

Planning to Re-open for worship.

The guidance and forms that you will need to use for activities in church buildings are in this tree of tabs. Here we offer a route towards opening for worship and we will provide a draft risk assessment form that you can use as a starting point. The comments herein are consistent with the Government guidelines for opening after July 4, 2020 and last updated on August 18, 2020.

The key points are:

- Minimise the risk of infection before the event by having clean surfaces and a fresh air space.
- Minimise the risk of infection during the event by avoiding interpersonal contact, passing of items between people and taking steps to minimise sharing of respiration.
- Ensure the cleaning and/or quarantining of the church and its contents after the event.

To open a church for worship, a risk assessment must be prepared for that activity, agreed by the church stewards and then agreed by the Superintendent. Please discuss the drafts with me before sending them to Sue. Once a church has an agreed opening procedure in place, subsequent risk assessments should be signed off by a steward or stewards. Again, I would be pleased to discuss these with you.

During lockdown

Buildings should have been inspected regularly, to ensure the building is sound, utilities are operable and anti-legionella steps are taken.

What type of worship?

Protocols for worship and prayer, defined as *Communal Worship*, have been provided:

- *Congregations should avoid singing, shouting, raising voices and/or playing music at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult or that may encourage shouting.*
- *Individual and choir singing is allowed, and singing groups can rehearse and record indoors.*
- *Spoken responses during worship should also not be in a raised voice.*
- *Activities such as singing, chanting, shouting and/or playing of instruments that are blown into should be specifically avoided in worship or devotions. This is because there is a possible additional risk of transmission ...and this applies even if social distancing is being observed or face coverings are used.*
- *Where essential to an act of worship, one individual only should be permitted to sing or chant, and the use of plexi-glass screens should be considered to protect worshippers from them, as this will further prevent transmission and the screen can be easily cleaned.*
- *Recordings of music are available and may be alternatives to live singing.*
- *You are advised that all musical instruments can be used. Organs can be played for faith practices, as well as general maintenance, but should be cleaned thoroughly before and after use.*

This then allows the use of, for example, keyboard and stringed instruments and digital sources, provided all are properly cleaned. Sound amplification for speakers can reduce their voice levels to conversational.

In terms of communion, the following guidelines are relevant.

- *Where food or drink 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*
- *Speaking, singing and chanting should not happen across uncovered consumables (other than consumables to be used by the celebrant alone). Instead consumables must be securely covered, and prior to the receptacle being opened, should be cleaned, hands must be washed or gloves worn.*

Who can come?

Gatherings of more than 30 people will still not be permitted apart from certain public spaces. The maximum number of people in the space should be ‘*decided by the venue manager*’, in our case the church stewards/ leadership team.

In terms of children, the following applies:

- *Young children should be supervised by the parent or guardian. They 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.*
- *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.*

There is also advice for those classes as clinically vulnerable:

- *Individuals who fall within this group are advised to stay at home as much as possible and, if they do go out, to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside of their household.*
- *Individuals who are shielding should continue to follow the government’s advice on shielding.*

Ensure they know what is expected of them and agree to do so

The chance of carrying out a worship (and any other) session in a safe way is greater if people know the guidelines operating and agree with them. Worshippers/visitors should then feel more at ease at event. There is emphasis on this in the guidance, for example:

- *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.

Signage in the church should be used as a reminder.

Preparing the worship session

This is key to a safe gathering and setting it up will be a tricky time for stewards and their helpers, but by thinking through what people do at the service, it will be possible in some venues to provide a Covid-safe worship session. We start from the assumption that the weekly checks and maintenance of water integrity have been carried out and the church has been thoroughly cleaned, accordingly to the Methodist advice.

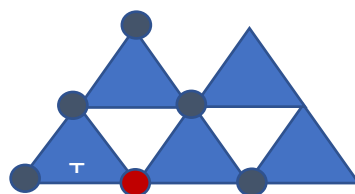
Both in terms of entrance and exits, queue management is important to avoid close contacts. This advice was published in June:

- 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.

Whether use of multiple exits is helpful will depend upon the venue. Staggered entry times can be used can be a possibility to minimise queuing, but this may well not be sensible if there is a single worship time, room and a maximum below 30 people.

On entry, and departure, everyone should wash their hands thoroughly or use a hand sanitiser. It seems most practical to provide a sanitiser at entrances, exits and other locations, together with paper towels and waste bins. Toilets should be available and cleaned with sanitisers before and after use. They should be well ventilated.

In addition to good hygiene, establishing social distancing is a key element in Covid-19. The scientific advice within the UK favours a minimum separation of 2 metres for face-to-face interactions.¹ The alternative '1+' implies additional mitigation measures which can be the wearing of face masks, enhanced ventilation and seating arrangements that avoid close face-to-face contact.



One possible seating arrangement is based on triangles. The person sitting in the red seat could be set to be, say, 2 m away from the neighbours in the row and the near neighbours in front. The nearest person in front would be 3.5 metres away.

Face coverings are now to be used in indoor public spaces by most people over the age of 11 when not eating or drinking. Speakers at services must either be located at a distance of

¹ This is substantially based on a research paper from the University of Hong Kong and Zhejiang published in March 2020. The findings were that the majority of exposure is reduced at a 1 metre separation, but there is still a very significant further reduction at 2 metres.

over 2 metres and or may speak from behind a screen. Speakers should refit their mask as they leave this location.

We should maintain a social distance norm of 2 metres, and consider reductions of that only when it is clear that we have sufficient mitigations to reduce that towards, but not below 1 metre. At this stage we do not recommend that the use of face coverings allows us to reduce the 2 metre distancing unless other mitigations are in place.

During the session

Attendance and contact details should be noted for Test and Trace purposes, and a form for doing this is provided in the Forms tab. This data should be destroyed after 21 days.

Some services begin and/or end with refreshments. Relevant guidance for this includes the avoidance of shared items. As we will see, this is set around items in worship, but the avoidance of passing on unwashed items by unwashed hands clearly applies to cups and plates. In addition, the mode of service is prescribed:

- *Hospitality spaces within a place of worship are permitted to open but should be limited to table-service, social distancing should be observed, and with minimal staff and customer contact in line with the hospitality guidance.*

A viable method may be to have table service with used items moved by the user into a separate quarantined area before transfer for washing.

The strong advice is for items associated with worship, such as Bibles and hymnbooks, is that if needed they should normally be brought by the worshipper are kept by them. Service sheets should probably be avoided but if used, they must be removed and disposed of by the worshipper. There is guidance to allow the use of church-owned resources, such as worship or music books:

- *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.*

This 48-hour period appear to be sufficient to allow the decay of viruses on paper and card.

In terms of offerings, the advice strongly favours cashless giving:

- *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.*

A viable option is to store cash offerings in a safe place for 72 hours before counting and recording.

The planning of the event should include the eventuality of someone becoming unwell with Covid-19 symptoms. Hence a quarantine area should have been identified and appropriate PPE be available for anyone attending to them. They are advised to return home if they are able and contact NHS 111 online.

After the event

Although viruses cannot replicate without a host, and thus they will lower in concentration with time, it is probably best practice to complete a cleaning process to prepare the venue as you would wish to find it for use. The air spaces should also be ventilated. Any quarantined material should be left in a specific area and labelled with the period of quarantine.

At this stage we consider that only one event should be held in a given space in any one day. If someone is suspected as having Covid-19 has been present, a period of 72 hours of quarantine should be put in place, which may only be reduced if a negative test is provided.

Review the processes

At the end of the event, it will be invaluable to share your experiences and refine your method and risk assessment. Please also inform me so that we can improve the advice that we provide across the Circuit.