

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 Andrew's Ilford	Assessor's name: Rev H. Morris and Ellen Harley	Date completed: 27 th March 2021	Review date:
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Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
Deciding whether to open to the public for private prayer, public worship and other permitted activities	We have an NHS Track and Trace QR code available, with an alternative option for those who cannot use that system.	On wall as enter the building Access clearly labelled		In place
	Congregation advised to travel only when they feel comfortable to attend.			
	PCC approved Service Guidelines adopted. As per that clergy only to open church to the public; clergy to decide their own fitness to do so under the National Guidelines.	As per Service Guideline		
	Clergy has discouraged clinically extremely vulnerable members of the congregation not to attend church in person and do so by Facebook. For visitors there is clear signage to follow the national guidance			
Deciding whether to have a choir or music group singing/performing	As set out in the Service Guidelines			
	Choir social distanced in the chancel from each other the clergy and from the congregation. All choir			

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
Risk: Aerosol spread of coronavirus may be increased by singing and playing of wind instruments	members briefed on the guidelines and attend by choice and at own risk.			
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.	Clergy to set up the livestreaming/broadcast and congregation informed service is to be streamed.			
	Church website updated periodically with service details and key requirements as per national guidance e.g. wearing face mask social distancing and hand sanitising.			
	Clear signage at entrance of church of national guidance to indicate compliance with the law requiring the wearing of face covering for all except those exempt.	. Masks are available to ensure compliance		
	Clear signage at point of entry of one-way system that is in operation			
	Clear signage for queuing system to observe social distancing to enter the building.		Church Warden	3.3.21
	H&S Officer advised that due dimensions and height of the building the ventilation is adequate.			
	Heating system has been checked is safe for use.			27.3.21
	Items that are used by multiple people removed from church. Readers to use their own bible.			
	Pew cushions/kneelers to be removed until further notice.			

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	Remove or isolate children’s resources and play areas.			
	Church layout planned to ensure physical distancing in seats, aisles, at the altar rail, including safe flow of visitors. Labelled for 2metres distancing in all directions from each person.			
	Clearly marked out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing.			
	Clearly marked out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements.			
	Have closed off access to places where the public does not need to go			
	Hand sanitisers available for visitors to use at strategic points in the building and handed out prior to the receipt of communion.			
	Notices given out during service to remind visitors about important safe practices			
	Service leader to ensure lectern and microphone are appropriately sanitised in between multiple users			
	The toilet facilities are for emergency use only. They will be adequately supplied with soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available.			
	All waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them.			

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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 commemorative events can be found here .		
Cleaning the church before and after general use (no known exposure to anyone with Coronavirus symptoms) Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here . Risk: Getting or spreading coronavirus by not cleaning	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 church will be cleaned by hired cleaners who ensure they abide by the national guidance. Professional cleaning contract in place to ensure church is adequately cleaned between use. Keep surfaces clear to make it easier to clean and reduce the likelihood of contaminating objects. Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site.			

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surfaces, equipment and shared facilities.	Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal.			
Cleaning the church after known exposure to someone with Coronavirus symptoms	If possible close the church building for 48 hours with no access permitted.			
	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.		