

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, that 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 [there](#).

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 John the Baptist Church, Curbridge	Assessor's name: Ian Galletley	Date completed: 8 July 2021	Review date: July 2021
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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.	In a small congregation, those able to attend do not include the clinically vulnerable and all who do attend have registered to do so.	I.G. as in all cases below shown as *	I.G. 7.12.20 as in all cases below shown *
	Identify one point of entry to the church building, and a separate exit if possible.	Only one entrance, containing two doors, one to the vestry, the other to the nave.	*	*
	A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant.	The Witney PCC Health and Safety Policy agreed in 2019 includes a section on lone working in all of our buildings. This remains applicable through the current pandemic.	Completed 2019	Approved Witney PCC 1.12.20

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Consider staggered arrival times if multiple people from different households are coming into the building.	Appropriate social distancing at all times	*	*
	Holy water stoups and the font are empty.	N/A		
	Ensure safe use of equipment needed for livestreaming: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets, cables/tripod causing trip hazard	N/A		
	Provide adequate hand cleansing stations. Provide hand sanitiser for the occasions when people can't wash their hands.	Already provided	*	*
	Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the 'cleaning' section of this risk assessment (below).	Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here .	*	*
	Read the Cof E 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 . All attended comply.	*	*
	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.	Already undertaken	*	*
	Ensure you have an NHS Track and Trace QR code available, with an alternative option for those who cannot use that system.	Consult advice on complying with Track and Trace .		
Deciding whether to open to the public for private prayer, public worship	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	Only use of building is for socially distanced acts of worship	*	*

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
and other permitted activities	from a wide area, consider the implications of where people travel from and the distance involved.			
	Discuss with nearby venues and businesses to ensure that the timing and practical arrangements for using the church are compatible.		*	*
	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.		*	*
	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.	The rector has considered it and decided that as shielding has ended, it is appropriate for individuals to make their own informed personal decision.	Toby Wright	Toby Wright 20 th April 2021
	Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services	No longer required		
	Communicate with nearby churches to ensure offered provisions are complementary.	Via deanery meetings	Toby Wright	ongoing
Deciding whether to have a choir or music group singing/performing	Check current guidance on singing to establish what is permitted. This can be found in the Church of England guidance on conducting public worship and on in the Government guidance for places of worship .	The guidance for weddings and funerals re music is that numbers should be kept to an 'absolute minimum'. The rector suggests that this would be organist + up to 4		

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Risk: Aerosol spread of coronavirus may be increased by singing and playing of wind instruments		Singers. No singing in this church at present.		
	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.			
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, entry/exit points and other communal areas.	Confirm that all steps (above) for access for livestreaming/broadcast have been carried out before anyone else accesses the building.	N/A		
	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 document).	N/A		
	Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the 'cleaning' section of this risk assessment (below).	Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here .	*	*
	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.	Advice on face coverings can be found here . Done	*	*

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	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.	There is only one such entrance for the public		
	Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside).	All attendees enter singly, maintaining social distancing as required	*	*
	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.		*	*
	If heating is required check your system is safe to use and test it before people are allowed in.	Guidance on church heating can be found here .		
	Remove items such as Bibles, prayer and hymn books that are used by multiple people.	You could consider a long-term loan system for Bibles and other books to ensure people have access to these.		
	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.			
	Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on)	.	*	*

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	Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance on soft surfaces.	Present but not used.	*	*
	Remove or isolate children’s resources and play areas.	Removed	*	*
	Walk through the church to plan for physical 1m distancing in seats, aisles, at the altar rail, including safe flow of visitors.	Safer churches guidance, including ideas on floor plans, is available here .		
	Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing		*	*
	Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements.		*	*
	Limit access to places where the public does not need to go, maybe with a temporary cordon is needed		*	*
	Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use.		*	*
	Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing		*	*
	Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practise hand washing etc.		*	*
	Ensure high-risk surfaces and touch points have been wiped with appropriate sanitiser spray or disposable wipes	Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here .	*	*

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	Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels.	No water in the building		
	Where there are toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available.	N/A		
	Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them.	There is none,		
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.	<p>Advice on baptisms can be found here.</p> <p>Advice on weddings can be found here</p> <p>Advice on funerals can be found here.</p> <p>The government’s advice on commemorative events can be found here.</p>	<p>Rector and wardens</p> <p>Ness B-E and wardens</p> <p>Rector, Michelle B-W and wardens</p>	<p>Toby Wright 20 April 2021</p> <p>Ness B-E 20 April 2021</p>
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.	The church is not in use for purposes other than acts of worship.		

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<p>Cleaning the church before and after general use (no known exposure to anyone with Coronavirus symptoms)</p> <p>Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here.</p> <p>Risk: Getting or spreading coronavirus by not cleaning surfaces, equipment and shared facilities.</p>	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.		*	*
	If 48-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating.	N/A		
	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.		*	*
	Keep surfaces clear to make it easier to clean and reduce the likelihood of contaminating objects.		*	*
	Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets deemed essential for services should be quarantined for 48 hours after use where possible			
	All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable).		*	*
	Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned.		*	*
	Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site.	I.G.	*	*
	Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal.	After every service	*	*

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Cleaning the church after known exposure to someone with Coronavirus symptoms	If possible close the church building for 48 hours with no access permitted.	This happens after all openings anyway	*	*
	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.	*	*
	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.	*	*