

Risk Assessment Template for Opening Church Buildings to the Public

Version Control

Issue Date	Version Number	Issued by
25 th March 2021	9	The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group

This update has been reviewed to reflect the [roadmap to ease restrictions](#) issued by the UK government and is intended for use from 29th March onwards ('phase 1b'). It incorporates sections on singing, workplace testing, and planning for wider use of buildings including for non-worship purposes. At all times churches should check national and, if relevant, local restrictions to ensure the activity planned is currently permitted. Risk assessments carried out using an earlier template may still be valid but should be reviewed regularly and checked against this latest version of the risk assessment.

England entered the government's roadmap out of lockdown on 8th March with the re-opening of schools and other education settings, and an increase in permitted reasons to leave home to meet one person outside for social purposes. As they have been throughout the third lockdown (from 5th January) churches are permitted to open for communal worship, private prayer and a number of essential purposes where they can be carried out in a Covid-safe way. There may be specific local regulations recommended by local authorities, which place additional restrictions on certain activities. Before completing this risk assessment you can see what is permitted by checking the guidance on permitted activities on the national church coronavirus webpage. Guidance on opening cathedral and church buildings to the public during COVID-19 can also be found [here](#).

The [government guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic](#) requires a COVID-19 risk assessment to be carried out for every building and site open to the public. This document provides a template risk assessment, with links to the relevant advice notes. It relates to opening up church and cathedral buildings to clergy and members of the public entering for any permitted purposes. As well as offering guidance on best practice, the template is also intended to help parishes make a decision on whether to open for any or all of these purposes or not, based on their local circumstances, resources and context. Specific guidance linking to advice on the lockdown period is available on the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](#).

The government acknowledges that 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 the virus. In drawing up a risk assessment for your church, or revising it in the light of the current situation, you will need to think carefully whether the public benefits you achieve by opening are justified by the risks involved, however much you can mitigate them. This judgement will vary depending on the

location and nature of your church building and the make-up of your congregation and visitor profile. You will need to discuss the factors with your governing body, whether the PCC or chapter. Remember that this is your collective choice whether to open: while our churches are permitted by government to open, they are not obliged to do so. If you decide not to open, you can continue to have a valuable role serving the community in a number of ways. Guidance on this can be found on the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](#).

Guidance indicating how churches might arrange access and events in a Covid-safe way has been produced as part of a government initiative to encourage re-opening in a safe and reasonable way. This includes a number of case studies that may help you think about your church building.

Future versions of this document will be produced when there is any substantive change to the guidance on the safe use of places of worship.

Separate risk assessments for outdoor worship and for access by contractors and construction workers are available on the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](#).

Carrying out a risk assessment

1. Agree what activities you are planning for:
 - Private prayer
 - Public worship
 - Funerals, weddings, baptisms, ordinations
 - Livestreaming or recording services
 - A choir or music group singing indoors as part of a public, livestreamed or recorded service (congregational singing may take place outside, but at present is not permitted indoors)
 - Formal childcare or where part of a school
 - Essential voluntary and public services
 - Use as a vaccination centre
 - Other exempted activities such as support groups
 - Provision of youth services
 - Opening shops/cafes (may be permitted in Step 2, depending on access arrangements)
 - Opening for visitors/tourists/educational visits as a heritage attraction (not permitted until Step 3)
 - Opening for concerts, plays etc (not permitted until Step 3)
2. Consider the hazards:
 - Transmission of COVID-19
 - Hazards arising from using the church in a different way to usual

Read the guidance and think about how it relates specifically to your church. What constraints are there? Consider how people will arrive at the church, including if they will need to wait or queue outside; how people will enter and leave the church; circulation inside: from the entrance to the worship space and out again; circulation within the worship space; also access to other areas including the toilet(s).

3. Consider who might be harmed and how. Read the guidance and think about how the activities you are planning will affect different groups of people. The risks are not different for larger churches as long as they are properly managed, but having any significant numbers of people coming through your building makes the possible impact – in particular someone with COVID-19 coming into contact with others – higher than in smaller churches with fewer people. Consider your particular circumstances and adapt the checklist below as appropriate. Gathered congregations and major services may attract people from far afield, which is likely to add to the risk profile and go against the general guidance that people should stay local for any activities outside the home. Consider whether you need to consult your wider membership and users.

4. Using the risk assessment checklist below as a template:
- add in mitigations for any risks that are particular to your circumstances that may not be on the list;
 - record what you need to do for each activity to go ahead safely;
 - consider any equipment you need and any temporary changes you might need to make to the church;
 - check back against your list of activities to confirm which ones can go ahead and when.

Risk assessment template

Church: St Matthew's, Park Hill, Croydon	Assessor's names Revd Simon Foster, Rohini Abhayaratne and Stephen Collingwood	Date completed: 01/06/21	Review date:
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Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
Access to church buildings for purposes of recording and/or livestreaming services (with no congregation present) Risk: contracting or spreading the virus by not social distancing or by touching contaminated services	Consider if anyone required for recording or broadcasting is clinically extremely vulnerable or has household members who are. Can someone else fulfil their role in the recording/livestreaming? Ensure that the people who need to attend the church building to enable the livestreaming or recording to take place are willing to do so and can do so safely. Make sure that only those essential for livestreaming or recording enter the church.	Advice on livestreaming and recording can be found here .	SF	
	Identify one point of entry to the church building, and a separate exit if possible.	Entry and Exit via Main Doors. If there are more than 6 people then they should exit via the fire doors.	SF and CA	
	A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant.	The only people who are authorised to be in the building on their own are Simon Foster, Penny Goswell and Terry Mitchell. They need to phone hourly a nominated person for health and safety reasons.	SF, TM and CA	

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	Consider staggered arrival times if multiple people from different households are coming into the building.		SF	
	Holy water stoups and the font are empty.		SF	
	Ensure safe use of equipment needed for livestreaming: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets, cables/tripod causing trip hazard		SF and JH	
	Provide adequate hand cleansing stations. Provide hand sanitiser for the occasions when people can't wash their hands.	Hand sanitisers will be available in the foyer.	CA	
	Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the 'cleaning' section of this risk assessment (below).	Access will be denied to the kitchen, gallery and clergy vestry and church office. SF,PG and TM may access the Clergy Vestry and Church Office. CA to control the cleaners.	SF and CA to clean any areas they access	
	Read the CofE guide on face coverings and produce or download signage or other relevant materials to indicate compliance with the law and requiring these for all except those exempt.	Advice on face coverings can be found here . Wear face coverings when not actively speaking/singing	SF	
Identify where you can reduce the contact of people with surfaces, e.g. by leaving open doors that are not fire doors, using electronic documents rather than paperwork.	Leave fire doors open, wipe lectern between users, no sharing of service sheets	SF		
Ensure you have an NHS Track and Trace QR code available, with an alternative option for those who cannot use that system.	QR code available. If personnel cannot use that they must provide contact details on a piece of paper.	CA to provide suitable receptacle for contact details		

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			and produce paper forms to aid this process.	
Deciding whether to open to the public for private prayer, public worship and other permitted activities	Consider how the national lockdown applies to the particular circumstances of the church and the worship or other activities envisaged. For gathered congregations or other activities drawing people from a wide area, consider the implications of where people travel from and the distance involved.		SF	
	Discuss with nearby venues and businesses to ensure that the timing and practical arrangements for using the church are compatible.	Not applicable		
	Check if any clergy, staff or volunteers required for opening to the public fall into clinically extremely vulnerable categories or have members of their household who do, and ensure there are enough people safely able and willing to facilitate opening and cleaning the building.		SF and CA	
	Consider whether to discourage clinically extremely vulnerable members of the congregation or visitors from attending services altogether or setting aside a time for them to attend for individual devotions.		SF	
	Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services		SF and CA	
	Communicate with nearby churches to ensure offered provisions are complementary.		SF	
	Deciding whether to have a	Check current guidance on singing to establish what is permitted. This can be found in the Church of	A group of up to 6 amateur singers can perform, or	SF

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choir or music group singing/performing Risk: Aerosol spread of coronavirus may be increased by singing and playing of wind instruments	England guidance on conducting public worship and on in the Government guidance for places of worship .	rehearse for performance with physical distancing being maintained at all times, while the rest of the congregation remain seated. Communal singing, by the congregation, should not take place and strict physical distancing should be observed		
	Ensure that singers from different households can be socially distanced from one another, and from anyone else present (including a conductor, camera or microphone operator or, if present, a congregation).			
	Put in place measures to create a physical barrier between singers and any congregation.			
	Remind any members of congregation present that at present they are not allowed to sing indoors.		SF	
Preparation of the Church for access by members of the public for any permitted purposes Risk: Getting or spreading coronavirus in common use high traffic areas such as corridors, toilet facilities,	Confirm that all steps (above) for access for livestreaming/broadcast have been carried out before anyone else accesses the building.		SF	
	Update your website, A Church Near You, and any relevant social media with information for visitors. Communicate details on requirements such as bringing a face covering. Clearly state the limits on attendance for weddings, funerals, commemorative events and any other permitted activities where upper limits apply (or provide a link to this	Needs separate instructions for people accessing the building.	JH CA to run booking system if we need to control numbers.	

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entry/exit points and other communal areas.	document).			
	Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the ‘cleaning’ section of this risk assessment (below).	Access will be denied to the kitchen, gallery, Lady chapel, choir and clergy vestry and church office. SF, CA and TM may access the Clergy Vestry and Church Office.	SF, CA, TM	
	Read the CofE guide on face coverings and produce signage or other relevant materials to indicate compliance with the law requiring these for all except those exempt.	Face coverings are mandatory inside the building except when officiating.	CA	
	Choose one point of entry into the church to manage flow of people and indicate this with notices, keeping emergency exits available at all times. Where possible use a different exit.	Entry and Exit via Main Doors. If there are more than 6 people then they should exit via the fire doors.	Duty welcomer	
	Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside).	They will need to queue outside in the direction of the sundial at 2 meter separation.	Duty welcomer	
	Make any temporary arrangements for managing the approaches to the entry points and any parking areas to ensure social distancing can be observed (taking into account any consequential risks arising from changes to circulation).			
	Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation.	At end of service open main door and fire doors to ventilate worship space.	SF	

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	If heating is required check your system is safe to use and test it before people are allowed in.	Hopefully heating not required during summer.	CA if heating required	
	Remove items such as Bibles, prayer and hymn books that are used by multiple people.	All the tables and papers/books in the vestibule need to be removed and stored in the choir vestry with all the soft covered chairs or made inaccessible by visitors.. All literature/books etc in the church need to be removed and placed in the choir vestry.		
	If providing single-use service sheets or prayer cards, either place these on sheets or ask people to sanitise hands before picking one up, and request that people take these home with them.		Duty welcomers	
	Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on)		SF and CA	
	Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance on soft surfaces.	All the soft chairs, kneelers, seat cushions, linen, table cloths need to be removed. Only altar cloth and dust cover remain.	SF and SC	
	Remove or isolate children’s resources and play areas.	Remove	SF and SC	
	Walk through the church to plan for physical distancing in seats, aisles, at the altar rail, including safe flow of visitors. Remember 2m in all directions from each person (or 1m with risk mitigation if	Create a barrier with hard chairs for those areas that are denied access. (We don’t want tape on the floor).	SF and SC	

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	absolutely necessary).			
	Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing.	Seating will be placed. Visitors must not move the chairs.	SF and SC	
	Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements.	Seating will be placed. Visitors must not move the chairs	SF and SC	
	Limit access to places were the public does not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon is needed.	Create a corridor with hard chairs from the main door into the praying/service location. (We don't want tape on the floor).	SF and SC	
	Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use.	Hand sanitisers will be available in the foyer CA to ensure a supply of hand sanitiser.	SF, SC & Duty welcomers	
	Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing	Consult advice on gaining temporary permissions .	SF and SC	
	Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc.		CA	
	Ensure high-risk surfaces and touch points have been wiped with appropriate sanitiser spray or disposable wipes	Only necessary if church is being occupied within 72 hours. However, the lectern needs wiping between uses.	Clergy, CA and contract cleaners	
	Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels.	Soap, hand towels and a waste bin lined with a plastic bag should be available in all the	SF and SC and Duty welcomers	

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		toilets. CA to ensure a good supply of soap and paper towels.		
	Where there are toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available.	Soap, hand towels and a waste bin lined with a plastic bag should be available in all the toilets. Contract cleaners should clean the toilets at least weekly and double bag waste.	CA to arrange for contract cleaners to clean at least once a week	
	Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them.	Volunteers on duty to wear gloves and remove and dispose of waste – double bagged in the clergy vestry for 72 hours then in the bin outside the church. They should put fresh liners in the bins.	Duty welcomers. CA to ensure a good supply of soap and paper towels.	
Use of the church for baptisms, weddings, funerals, commemorative services and ordinations	Consider the specific guidance in place for those activities and assess the additional controls and limits on attendance in place.	Advice on baptisms can be found here . Advice on weddings can be found here (scroll down to Can weddings go ahead?). Advice on funerals can be found here . The government’s advice on		

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		commemorative events can be found here .		
Use of the church for permitted activities other than private prayer or worship	Consider the specific guidance in place for those activities and assess the additional controls and limits on attendance in place. Check that any external group using the church has COVID-secure working practices in place, including their own risk assessment where necessary, and will comply with what is required by the church.	<p>The government’s guidance on the safe use of multi-purpose community facilities for permitted activities (including formal childcare and support groups) can be found here.</p> <p>Advice on use of churches as vaccination centres can be found here.</p> <p>The government’s guidance on the use of hospitality spaces can be found here.</p>	Any users should submit Risk Assessments to the CA for approval before any group uses the facilities.	
Cleaning the church before and after general use (no known exposure to anyone with Coronavirus symptoms)	If the church building has been closed for 48 hours between periods of being open then there is no need for extra cleaning to remove the virus from surfaces.		CA	
	If 48-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating.	Liaise with the cleaning company	CA	
	Identify surfaces that are frequently touched and by many people (often common areas), e.g. handrails, door handles, shared equipment, toilets, and specify the frequency and level of cleaning and by whom.	Ensure that RAs include details of who will clean the building after use by a group/club.	CA	
Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here . Risk: Getting or spreading				

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coronavirus by not cleaning surfaces, equipment and shared facilities.	Keep surfaces clear to make it easier to clean and reduce the likelihood of contaminating objects.		CA	
	Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets deemed essential for services should be quarantined for 48 hours after use.		SF	
	All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable).	Groups to provide their own cleaning materials.	CA	
	Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned.	Groups to provide their own cleaning materials.	CA to file approved RAs	
	Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site.		Contract Cleaners	
	Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal.	Weekly removal	Contract Cleaners	
Cleaning the church after known exposure to someone with Coronavirus symptoms	If possible close the church building for 48 hours with no access permitted.		SF CA	
	If 48-hour closure is not possible then follow Public Health England guidance on cleaning in non-healthcare settings.	Public Health England guidance available here.	SF CA	
	If the building has been quarantined for 48 hours, then carry out cleaning as per the normal advice on cleaning.	Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here.	CA using contract cleaners.	

Key to personnel:

SF Revd Simon Foster

TM Terry Mitchell

JH Jon Highton

CA Church Administrator

SC Stephen Collingwood