

COVID 19: guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic

The Government has now produced guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic. The full guidance can be found by clicking [HERE](#). The advice provided by the Church of England, including risk assessment templates, can be found by clicking [HERE](#).

This guidance, along with advice produced by the Church of England, will be updated as and when further changes come into effect. Opening a church building for individual private prayer is entirely discretionary according to local circumstances. Many churches will not be able to open yet for private prayer.

Key points

- From 13 June places of worship will be permitted to open for individual worship. Individual prayer within a place of worship is defined as a person or household entering the venue to pray on their own and not as part of a group, led prayer or communal act.
- For the purposes of this guidance, a place of worship refers to all confined or enclosed spaces, within buildings or outdoors, used for religious ceremonies, collective prayer and worship or similar gatherings by faith organisations, such as a church or prayer/meeting hall.
- Certain groups of people may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, including people who are aged 70 or older, regardless of medical conditions. Individuals who fall within this group are advised to stay at home as much as possible. Therefore, people aged 70 or older, unfortunately, should not volunteer for cleaning, supervising or other similar operational activities, according to Government guidance.
- Collective or communal prayer and regular scheduled services are not permitted at this time as set out in Regulations. This includes a minister or lay person leading devotions or prayer of any sort. The only exception is for funerals.
- Individual ministers (and their household) may enter a church building to broadcast an act of worship, whether over the internet or as part of a radio or television broadcast. The building must be closed for individual private prayer while this takes places.
- Buildings should remain closed for tourism purposes
- Individual prayer should be carried out such that adherence to social distancing of 2 metres (3 steps) all round can be maintained between individuals or those from separate households.
- Steps should be taken to reduce the social interaction between people outside of an individual's household to reduce the transmission of the virus. The advice and risk assessment template produced by the Church of England will help churches achieve this.
- Restrictions should be set locally to limit the number of people permitted to enter the place of worship for individual prayer at any one time, so that a safe distance of at least 2 metres (3 steps) can be maintained between individuals and households.

- All use of shared objects, such as books, reusable and communal resources and food items, should be removed to limit the spread of infection.
- Any facilities for children (play corners, books, toys) should be removed, and any outdoor play equipment (climbing frames, slides) should remain closed. Particular attention should be paid to cleaning frequently touched services which are at child height.
- Activities such as singing and/or playing instruments should be avoided, with the exception of organists who are able to use buildings for practice with appropriate social distancing.
- Where individuals are self-isolating due to a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the household, they should participate remotely
- Organ Practice: The guidance also permits organ practice, providing the same social distancing precautions are observed as for individual prayer.

There has been some concern about the use of the word 'supervised' in previous Government announcements relating to individual prayer. The term is not repeated in this document in that context. However, it does refer to situations which might, in practice, require some physical staffing in some places.

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