

Risk Assessment Template for Opening Church Buildings to the Public

Version Control

Issue Date	Version Number	Issued by
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: Barnsley St Edward the Confessor	Assessor's name: F Thompson ; Rev'd P Maries	Date completed: 12/6/20. Updated: 19/7/20; 26/7/20 1/8/20, 9/12/20; 14/1/21	Review date: At PCC meetings
--	--	--	--

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	In all circumstances consider if anyone required in church is clinically extremely vulnerable or has household members who are. No-one who has Covid-19 symptoms or should be self-isolating should come to church.		clergy	On-going
Access to church buildings for clergy for purposes of private prayer and/or livestreaming	One point of entry to the church building clearly identified and separate from public entry if possible	Vestry door Sanitise hands and sign the book just inside the door	clergy	done
	A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant.	PCC has a Lone Working Policy reviewed in January 2020		done
	Buildings have been aired before use.		clergy	done
	Check for animal waste and general cleanliness.		clergy	done
	Ensure water systems are flushed through before use.		churchwarden	Completed before 19/7/20
	Switch on and check electrical and heating systems if needed. Commission system checks as necessary.		churchwarden	Completed before 19/7/20

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Holy water stoups and the font are empty.		churchwarden	Completed before 19/7/20
	Ensure that people who need to attend the church to enable the live streaming/recording to take place are willing to do so and can do so safely		clergy	
	Ensure safe use of equipment needed for livestreaming: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets, cables/tripod causing trip hazard		clergy	On-going
	Consider staggered arrival times if people from different households are coming into the building.		clergy	On-going
	Face coverings are mandatory if people are present from different households		clergy	On-going
Deciding whether to open to the public for private prayer or public services	Discuss with nearby venues and businesses to ensure that the timing and practical arrangements for using the church are compatible.		n/a	done
	Communicate with nearby churches to ensure offered provisions are complementary	Contact other Benefice churches re shared services	clergy	On-going
	Update your website, A Church Near You, and any relevant social media.		webmaster	On-going
	Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services	Booking to be used for Christmas services and will be used for other services if necessary	FT	done
	During lockdown consider whether the church should be open for public services	PCC on 12/1/21 agreed to keep church open. Fr Stephen Race will make weekly decision on church opening		

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
		according to local public health advice.		
Preparation of the Church for access by members of the public for any permitted purposes, including worship and tourism	Confirm that all steps (above) for access by clergy have been carried out before anyone else accesses the building. <u>Anyone entering the church/churchyard via the vestry door to sanitise hands and sign book in vestry lobby</u>		PCC	14/7/20
	Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the ‘cleaning’ section of this risk assessment (below).		Cleaning team	On-going
	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.	Entrance and exit via south door, with one way system marked out. Emergency exit via north door or vestry door Door to be propped open to reduce contact of people with high touch surfaces. Encourage use of sanitiser on entry	Churchwarden Deputy churchwarden	completed
	Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside). NOTE: <u>CofE guidance indicates that the place of worship includes the churchyard</u>	Social distancing markings in porch		completed
	Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation.	Open south and north porch doors to air the church	Key holder on the day	On-going

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Remove Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets	n/a. Service books will be used and then isolated for over 48 hours Bookshelves to be covered/cordoned off	Deputy church warden J&MG	On-going Before 17/1/21
	CofE guidance indicates that face coverings are mandatory	Disposable face masks are available in church		On-going
	Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on) Votive candles may be lit provided sanitiser is used safely as it is highly flammable		churchwarden	completed
	Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance	Kneelers and cushions are stored in unused pews and are not touched between services		done
	Remove or isolate children’s resources and play areas	n/a		done
	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).	Advisory cap on numbers at 30 people (households/bubbles)	Churchwarden and clergy	12/6/20 Updated 13/1/21
	Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing.		churchwarden	15/7/20

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements.		churchwarden	15/7/20
	Limit access to places where the public does not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon in needed.	Lady Chapel	churchwarden	15/7/20
	Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use.	On entry and exit in church In the vestry lobby	churchwarden	15/7/20
	Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing	n/a		done
	Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing, mandatory wearing of face coverings, and NO MINGLING between households/bubbles AT ANY POINT		churchwarden	15/7/20
	Ensure high-risk surfaces and touch points have been wiped with appropriate sanitiser spray or disposable wipes	As necessary	Cleaning team	On-going
	Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels.		Cleaning team	26/7/20
	Where there are toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available.		Cleaning team	On-going
	Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them.		Cleaning team	19/7/20
	Cleaning schedule to be displayed in the upstairs lavatory		Cleaning team	done

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Provide safe means for worshippers and visitors to record their name and contact details; retain each day's record for 21 days QR code is available for people with an appropriate smartphone	Names and contact details to be kept in the safe for 21 days to comply with GDPR	Deputy churchwarden	On-going
	Give due notice of the resumption of use of the building to neighbours, congregation and wider community, ensuring that visitors and worshippers will know what to expect when they come.	Congregation notified 25/7/20		done
	Donations	Cash/cheques will be placed in the safe for at least 48 hours	treasurer	On-going
	The choir and congregation may not sing			On-going
	Congregation to remain in their pew for communion, and to sanitise their hands before receiving the host			On-going
	Members of the congregation should remain in their household/bubble and not mingle			On-going
	Refreshments cannot be served after the service			On-going
Use of the church for baptisms, funerals, weddings etc	Consider specific government and Church of England guidance		Clergy/PCC	On-going
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.	Check signing in book that no-one has been into the church. The signing in book is in the vestry lobby	All key holders as necessary	On-going

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	If 48-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating.		Cleaning team	On-going
	Keep surfaces clear to aid cleaning			On-going
	Set up a cleaning rota to cover your opening arrangements.	Cleaning team will attend on 15/7/20 to clean before first public service		done
	All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable).	If required	Cleaning team	On-going
	Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned.		Cleaning team	On-going
	Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site.		Cleaning team	
	Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal.	After every opening-key holder on the day responsible for safe removal of waste		On-going
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.		