

Updated guidance as of Thursday 17th September 2020

New section:

- Key principles

New FAQs:

- How does the new 'rule of six' affect regular church services? in The rule of six section
- Are places of worship exempt from the 'rule of six'? in The rule of six section
- Can bible study groups or home groups now meet in person? In Prayer and Worship section
- Can a choir sing during worship if there are more than six members? In Prayer and Worship section
- Can a choir rehearse? In Prayer and Worship section

Updated FAQs:

- Can churches open for individual prayer? In Prayer and Worship section
- Can churches hold services of worship? In Prayer and Worship section
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The Church of England continues to engage with the Government seeking clarification on a number of areas.

We anticipate further updates in the next few days with further additions to the FAQs and we also continue to review the downloadable guidance papers which will be updated accordingly.

All updates will be notified at the top of this page.

Key principles

The Government has introduced new regulations making it illegal for groups of more than six people to meet, unless covered by exemptions.

The intention is to limit the spread of the virus by minimising close physical contact as much as possible. When deciding whether to proceed with an activity, depending on local circumstances, please bear this principle in mind.

Areas covered by exemptions to the 'rule of six' include work, children's activities and charitable services.

There is also an exemption that covers places of worship making it possible for more than six people to gather for acts of communal worship. However, it is not a blanket exemption for any activity in a place of worship.

The advice below is provided to assist local churches in their planning and decision making.

It is everyone's responsibility to comply with the law. This guidance is designed to help those who have responsibility for organising gatherings, to ensure they comply with the law and protect parishioners and the public, especially those most vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19.

We acknowledge and share the sadness many are feeling at not being able to meet together as we used to do. We prayerfully and confidently look forward to the day when we can all meet together again.

FAQs

The rule of six

HOW DOES THE NEW 'RULE OF SIX' AFFECT REGULAR CHURCH SERVICES?

Public worship can continue. There is an exemption that covers places of worship making it possible for more than six people to gather for acts of communal worship. However, it is not a blanket exemption. People must not be part of a group of more than six unless they are from the same household or support bubble.

ARE PLACES OF WORSHIP EXEMPT FROM THE 'RULE OF SIX'?

There is an exemption that covers places of worship making it possible for more than six people to gather there. The exemption covers church services and as well as some other activities that take place in church buildings.

However, it is not a blanket exemption. People must not be part of a group of more than six unless they are from the same household or support bubble.

Prayer and worship

CAN CHURCHES OPEN FOR INDIVIDUAL PRAYER?

Since 15 June, the Government has allowed access to places of worship for individual prayer and funerals. See our guidance on individual prayer.

Individual prayer should be individual. People must not be part of a group of more than six unless

they are from the same household or support bubble. If your church is opening for Individual prayer or public worship, please complete a risk assessment.

CAN CHURCHES HOLD SERVICES OF WORSHIP?

Since the 4th of July 2020, the Government has allowed public worship to resume. New regulations came into force on 14th of September 2020 limiting gatherings to no more than six people. Places of worship, alongside other COVID-secure premises, are exempt, meaning that the number of people able to attend services depends on how many can safely be accommodated, observing appropriate physical distancing and hygiene measures.

However people must not be part of a group of more than six unless they are from the same household or support bubble.

Read our advice on safely resuming public worship.

Read a blog which shares a range of options for churches to share services and events online as doors are reopened for prayer, worship and life events.

CAN BIBLE STUDY GROUPS OR HOME GROUPS NOW MEET IN PERSON?

A group can meet in someone's home as long as there are no more than six people in the house in total, including those not taking part in the group at that time.

Groups can meet on church premises under the same conditions as apply to services of worship – for example people attending must not be part of a group of more than six unless they are from the same household or support bubble.

However Government guidance states:

“However, for activities and social groups where there is a significant likelihood of groups mixing and socialising (and where it will be difficult to prevent mingling and therefore breaking the law) should not take place in a community facility.”

Please take this into consideration.

CAN A CHOIR SING DURING WORSHIP IF THERE ARE MORE THAN SIX MEMBERS?

Although the congregation may not sing yet, provided adequate physical distancing can be achieved, a small choir may sing. There may be more than six members depending on whether adequate physical distancing can be achieved.

Please see our guidance on public worship for more information.

Please also see Guidance from the RSCM on the safe resumption of choral singing.

CAN A CHOIR REHEARSE?

Choirs can rehearse for a worship service in a place of worship with more than six people.

However, Government guidance suggests amateur choir rehearsals are an activity where there is a significant likelihood of groups mixing and socialising. They should therefore be carefully risk assessed.

CAN WE HAVE WORSHIP OUTSIDE?

Yes, but the precautions you need to take depend on how many people attend. Social events where more than six people from more than one household or support bubble are likely to gather should not take place outside, including in a churchyard.

Please see our guidance for more information.

CAN FUNERALS STILL GO AHEAD?

The House of Bishops has advised that funerals may be carried out in church buildings.

Please see our guidance on funerals in church buildings for more information.

There is a specific exemption that covers funeral services. This allows a maximum of 30 people to attend church premises for a funeral without observing the 'rule of six'. This is subject to the church carrying out a risk assessment and taking all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of coronavirus. Until otherwise advised, we consider the maximum of 30 to include everyone participating in the service.

We recognise how difficult this time is for anyone who has lost a loved one even though a funeral in church is now possible, you may wish to discuss with your vicar or minister the possibility of a memorial service at a date in the future where more people can be present.

CAN WEDDINGS STILL GO AHEAD?

From 4 July, the Government has allowed for weddings in places of worship, providing certain public health criteria are met.

There is a specific exemption that covers wedding services. This allows a maximum of 30 people to attend church premises for a wedding without observing the 'rule of six'. This is subject to the church carrying out a risk assessment and taking all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of coronavirus. Until otherwise advised, we consider the maximum of 30 to include everyone participating in the service.

CAN BAPTISMS STILL GO AHEAD?

Baptisms are possible providing appropriate steps are taken to minimise risk. Please see our guidance on baptisms for more information.

If the baptism is taking place as part of a regular act of worship the usual requirements for public worship apply (see Rule Six FAQ section above).

There is a specific exemption that covers standalone baptism services. This allows a maximum of 30 people to attend church premises for a baptism without observing the 'rule of six'. This is subject to the church carrying out a risk assessment and taking all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of coronavirus. Until otherwise advised, we consider the maximum of 30 to include everyone participating in the service.

CAN ORDINATIONS STILL GO AHEAD?

Yes, as long as there are no more than 30 people if it is not taking place as part of a regular act of worship. There is a specific exemption that covers these services. This allows a maximum of 30 people to attend church premises without observing the 'rule of six'. This is subject to the church carrying out a risk assessment and taking all reasonable measures to limit the risk of transmission of coronavirus. Until otherwise advised, we consider the maximum of 30 to include everyone participating in the service.