

Controlling the risks in your places of worship and buildings

As part of managing the health and safety of your business you must control the risks in your worship and buildings. To do this you need to think about what might cause harm to people and decide whether you are taking reasonable steps to prevent that harm. This is known as risk assessment and it is something you are required by law to carry out.

A risk assessment is not about creating huge amounts of paperwork, but rather about identifying sensible measures to control the risks in your places of worship and buildings.

You are probably already taking steps to protect, but your risk assessment will help you decide whether you have covered all you need to. Think about how contamination and ill health could happen and concentrate on real risks – those that are most likely and which will cause the most harm.

For some risks, other regulations require particular control measures. Your assessment can help you identify where you need to look at certain risks and these particular control measures in more detail. These control measures do not have to be assessed separately but can be considered as part of, or an extension of, your overall risk assessment.

How to assess the risks in your places of worship and your PCC buildings

1. Identify the hazard
2. Decide who might be harmed and how
3. Evaluate the risks and decide on the precautions
4. Record your significant findings
5. Review your assessment and update if necessary

You don't have to be a health and safety expert to complete a risk assessment.

When thinking about your risk assessment, remember:

- A **hazard** is anything that may cause harm; these can be hazards, and are covered in the normal risk assessments which parishes consider and complete to operate in 'normal circumstances' they included risks to physical health such as chemicals, electricity, working from ladders, lone working.
- A risk assessment of the challenges, which accompany the Corona virus pandemic, is similar in its aim to address the potential hazards of Corona virus contamination and to minimise the opportunity of spreading the virus, to keep those who enter places of worship of your PCC building's safe.
- The **risk** is the chance, high or low, that somebody could be harmed by becoming contaminated with the Corona virus, together with an indication of how serious the potential of providing an opportunity for contamination might be.

Further Assistance and Support

- As a church, the incumbent, churchwardens and PCCs are responsible for completing an assessment of risk and these documents are a guide and your local context may be different and this overview is provided to assist you in beginning to assess, prepare and complete an assessment for your own situation.
- In addition to this guidance, example template and documents specifically mentioned to help with this risk process, a supplementary list can be found at the end of this document.
- Do contact your area dean or your archdeacon if, having read this document and discussed the matters as incumbent, churchwardens and PCCs, you need help to clarify particular matters relating to the assessment you are completing.

1. Identify the hazards

One of the most important aspects of your risk assessment is accurately identifying the potential hazards in your buildings. A good starting point is to conduct a 'virtual' walk around your buildings and think about any hazards. In other words, what is it about the activities, processes or substances used that could injure those using your buildings or harm their health?

When you attend a place everyday it is easy to overlook some hazards, so here are some tips to help you identify the ones that matter:

Check guidance on the elements, which provide opportunity for contamination.

- Personal contact between others
- Potential contaminated surfaces
- Number of those using the building
- The size/space within the building and inbuilt obstacles – pews or pillars which will influence the route individuals are required to take
- Shared facilities toilets, serveries
- Shared resources – Registers, Books, Pens, Cleaning Tools and other equipment. This can help spell out the hazards and putting them in their true perspective

Check manufacturers' instructions

Or data sheets for new chemicals and equipment used as part of your management of the Corona Virus risks, such as hand washing solutions, or surface cleaning solutions as they can be very helpful in spelling out the hazards and putting them in their true perspective.

Take account of non-routine operations

(eg maintenance, cleaning operations, operations outside of the buildings – churchyard grass cutting and potential changes in cycles, which have occurred following closures)

Remember to think about long-term hazards to well-being

(e.g. exposure to harmful substances, potential- mental ill health)

Visit the Church of England Covid 19 Guidance Web Page

which provides some useful information and indicators on the areas that need to be considered and provides general advice for incumbents, churchwardens and PCC members'. <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches> at the bottom of this web page under documents the advice is contained in 'Access to church buildings during lockdown: general advice for incumbents, churchwardens and PCC members'.

Visit the Health and Safety Environment Web Page

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/index.htm> which publishes practical guidance on hazards and how to control them

2. Decide who might be harmed and how

Think how those using the church or parish buildings (or others who may be present such as contractors or visitors) might be harmed. Ask your PCC members and volunteers what they think the hazards are, as they may notice things that are not obvious to you and may have some good ideas on how to control the risks.

For each hazard you need to be clear about who might be harmed; it will help you identify the best way of controlling the risk. That doesn't mean listing everyone by name, but rather identifying groups of people (eg 'people working in the vestry or 'passers-by').

Remember:

- Some people using the building may have particular requirements, for example volunteers, ministry team, others who may be lone workers.
- Think about people who might not be in the building all the time, such as visitors, contractors and maintenance workers
- Take members of the public into account if they could be hurt by activities within the building
- If you share your building with another business or group, consider how your work affects others and how their work affects you and your workers. Talk to each other and make sure controls are in place. Note that they have their own risk assessments to complete and monitor for their business requirements and compliance. (Nurseries/contractors)
- Ask your PCC members and volunteers if there is anyone you may have missed
- Consider how you might contact them if contamination occurs.

3. Evaluate the risks

Having identified the hazards, you then have to decide how likely it is that harm will occur; ie the level of risk and what to do about it. Risk is a part of everyday life and you are not expected to eliminate all risks. What you must do is make sure you know about the main risks and the things you need to do to manage them responsibly.

Generally, you need to do everything 'reasonably practicable'. This means balancing the level of risk against the measures needed to control the real risk in terms of money, time or trouble. However, you do not need to take action if it would be grossly disproportionate to the level of risk.

Your risk assessment should only include what you could reasonably be expected to know - **you are not expected to anticipate unforeseeable risks.**

Look at what you're already doing, and the control measures you already have in place. Ask yourself:

- Can I get rid of the hazard altogether?
- If not, how can I control the risks so that harm is unlikely?

Some practical steps you could take include:

- Trying a less risky option
- Preventing access to the hazards
- Organising activities to reduce exposure to the hazard
- Issuing protective equipment
- Providing welfare facilities such as first aid and washing facilities
- Involving and consulting PCC members and volunteers - so that you can be sure that what you propose to do will work in practice and won't introduce any new hazards.

4. Record your significant findings

Make a record of your significant findings, which will evidence your assessment of the hazards, how they might harm people and what you have in place to control the risks. (A risk assessment) Any record produced should be simple and focused on controls.

See the template provided by the Church of England <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

Found at the bottom of this web page under Documents and titled '**Towards Re-opening Church Buildings: Coronavirus Risk Assessment Checklist for Parish Churches**'

Any paperwork you produce should help you to communicate and manage the risks. For most this does not need to be a big exercise - just note the main points down about the significant risks and what you concluded.

An easy way to record your findings is to use the template provided. When writing down your results keep it simple, for example work with generic step by step headings to begin the thought process such as: 'What might be the considerations surrounding the reopening of a closed building after a lengthy closure – other contaminants such as bats, water borne contagions such as legionaries and the restarting of key utilities electricity, heating etc.? Who are the potential people likely to enter the building, for what purpose and how regularly? What might they need to use or touch?

As these questions are answered, the next step is to consider whether these will increase the risk of contamination and what you might reasonably do about this to minimise this risk.

For example; the Church of England considers the use of shared books through cross surface contamination as a sufficiently high risk that the guidance given is not to share books. Therefore in creating a response to the consideration of the risks of shared books, the action taken to avoid or minimise the risk of spreading contamination would be to not share books.

Similarly, the risk of people who are asymptomatic in carrying the virus, entering the buildings, as potential carriers of the virus should also be noted, and provision for good personal hygiene should be made. Washing of hands, hand sanitizers, paper towels and 'refuse' bags to dispose with plans in place to ensure that the refuse bags are removed and disposed of at regular intervals.

A risk assessment must be 'suitable and sufficient', ie it should show that:

- A proper check was made
- You asked who might be affected
- You dealt with all the obvious significant hazards, taking into account the number of people who could be involved
- The precautions are reasonable, and the remaining risk is low
- You involved your PCC members, volunteers in the process

If your risk assessment identifies a number of hazards, you need to put them in order of importance and address the most serious risks first.

Identify long-term solutions for the risks with the biggest consequences, as well as those risks most likely to cause contamination. You should also establish whether there are improvements that can be implemented quickly, even temporarily, until more reliable controls can be put in place.

Remember, the greater the risk the more robust and reliable the control measures will need to be.

5. Review your risk assessment and update if necessary

The response to the Corona virus is evolving. Sooner or later, there will be new guidance and changes, which may bring new challenges and hazards, and may change the core practices, which informed your original assessment. So it makes sense to review what you are doing on an ongoing basis, look at your risk assessment again and ask yourself:

- Have there been any significant changes?
- Are there improvements you still need to make?
- Have the members of the PCC or your volunteers spotted a problem?
- Have you learnt anything from accidents, near misses, and work-related ill-health (physical and mental) reports?

Make sure your risk assessment stays up to date.

Supplementary Reference and Support

The Church of England guidance page on response to covid 19, at the bottom of which are some helpful documents that can be downloaded for use, are held centrally and updated with the latest guidance from the Church of England.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches>

Church of England Documents

Building Access and cleaning

1. **Access to church buildings** during lockdown: **general advice** for incumbents, churchwardens and PCC members
2. **Towards Re-opening Church Buildings: Coronavirus Risk Assessment Checklist for Parish Churches** (*Template which also contains helpful links to other sources of advice*)
3. Guidance for **churches and cathedrals** on access to their buildings for **construction** work during lockdown
4. Keeping **church buildings clean**

Safeguarding and Wellbeing

5. **Wellbeing** of clergy and lay ministers during the coronavirus pandemic
6. Guidance on **mental health and wellbeing** and Coronavirus
7. **Safeguarding** and COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
8. Advice on **pastoral support** in the community, including care homes
9. Guidance on **Spiritual Communion** and Coronavirus

Community Action

10. A guidance note on churches' **community action** during COVID-19

Additional earlier guidance

11. **Securing and caring** for your church buildings during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic: advice for incumbents, churchwardens and PCC members
12. **Access to church buildings** during lockdown: advice for **incumbents**
13. Guidance for accessing church buildings for **buildings maintenance** during the coronavirus pandemic