

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 from the Diocese of Lichfield

Church: St. Peter's, Elford, Tamworth	Assessor's name: Revd. John Grice	Date completed: April 2020 - March 2021	Review date: At least bi-weekly till June 21 st 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.	Advice on livestreaming and recording can be found here . We have been pre-recording services using 1-2 people, either inside or outside.	Ministry Team	April 2020 - March 2021 Revd. John Jackie Tyler Revd. Nicky
	Identify one point of entry to the church building, and a separate exit if possible.	This is in place at Elford Already. Thursday's/ Sunday's	Church Opening Team	Throughout lockdown
	A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant.	An example can be found here .		
	Consider staggered arrival times if multiple people from different households are coming into the building.	Track and trace, social distancing, and reserving seating for services	Jackie Tyler	Christmas 2020 Holy Week 2021 Larger services going forward

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	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	We are only recording funerals presently with one tripod and camera	Ministry Team	Ministry Team
	Provide adequate hand cleansing stations. Provide hand sanitiser for the occasions when people can't wash their hands.	We have two stations at Elford with hand gel.	Checked by volunteers	Twice weekly volunteers plus church cleaner A.P
	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 .	Church is cleaned by A.Potter	Dec 2020 - ongoing. Using Covid -19 guidance.
	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 .	Face masks are worn by everyone in church	Service leaders Sides person/ verger roles
	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.	We use paper and electronic resources. Paper is quarantined after a service	Ministry Team and Sides persons	June 2020 - ongoing
	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 . We use Q.R code plus a paper list	Ministry team	June 2020 - ongoing
Deciding whether to open to the public for private	Consider how the national lockdown applies to the particular circumstances of the church and the worship or other activities envisaged. For gathered	Opening Sundays' and Thursdays' with exceptions for funerals mid-week.	Church opening team	June 2020 - ongoing

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prayer, public worship and other permitted activities	congregations or other activities drawing people from a wide area, consider the implications of where people travel from and the distance involved.	Services closed from Dec 27 th to March 2 nd	and Ministry Team	
	Discuss with nearby venues and businesses to ensure that the timing and practical arrangements for using the church are compatible.	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.	Shielding has been observed in out teams during and pre-lockdown Where this was not possible, we closed the services and buildings	Ministry team Ministry Team	Revd. John Dec 2020 – ongoing Revd. John
	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.	We closed morning prayer and live services to protect vulnerable persons. We adopted Zoom where able	PCC's with guidance from our Bishops	Dec 2020 - ongoing Revd. John
	Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services	Christingle/ Christmas/ Seasonal services	Ministry Team	Nov 2020- March 2021
	Communicate with nearby churches to ensure offered provisions are complementary.	Regular Deanery Meetings Taking place over zoom	Revd. John Revd. Nicky	April 2020 - ongoing
Preparation of the Church for access by members of the public for any permitted purposes	Confirm that all steps (above) for access for livestreaming/broadcast have been carried out before anyone else accesses the building.	We access church often alone to film, or on open days in the week. Closing 48hr afterwards	Ministry Team	

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Risk: Getting or spreading coronavirus in common use high traffic areas such as corridors, toilet facilities, entry/exit points and other communal areas.	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).	Website and facebook are updated. ACNY is not regularly maintained but links to our main website.	Website. Revd. John Facebook. Ministry Team	When notices are needed and services uploaded weekly
	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.	Our parishioners who are elderly and more vulnerable are not internet users in the most part. When discouraging attendance, we tend to close services to avoid mixed messages.	Revd. John Ministry Team	April 2020 - ongoing
	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 . We used 72 hours, now 48 hrs between church use, otherwise cleaning takes place.	Church open teams Church cleaner A. Potter	December 2020 - ongoing
	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.	We do this at Elford We have two doors in use for services for single flow	Ministry team and Open church Team	Twice weekly

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	Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside).	Our space outside allows plenty of room		
	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).	Entry to church is clear, with large church drive		
	Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation.	Doors where possible for ventilation	Service leaders	
	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 . We use hotwater pipes	Timed operation	Church opening teams
	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.	Books are placed out of the way or if used are quarantined for 48 hrs between uses	Verger and service leaders	April 2020 - ongoing
	Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on)	We are using only essential furniture and items	Service Leaders	April 2020 - ongoing
	Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance on soft surfaces.	These were removed	Revd. John Jackie Tyler	2020
	Remove or isolate children's resources and play areas.	This area was closed		2020

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	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).	Signs, pews closed off, 1 meter achieved if not 2 meters		2020 - ongoing
	Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing.	Laminated signs in place already	Jackie Tyler	2020 - ongoing
	Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements.	Separate exit and markings on the floor	Jackie Tyler	2020 - ongoing
	Limit access to places where the public does not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon is needed.	People remain in pews for the live services. Parts of church closed to the public on open days.	Church opening Team and Ministry Team posters	Ministry team
	Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use.	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.	Ministry Team	2020 - ongoing
	Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing	Consult advice on gaining temporary permissions .		
	Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc.	We have isolated seating using signage to allow safe working practices	Revd. John Jackie Tyler	2020 - ongoing
	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 .	Church cleaners team	When needed
	Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels.	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.	Ministry Team Church opening Team	2020 - ongoing

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	Where there are toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available.	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.	Own supplies	Revd. John and Jackie Tyler and Volunteers
	Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them.		Church cleaning Team	2020 - ongoing
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.	<p>Advice on baptisms can be found here.</p> <p>Advice on weddings can be found here (scroll down to Can weddings go ahead?).</p> <p>Advice on funerals can be found here.</p> <p>The government’s advice on commemorative events can be found here.</p>	Revd. John in conversation with Ministry team	2020 - ongoing
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 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 .	N/A	2020 - ongoing

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name	
		<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>	N/A		
<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.	We operate this already		2020 - ongoing	
	If 48-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating.				
	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.	This is done and discussed with church cleaners.	Ministry Team		2020 - ongoing
	Keep surfaces clear to make it easier to clean and reduce the likelihood of contaminating objects.	Done		Jackie Tyler Chris Billingham	2020 - ongoing
	Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets deemed essential for services should be quarantined for 48 hours after use.	Done			2020 - ongoing
	All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable).	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.		Church cleaners and PCC	2020 - ongoing

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	Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned.	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.	Ministry Team	2020 - ongoing
	Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site.	We are not using bins in the main church, people take waste home to dispose.		2020 - ongoing
	Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal.	Toilets closed currently during the week		2020 - 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.		Rev. John Ministry team	As soon as we are made aware
	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.		