of people with possible or confirmed COVID-19 infection who do not live with the person, and for places of work.

(<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/nhs-test-and-trace-workplace-guidance#about-the-nhs-test-and-trace-service>).

Venues should assist this service by keeping a temporary record of visitors for 21 days, in a way that is manageable for your place of worship, and assist NHS Test and Trace with requests for that data if needed for contact tracing and the investigation of local outbreaks. You should also display official NHS QR code posters so that those with the app can scan in.

Find further information (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/maintaining-records-of-staff-customers-and-visitors-to-support-nhs-test-and-trace>) on maintaining records of staff, customers and visitors to support NHS Test and Trace.

When collecting the names and contact details of people attending your place of worship, you should ask for their consent. This is because of the potentially sensitive nature of the data collected in these circumstances, which is protected by law. Guidance on collecting visitor details for Test and Trace, including issues around consent, is provided by the Information Commissioner's Office. You should make clear that giving contact details is optional and is not a condition of attending your place of worship. We have created a template form for collecting consent at places of worship, available in Annex B.

Face coverings

In England, face coverings are required by law to be worn in places of worship.

There are valid exemptions for some individuals and groups to not wear a face covering in these settings. In particular, those who are leading permitted services or events in a place of worship, and those who assist them

See guidance on the wearing of face coverings at a place of work (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>). For more information please see guidance on face coverings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>).

Social distancing

Social distancing measures are actions to reduce social interaction between people in order to minimise the opportunity for transmission of COVID-19.

All venue managers and all visitors to a place of worship must follow the law and should follow the guidance on social distancing including:

- adhering to social distancing, meaning people should be 2 metres apart or more than 1 metre apart as well as taking extra steps to stay safe (such as wearing face coverings) to reduce the risk of transmission
- for frequently used places, mark areas using floor tape or paint to help people maintain social distance
- visitors must not mingle with anyone outside of their household or support bubble when attending a place of worship

You should consider and set out the additional actions you will take to reduce the risk of transmission in your risk assessment. These could include, for instance, avoiding any face-to-face seating by changing layouts, reducing the number of people in enclosed spaces, improving ventilation, using protective screens and face coverings, and closing non-essential social spaces, as outlined throughout this guidance.

Queue management is important so the flow of groups in and out of the premises can be carefully controlled in a socially distanced way, reducing the risk of congestion or contact. Considerations should be made for how to manage those waiting outside a place of worship, including the

introduction of socially distanced queuing systems.

All religious practices should be carried out to try ensure social distancing can be maintained between individuals from different households. This is to reduce the risk of transmission. There should only be a closer distance when absolutely essential to enable a faith practice to be carried out (for example contact with the faith leader). Time spent in contact should be kept to an absolute minimum.

Other actions to take to reduce the risk of transmission to support social distancing could include:

- Those leading the worship reminding congregants of the importance of social distancing and hygiene.
- Introducing a one-way flow in and out of the premises with appropriate floor markings or signage, with restrictions on accessing non-essential areas. At the end of worship, this could include worshippers leaving one row at a time, in order to prevent crowding at entry or exit points.
- Multiple entry points could be opened, and clear signposting or assistance could be offered to guide worshippers and to avoid congestion.
- Staggering arrival and departure times will reduce the flow at exits and entrances as well as reduce any impacts on public transport. Venues could also consider introducing a booking system to help facilitate this. You may want to consider how prioritisation could be given to people who may have a specific need or requirement.
- Using screens, barriers or alternative rooms and spaces to separate worshippers.
- Any changes to entrances, exits and queues should take into account reasonable adjustments to accommodate those who need them, such as worshippers with physical disabilities.
- Introducing a booking system to help with managing numbers, particularly for services where demand will be high.
- Venue managers advertising set days or times when places of worship are open solely for those particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, such as those over 70 or clinically vulnerable.
- Leading worship in different spaces of the place of worship to limit the number of people in any one location - while avoiding risk of crowding at entry/exit points.
- Where social distancing cannot be maintained, extra attention needs to be paid to cleaning and hygiene to reduce the risk of transmission. Consider how well ventilated the venue is and improve this where possible, for example by fixing doors open where appropriate.

The above advice on social distancing also applies when travelling to and from a place of worship. Decisions to reopen car parks are to be made locally and practical measures such as changing the car park layout to help people socially distance should be considered. Guidance on social distancing relevant to transport, parking and the public realm can be found in guidance for passengers who need to travel during the coronavirus outbreak

(<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers>). This is being regularly reviewed and updated.

People who are symptomatic

Anyone showing symptoms of COVID-19 (a new continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell) should not attend the place of worship due to the risk that they pose to others; they should self-isolate at home immediately with other members of their household. Remote participation should be considered, for example by live streaming. This applies equally to individuals who work at the place of worship.

Individuals who are self-isolating due to a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the household

Where individuals are self-isolating due to a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the household, or because they have been requested to so by NHS Test & Trace, they must only participate remotely.

For a funeral, even if you are a close family member of the deceased, we strongly recommend that you attend remotely, if possible, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread to other mourners. However, if after careful consideration of the risk, you choose to attend in person, it is essential that you follow the precautions outlined in the guidance for arranging or attending a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic>).

Hygiene

On entering and leaving a place of worship, everyone, including staff, should be asked to wash their hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds using soap and water, or to use hand sanitiser if hand washing facilities are not available.

There should be signs and posters to build awareness of good handwashing technique, the need to increase handwashing frequency, avoid touching your face and to cough or sneeze into a tissue which is binned safely, or into the crook of your sleeved arm if a tissue is not available.

You should provide hand sanitiser in multiple locations in addition to toilet facilities.

Toilets

Toilets inside or linked to places of worship should be kept open and carefully managed to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Steps that will usually be needed to make the use of toilets as safe as possible:

- using signs and posters (see Hygiene above)
- using social distancing marking in areas where queues may form, and the adoption of a limited entry approach, with one in, one out (whilst avoiding the creation of additional bottlenecks)
- to enable good hand-hygiene make hand sanitiser available on entry to toilets where safe and practical. And ensure suitable handwashing facilities including running water and liquid soap and suitable options for drying (either paper towels or hand dryers) are available. Communal towels should be removed and replaced with single use paper towels.

- set clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets, with increased frequency of cleaning in line with usage. Use normal cleaning products, paying attention to frequently hand touched surfaces, and consider the use of disposable cloths or paper roll to clean all hard surfaces
- keep the facilities well ventilated, for example by fixing doors open where appropriate and safe to do so
- special care should be taken for cleaning of portable toilets and larger toilet blocks
- putting up a visible cleaning schedule that is kept up to date
- providing more waste facilities and more frequent refuse collection

Cleaning

All surfaces, especially those most frequently touched such as door handles and rails, should be regularly cleaned using standard cleaning products. See guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>). Sufficient time needs to be allowed for this cleaning to take place, particularly before reopening for the first time or between different types of permitted activities. Frequently used objects, surfaces or spaces, including for example doorways between outside and inside spaces should be given particular attention when cleaning.

Historic England has also produced guidance on cleaning historic surfaces (<https://historicengland.org.uk/coronavirus/historic-places/cleaning-historic-surfaces/>), which might not be suitable for cleaning using standard cleaning products.

A decision should be made locally on how frequently cleaning should take place based on an assessment of risk and use of the building.

See guidance on waste disposal in non-healthcare settings (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-disposing-of-waste#cleaning-waste>).

Protecting the vulnerable

There should be a particular focus on protecting people who are clinically vulnerable and more likely to develop severe illness, including people who are aged 70 or older, regardless of medical conditions.

Individuals who fall within this group are advised to keep social contacts low and maintain social distancing from those they do not live with.

There is a further group of people who are defined, also on medical grounds, as clinically extremely vulnerable to coronavirus – that is, people with specific serious health conditions. There is additional advice that clinically extremely vulnerable people must follow.

From 6 January under the national lockdown, if you are clinically vulnerable, you could be at higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus. There is additional advice for people who are clinically extremely vulnerable to coronavirus. Those who are clinically extremely vulnerable should follow resumed shielding guidance and should not attend work, school, college or university. You should limit the time you spend outside the home. You should only go out for medical appointments, exercise or if it is essential. For further information, please see guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19.

How can places of worship communicate this guidance to visitors?

Each place of worship is strongly advised to implement the measures set out in this guidance and complete any recommended risk assessments for the safety of all those who visit and work there. The government strongly advises each place of worship ensures that visitors follow social distancing guidelines.

Many faiths have issued specific guidance to their faith communities about some of these issues. You may wish to make the government's information on COVID-19 available to your faith community and others, in order to challenge misinformation.

You should consider informing certain groups of people (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19#clinically-extremely-vulnerable-groups>) who may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, of the symptoms of COVID-19 and current stay at home and social distancing guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-people-with-confirmed-or-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>), and strongly discourage them from attending faith gatherings during this time or set aside a time for them to attend for individual devotions.

Places of worship and faith leaders should consider how guidance can be communicated to visitors, including before they visit, in a way that is accessible and appropriate for the cultures, languages and reading levels of communities served by the place of worship.

Protective security

Adapting a place of worship to COVID-19 measures will inevitably result in changes to operating policies, processes and procedures at the place of worship. Any changes to these should always be considered with regard to security implications.

In implementing this guidance places of worship in place should continue to take account of protective security considerations to maintain effective security of the premises, all staff and visitors, especially around entry and exit procedures, and any queueing or crowding outside the building where people can be more exposed.

Individuals with responsibility for the security of the venue should be consulted and involved throughout to help ensure good security is maintained as far as possible and that there are not any unintended security consequences as a result of any changes that are made. An assessment of risk should be undertaken on any new measures or changes in operation to ensure risks have been considered and all practical actions taken to reduce the risk of transmission identified and put in place

It is up to each place of worship to assess the level of risk, and places of worship may choose to delay opening if they do not feel they are able to safely do so under current social distancing measures.

In the process of completing a risk assessment you should consider the security factors at Annex A.

Enforcement

It is important to be aware of the enforcement provisions, as is the case for other sectors.

Where the enforcing authority (usually your local authority), identifies responsible individuals who are not taking action to comply with the relevant public health legislation and guidance to control public health risks (including this guidance), they will consider taking a range of actions to improve control of risks. For example, this would cover employers not taking appropriate action to ensure social distancing, where possible.

Under existing Health & Safety legislation (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/legislation/hswa.htm>), failure to complete a risk assessment that accounts for COVID-19 could constitute a breach of that legislation, as could having a risk assessment with insufficient measure.

The actions the enforcing authority can take include the provision of specific advice to employers to support them to achieve the required standard, through to issuing enforcement notices to help secure improvements. Serious breaches and failure to comply with enforcement notices are against the law with serious fines and even imprisonment for up to 2 years.

Employers are expected to respond to such actions or any advice or notices issued by enforcing authorities rapidly and are required to do so within any timescales imposed by the enforcing authority. The vast majority of employers are responsible and will join with the UK's fight against COVID-19 by working with the Government and their sector bodies to protect their workers and the public. However, inspectors are carrying out compliance checks nationwide to ensure that employers are taking the necessary steps.

Annex A: Risk assessment for protective security - factors to consider

A risk assessment that considers protective security should be conducted in addition to, or as part of, any health and safety/ fire safety or other broader assessment of the hazards and threats to the people in and around the place of worship as a result of changes made to how that place of worship functions.

Queues, social distancing and security

Whilst busy crowding is unlikely if social distancing is operating correctly, the revised layout of spaces could present new security risks, particularly where multiple queues are created. Consideration should be given to the following:

- Venue managers should wherever possible, and in line with social distancing, organise queuing within existing protected areas; venue managers should not remove any security features or useful street furniture items without considering protective security in the round.
- If queuing is only possible outside of protected areas then venue managers should consider and mitigate any vulnerabilities by: routing queues behind permanent physical structures (such as street furniture, bollards, trolley parks & bike racks) to provide a visual deterrent and delay; closing off vehicle access to shared spaces; adjusting servicing and delivery times; reducing the opportunities for vehicles to interact with pedestrians; erecting robust barriers; introducing a reduced speed limit mandated using traffic calming.

- Venue managers should avoid making public at the site or online, detailed information about queue locations, times and number of people or removal of security features such as street furniture and bollards.

Staff, security officers/ volunteers and stewarding

It is vital for staff to remain vigilant and act on potential security threats including terrorism and wider criminality. They should:

- Continue to ensure that awareness of security threats is raised alongside health and safety risks through staff briefings.
- Whilst stewards, and in some cases security officers, may be focussed on managing people and queues for COVID-19 safety reasons, they should continue to remain vigilant for and report any suspicious activity as soon as possible.
- Ideally consider having separate stewarding for managing social distancing and health and safety aspects, and for security as this will allow proper due attention to be given to keeping the site safe from threats.
- Ensure there is a good communication system in place to inform people of any incident. Carry out a short exercise or test to check procedures and equipment for this are working correctly.

For further information see the Centre for Protection National Infrastructure (CPNI) and National Counter Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO) for specific security advice related to COVID-19.

Helpful information can also be found at the following websites:

CPNI advice:

- All COVID-19 security advice (<https://www.cpni.gov.uk/staying-secure-during-covid-19-0>)
- Advice on protecting queues from hostile vehicles
(<https://www.cpni.gov.uk/system/files/documents/cd/fa/The%20risk%20to%20pedestrians%20from%20Vehicle.pdf>)
- Advice on hostile reconnaissance
(<https://www.cpni.gov.uk/system/files/documents/23/de/understanding-hostile-reconnaissance-understanding-and-counteracting-the-threat.pdf>)
- COVID-19 workplace actions campaign (messaging about distancing and hygiene)
(<https://www.cpni.gov.uk/covid-19-workplace-actions-0>)

NaCTSO advice:

- General Security advice (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/national-counter-terrorism-security-office>)
- Sector Specific Crowded Places Guidance
(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/820082/170614_crowded-places-guidance_v1b.pdf)
- Action Counters Terrorism e-learning (<https://ct.highfieldelearning.com/>)

- Action Counters Terrorism Mobile App - Available at Download the Urim app in Google Play (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.app.urim&hl=en>) or App Store (<https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/urim/id1310305478>). Then email ct@highfieldlearning.com to request a user name and password. Please note access is for business/professional use only.

Annex B: Template form for collecting consent and contact details for attendees at places of worship

In order to support the NHS Test and Trace programme, we are taking contact details (name and telephone number) for all visitors, as well as recording times entering and leaving [name of place of worship].

In line with guidance issued by the Department for Health and Social Care, we will keep your details safely and in compliance with GDPR legislation for 21 days before securely disposing of or deleting them. We will only share your details with NHS Test and Trace, if asked, in the event that it is needed to help stop the spread of coronavirus. We will not use your details for any other purposes or pass them on to anyone else.

Thank you for your understanding.

If you agree to providing your information for this reason, please complete the following form:

Name	
Tel. No	
Signature	
Date	

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