

Risk Assessment Template for Opening Church Buildings to the Public

Version Control

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13 th January 2021	8	The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group

This update has been reviewed in the light of new guidance from the [Health and Safety Executive](#) and is intended for use from 13th January onwards. 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 a third national lockdown from 5th January 2021. This replaced the three-tier system introduced in late 2020 and later augmented with a fourth tier. During the lockdown, 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 [this document](#). Guidance on opening cathedral and church buildings to the public during COVID-19 can 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](#).

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
 - Livestreaming or recording services
 - Funerals, weddings, baptisms
 - 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
 - Opening for visitors/tourists, including opening shops and cafes

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 venues 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 Gabriel, Pimlico	Assessor's name: Vicar and Churchwardens	Date completed: 14 January 2021	Review date: Monthly or in light of changing circumstances. Daily review of H.M. government Guidance to ensure RA is up to 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	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.	Broadcasting is currently conducted by Philip Griffin (PCC member with responsibility for building operations) and Caroline Colvin (Churchwarden). Neither is clinically extremely vulnerable. Further volunteers to help with broadcasting will be sought from the congregation when	Philip Griffin and Caroline Colvin	Kept under review

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
touching contaminated services		communal worship resumes (see below), and new equipment is being purchased to streamline the operation.		
	Identify one point of entry to the church building, and a separate exit if possible.	West door for congregation during communal services. Emergency exits already marked. For hirers of the church or vestry hall (when allowed), entry and exit points as specified when bookings taken	N/A for services; hirers for other purposes	N/A
	A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant.	Already agreed Parish Policy. Rotas are organised when appropriate to keep church open for private prayer when closed for communal worship	Vicar and Churchwardens	Kept under review
	Consider staggered arrival times if multiple people from different households are coming into the building.	Entry queues are invigilated to ensure suitable social distancing, using the West porch for extra isolation as necessary. Extra staff are employed for the purpose when larger services require ticketing (see below). A cone is available to mark out queuing areas when	Vicar and churchwardens; hirers where appropriate.	Kept under review

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		necessary. Similar requirements are placed on hirers (when hirings are possible).		
	Holy water stoups and the font are empty.	Emptied some months ago. Bowls of water are used ad hoc in the font when needed for baptisms.	Vicar	N/A
	Ensure safe use of equipment needed for livestreaming: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets, cables/tripod causing trip hazard	Kept under constant review and mats used to minimise trip hazards. New equipment should further minimise the risks	Clergy; Philip Griffin	Kept under review
	Provide adequate hand cleansing stations. Provide hand sanitiser for the occasions when people can't wash their hands.	Portaloos provided during current renovation of lavatories, which will in due course significantly expand capacity. Multiple hand-sanitisers provided at the West end, at the front of church for the communion queue, at the altar, and at the broadcasting station, and replenished from stocks as necessary.	Vicar and Church Wardens	Kept under review
	Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the 'cleaning' section of this risk assessment (below).	Done	N/A	N/A

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	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.	Done and implemented	N/A	N/A
	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.	Done. Arrangements ensure only one person or bubble touches each service sheet and service booklet. The latter are quarantined for 48 hours after each service (see also below)	Vicar and Churchwardens	N/A
	Ensure you have an NHS Track and Trace QR code available, with an alternative option for those who cannot use that system.	Done. QR codes available in several locations at the West end and alternative forms supplied (with single-use quarantined pens) for use by others.	N/A	N/A
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.	Done. In light of the recent declaration of a Major Incident in London, and the currently high levels of cases and hospital admissions in London, the decision has been taken to cease communal worship for the time being, while keeping the church open for private prayer during the week and maintaining a full set of live-	Vicar and Churchwardens	Kept under review

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
		streamed services according to current Church and Government guidance. This will be kept actively under review in light of changing circumstances		
	Discuss with nearby venues and businesses to ensure that the timing and practical arrangements for using the church are compatible.	Not directly applicable given geographical location of church.	N/A	N/A
	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.	Done	All	Kept under review
	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.	Not currently applicable, given current closure for communal worship (see above)	Vicar and churchwardens	Kept under review
	Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services	Booking system implemented using TicketSource software for communal services likely to attract larger numbers of people and successfully used (e.g.) for carol services, Christmas Eve services etc. Numbered seats ensure social distances between bubbled ticket-holders.	James Day (Choirmaster) and Churchwardens	Kept under review

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Communicate with nearby churches to ensure offered provisions are complementary.	Update on services sent to Area Dean before current closure for communal worship	N/A	N/A
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.	Done	Clergy	Daily
	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).	Done – website includes specific instructions (e.g. for ticketed services) and a link to the risk assessment, etc.	Vicar, Julie Anderson (Administrator)	Kept under regular review
	Update your website to remind people who are clinically extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 to stay at home as much as possible and observe social distancing guidance, and either strongly discourage them from attending church in person during this time or indicate a time for them to attend for individual devotions.	Not currently applicable given closure for communal worship (see above)	Vicar, Julie Anderson (Administrator)	Kept under regular review
	Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the ‘cleaning’ section of this risk assessment (below).	See separate Cleaning at St Gabriel’s during Covid-19 epidemic.	Regular cleaning team and ad hoc users as appropriate	Kept under review
	Read the CofE guide on face coverings and produce signage or other relevant materials to indicate	Done. Mask discipline is applied at the West door and	All	Kept under review

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	compliance with the law requiring these for all except those exempt.	a supply of masks is available for the (very few) people who arrive without one of their own.		
	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.	West door for congregation during services. Emergency exits already marked. For hirers of the church or vestry hall (when allowed), entry and exit points as specified when bookings taken	N/A for services; hirers for other purposes	Kept under review
	Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside).	Entry queues are invigilated to ensure suitable social distancing, using the West porch for extra isolation as necessary. Extra staff are employed for the purpose when larger services require ticketing (see above). A cone is available to mark out queuing areas when necessary. Similar requirements are placed on hirers (when hirings are possible).	Vicar and churchwardens; hirers where appropriate	Kept under review
	Make any temporary arrangements for managing the approaches to the entry points and any parking areas to ensure social distancing can be observed	N/A (there being no parking areas) or see above	N/A	N/A

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	(taking into account any consequential risks arising from changes to circulation).			
	Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation.	Done – ad hoc arrangements during services as appropriate	All	Kept under review
	If heating is required check your system is safe to use and test it before people are allowed in.	Done	Philip Griffin	Kept under review
	Remove Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets unless they are absolutely essential and participants cannot bring their own. Hardcopy literature should be quarantined for at least 48 hours between use.	Done (see above for service-specific quarantine arrangements)	All	N/A
	Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on)	Done	N/A	N/A
	Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance on soft surfaces.	Hassocks are used to identify pews out of use (rotation system alternates pews between communal services to allow quarantining when appropriate, with out-of-use pews roped off.) Cleaning of hassocks and of pews is conducted when timing of services precludes this.	As appropriate	Kept under review
	Remove or isolate children’s resources and play areas.	Done	N/A	N/A
	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	Done. Other mitigating factors for 1m + social distancing when communal services take place include:	N/A	N/A

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	<p>from each person (or 1m with risk mitigation if absolutely necessary).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rotation of worship areas (see above re nave pews – multiple altars are also used); • not facing other people; • single use service sheets (see also above); • promotion of face masks (see also above), • repetition of advice to stay at home for those with Covid-19 symptoms or the clinically extremely vulnerable; • when guidance allows choirs for communal services, limiting areas where choirs sing and for the parish choir restricting amateur attendance to those in easy walking distance of the 		

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		<p>church, so limiting the use of public transport.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other restrictions on amateur singers as per current Government and CofE guidance. • Numbers in choirs (when allowed for communal worship) to be kept under review to ensure minimum number present. • When live-streaming without a congregation, singing limited to professional singers only and numbers kept to the minimum possible <p>In addition, all hirers (when allowed) are required to adhere to the relevant Government Guidance on working safely during</p>		

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
		coronavirus, the safe conduct of the performing arts, the safe conduct of exercise activities etc, as appropriate and as (frequently) amended.		
	Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing.	Done. See above re arrangements for nave pews. Hirers (when allowed) will also be instructed as to what seating may be used, when extra cleaning is required etc.	N/A	N/A
	Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements.	Not usually relevant (see above re West end arrangements), but communicated via notices when necessary. Hirers will be asked to make their own arrangements as appropriate.	All	Kept under review
	Limit access to places where the public does not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon is needed.	Done	N/A	N/A
	Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use.	Done	N/A	N/A
	Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing	Not required	N/A	N/A
	Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc.	Done	N/A	N/A

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Ensure high-risk surfaces and touch points have been wiped with appropriate sanitiser spray or disposable wipes	Done. Sanitiser spray and wipes also available for ad hoc use during services. Hirers will be instructed to carry out relevant cleaning after use of church.	N/A	N/A
	Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels.	Done	N/A	N/A
	Where there are toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available.	Done. Hirers to be instructed to ensure facilities are left clean after bookings (when allowed)	N/A and Julie Anderson	Ongoing
	Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them.	Done	N/A	N/A
Use of the church for baptisms, weddings, funerals and commemorative services	Consider the specific guidance in place for those activities and assess the additional controls and limits on attendance in place.	Done. This guidance is kept under daily review and applied as necessary.	Vicar and Churchwardens	Kept under review
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.	As above. All the Government and CofE guidance for places of worship, educational settings, community halls and other relevant settings is kept under constant review.	Vicar and Churchwardens	Kept under review

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
<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.	Monitored and applied	All	Ongoing
	If 48-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating.	Cleaners given notice of which groups are vulnerable. Contract cleaners to perform regular cleans.	Vicar, Julie Anderson	Ongoing
	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.	See above re regular cleans. Ad hoc cleaning of surfaces undertaken by on-site team.	All	Ongoing
	Keep surfaces clear to make it easier to clean and reduce the likelihood of contaminating objects.	Done wherever possible	All	Ongoing
	Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets deemed essential for services should be quarantined for 48 hours after use.	Implemented via a permanent quarantine/recycling station at the West End	Vicar and churchwardens	Ongoing
	All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable).	Gloves to be provided although cleaners may bring their own	Julie Anderson	Ongoing
	Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned.	Materials kept available in church and regularly replenished	Julie Anderson	Ongoing
	Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site.	Contract cleaners, regular users including hirers	Contract cleaners, regular users	Ongoing

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal.	Daily checks	Clergy, other users	Ongoing
Cleaning the church after known exposure to someone with Coronavirus symptoms	If possible close the church building for 48 hours with no access permitted.	Will be applied if necessary	Vicar	Kept under review
	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.	N/A	N/A
	If the building has been quarantined for 48 hours, then carry out cleaning as per the normal advice on cleaning.	Use of rotating sections (see above) to reduce need for quarantine	Vicar	Kept under review