

Risk Assessment - Opening Church Buildings to the Public

Version Control

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|-------------------------------|----------------|--|
| 2 nd December 2020 | 7 | 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 3rd December onwards. Risk assessments carried out using an earlier template may still be valid but should be reviewed regularly.

From 3rd December, regardless of tier, churches are permitted to open for all purposes that can be carried out in a Covid-safe way. There may be specific local regulations, especially in tier 3 areas, that place additional restrictions on certain activities. There are varying limits on mixing of households that apply in different tiers. Before completing this risk assessment you can see what is permitted in your tier by checking [this document](#).

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](#).

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
 - 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 so long as they are properly managed, but having more people coming through your building makes the possible impact – for example of 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.
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

| | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| Church: St Gabriel, Pimlico | Assessor's name: Vicar and Churchwardens | Date completed: 5 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) and for any other purposes (e.g. hirings etc) 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. 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. Check that those attending for livestreaming or recording can do so within the limits for places of worship in the relevant tier. | 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 currently being sought from the congregation, and new equipment being purchased to streamline the operation. | Philip Griffin and Caroline Colvin | Kept under review |

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| touching contaminated services | Identify one point of entry to the church building, and a separate exit if possible. | 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 | 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 necessary. Similar requirements are placed on hirers (when hirings are possible). | Vicar and churchwardens; hirers where appropriate. | Kept under review |
| | Holy water stoups and the font are empty. | Emptied some months ago. Bowls of water are used ad | Vicar | N/A |

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| | | hoc in the font when needed for baptisms. | | |
| | 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, and at the altar 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 |
| | 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 | Vicar and Churchwardens | N/A |

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| | | latter are quarantined for 48 hours after each service | | |
| | 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 tier system applies to the church and the worship or other activities envisaged. For gathered congregations or other activities drawing people from a wide area, consider whether anybody attending would be likely to be traveling from a higher or lower tier | Done, but no longer directly applicable following institution of new national lockdown on 5 January 2021. | Vicar and Churchwardens | Kept under review |
| | 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 if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services | Booking system implemented using TicketSource software for services likely to attract larger numbers of people and successfully used (e.g.) for carol services, Christmas Eve | James Day (Choirmaster) and Churchwardens | Kept under review |

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| | | services etc. Numbered seats ensure social distances between bubbled ticket-holders. | | |
| | Communicate with nearby churches to ensure offered provisions are complementary. | Update on services sent to Area Dean | 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 the tier in which the church is located (or provide a link to https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-restriction-tiers-what-you-need-to-know). | 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 |
| | 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 compliance with the law requiring these for all except those exempt. | Done. Mask discipline is applied at the West door and a supply of masks is available for the (very few) people who arrive without one of their own. | All | Kept under review |

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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. | 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 |
| | 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. | Done (see above for service-specific quarantine arrangements) | All | N/A |

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|---------------|--|---|-----------------|---------------------------|
| | 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 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 from each person (or 1m with risk mitigation if absolutely necessary). | Done. Other mitigating factors for 1m + social distancing include: <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); | N/A | N/A |

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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; • limiting areas where choirs sing and for the parish choir restricting amateur attendance to those in easy walking distance of the church, so limiting the use of public transport. • No rehearsal by amateur singers. • Numbers in choirs to be kept under review to ensure minimum number present. <p>In addition, all hirers (when allowed) are required to adhere to the relevant</p> | | |

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| | | Government Guidance on working safely during 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 |

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|---|---|--|------------------------|---------------------------|
| | Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc. | Done | N/A | N/A |
| | 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 |
| 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. | 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 |

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| Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here . Risk: Getting or spreading coronavirus by not cleaning surfaces, equipment and shared facilities. | 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 on an ad hoc basis. | All | Ongoing |
| | Keep surfaces clear to make it easier to clean and reduce the likelihood of contaminating objects. | Done wherever possible | All | 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 |
| | 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. | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| | 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. | Use of rotating sections (see above) to reduce need for quarantine | Vicar | Kept under review |