



[Home](#) > [COVID-19: Guidance for the safe use of places of worship from 4 July](#)

Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Guidance

COVID-19: Guidance for the safe use of places of worship from 4 July

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Contents

- [1. Introduction](#)
- [2. Purpose of this guidance](#)
- [3. Key principles for safely opening places of worship](#)
- [4. Adapting practices to reduce the spread of infection](#)
- [5. General actions to reduce the spread of infection](#)
- [6. How can places of worship communicate this guidance to visitors?](#)
- [7. Protective security](#)
- [8. Enforcement](#)

[Annex A: Risk assessment for protective security – factors to consider](#)

[Guidance on safe use of places of worship before 4 July](#)

1. Introduction

The UK is currently experiencing a public health emergency as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The [transmission characteristics of COVID-19](#) are outlined by Public Health England. The transmission of COVID-19 is thought to occur mainly through respiratory droplets generated by coughing and sneezing, and through

contact with contaminated surfaces. The predominant modes of transmission are assumed to be droplet and contact.

This guidance for places of worship has been drafted on the basis of the scientific evidence available and will be updated as necessary as more data becomes available on this novel virus.

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 can make them places that are particularly vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19.

Through its Places of Worship Taskforce, the government has worked with faith leaders and representatives to develop this guidance to enable the safe reopening of places of worship for a broader range of activities from 4 July 2020.

This guidance will come into effect from 4 July 2020 in England alongside the relevant associated changes to the [Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#). Until 4 July you should continue to refer to the [current guidance online](#), which also sets out the current regulations.

This guidance remains under review and may be updated in line with the changing situation.

Changes from 4 July

From 4 July, gatherings of more than 30 people will be permitted but only in certain public places as set out in law. This will include places of worship and their surrounding premises. There are however activities where it is advisable to restrict numbers to 30 within a place of worship for public health reasons. This guidance sets out those activities as well as how to ensure your place of worship is COVID-19 secure.

Whilst engaging in an activity in the place of worship or surrounding grounds, all parties should adhere to social distancing guidelines. From 4 July, 2 metres or 1 metre with risk mitigation (where 2 metres is not viable) between households are acceptable.

For acts of worship taking place away from the place of worship and surrounding grounds, as defined below, please follow the relevant guidance on the number of people permitted to gather in those spaces.

The following table sets out where it is advisable to limit the number of people within a place of worship due to the potential for increased spread of COVID-19.

Table 1

Activity	Advised gathering limit
Communal worship, including led prayers, devotions or meditations by a Minister of Religion or lay person.	Limits for communal worship should be decided on the basis of the capacity of the place of worship following a risk assessment (see Section 5 'Restrictions on capacity'). Social distancing should be strictly adhered to (see Section 5 'Social distancing').
Marriage ceremonies	Marriage ceremonies should have no more than 30 people in attendance, and social distancing should be strictly adhered to. See more detail in the Guidance for small marriages and civil partnerships during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic .
Funerals	Funerals should have no more than 30 people in attendance, and social distancing should be strictly adhered to. See more detail in the COVID-19: guidance for managing a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic .
Other life cycle ceremonies (definition in Table 2).	Other life cycle ceremonies should have no more than 30 people present, unless the life cycle rite takes place during routine communal worship.

This guidance applies to places of worship when being used for a religious purpose or in preparation for a religious purpose.

Where a place of worship's premises is used by other user groups, only those activities permitted by law should take place. Businesses which cannot yet operate are [listed in this guidance](#) (such as indoor fitness, indoor soft play, indoor performances in front of a live audience, etc).

For permitted uses of a place of worship not included in this guidance, you should refer to the specific guidance linked below:

- [Tourism, retail](#) and [restaurants](#) and [other hospitality industries](#)
- Meetings or small gatherings, as now permitted in other multi-use settings. (To be published shortly.)

2. Purpose of this guidance

This guidance is designed to assist places of worship in England to prepare to open for a broad range of worship activities, in accordance with the associated legislation which will come into effect on 4 July 2020. The guidance sets out how this can be done in a manner that is COVID-19 secure and in line with social distancing guidelines, in order to minimise the risk of exposure to infection.

Table 2

Definitions for the purpose of this guidance

"Place of worship"	<p>A place of worship refers to a building used for regular religious ceremonies, communal worship or similar gatherings by religious organisations. It includes the use of surrounding grounds, for example, adjoining carparks, courtyards or gardens for which the venue managers are also responsible.</p> <p>The guidance also covers premises when being used for religious gatherings, even when their primary purpose is not for religious gatherings, such as a community centre. These premises will only be able to be used where they are permitted to be open and additional guidance may be applicable.</p> <p>This guidance does not cover public parks, private homes, cultural sites or other open spaces, such as woodlands which may be used for religious purposes. If people do want to engage in worship in these spaces, then the guidance relevant to that place should be adhered to.</p>
"Life cycle event"	Religious ceremonies to mark rites of passage, which are separate, self-contained ceremonies as opposed to marking a life cycle event or rite in the course of routine communal worship.
"Worshippers" or "Visitors"	Those entering the place of worship to engage in worship or other activity for which the place of worship may be used.
"Venue managers"	The person or persons responsible for the management of an individual place of worship, including assessment of compliance with the following guidelines. This may be a religious leader or lay person.
"Household" and "Support Bubble"	<p>A household is a person or a group of people who live together in the same accommodation.</p> <p>A support bubble is where a single adult living alone, or a single parent with children under 18, can form an exclusive network with one other household where social distancing does not have to be observed.</p> <p>The two households that form a support bubble count as one household for the purposes of this guidance.</p>
"Must"	Where the guidance states that an activity must take place this is because it is a requirement under the Health Protection

“Should” Where the guidance states that an activity should take place this is not a legal requirement under the [Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\)\(England\) Regulations 2020](#), however it is strongly advised that consideration is given to following the advice being given to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

3. Key principles for safely opening places of worship

Each individual place of worship is strongly advised to apply this guidance with reference to its own specific circumstances, including its size and type of activities, how it is organised, operated, managed and regulated.

Venue managers of places of worship will have discretion over when they consider it safe to open and should decide to remain closed if they are not able to safely adhere to the guidelines outlined below.

Many places of worship are also workplaces and should therefore be aware of their responsibilities as employers under existing health and safety law. Places of worship also have a duty of care to volunteers, to ensure that as far as reasonably practicable they are not exposed to risks to their health and safety.

Consideration should be given to how fair and equal access can safely be provided for all users to be able to undertake faith practices within a place of worship, in line with government guidelines and considering requirements under the Equality Act 2010 where these apply.

To help decide which actions to take, a COVID-19 risk assessment should be completed by each place of worship. This will be in addition to any risk assessment already in place.

This link provides generic [guidance on completing a risk assessment](#). Assessments should be done in consultation with unions or workers (including volunteers and contractors) if relevant. It may also be beneficial to include worshippers or other stakeholders (such as neighbouring tenants or property owners) in the risk assessment to assist understanding among faith communities and local communities and improve reopening design and execution. Failure to complete a COVID-19 risk assessment could constitute a breach of [Health & Safety legislation](#), as could having a risk assessment with insufficient measures set out. Places of worship are encouraged to make their risk assessments available online where possible.

Venue managers are strongly advised to take action to minimise the potential for spreading of COVID-19 among worshippers, and those working/volunteering within the building and surrounding grounds. You may want to engage worshippers in co-designing an informal community behaviour agreement. Venue managers should take all possible steps to ensure the safety of the public, ensuring that gathering limits where set locally are adhered, and where the advised limit is set in this guidance as 30 people.

Individual venues should consider the cumulative impact of many venues re-opening in a small area. This means working with local authorities, neighbouring businesses and travel operators to assess this risk and applying additional mitigations. These could include:

- Further lowering capacity - even if it is possible to safely seat a number of people inside a venue, it may not be safe for them all to travel to and from, or enter and exit the venue.
- Staggering entry times with other local venues and taking steps to avoid queues building up in surrounding areas.
- Arranging one-way travel routes between transport hubs and venues.
- Advising visitors to avoid particular forms of transport or routes and to avoid crowded areas when in transit to the venue.

4. Adapting practices to reduce the spread of infection

Religious leaders should adopt the guidance below and seek to include additional changes that could be made to their religious rituals that usually involve close contact and shared items between individuals.

Places of worship and faith communities should adapt religious services, especially where ceremonies would otherwise have taken place over a number of hours or days, to ensure the safety of those present and minimise spread of infection. It is advised that the ceremonies and services should be concluded in the shortest reasonable time.

Once completed, participants should be encouraged to move on promptly, to minimise the risk of contact and spread of infection. If appropriate, you should reconfigure spaces to enable worshippers to be seated rather than standing which reduces the risk of contact.

It is recommended that, where possible, places of worship continue to stream worship or other events to avoid large gatherings and to continue to reach those individuals who are self-isolating or particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

More specific guidance is as follows.

The use of shared items

- Individuals should be prevented from touching or kissing objects that are handled communally. Barriers and/or clear signage should be put in place where necessary to avoid this taking place.
- Individuals should also avoid touching property belonging to others such as shoes which, if removed, should be placed and collected by their owner while adhering to social distancing principles.
- Reusable and communal resources such as prayer mats, service sheets, religious texts or devotional material should be removed from use. Single use alternatives should be provided as long as they are removed and disposed of by the worshipper.
- Items owned by the individual to aid worship such as a prayer mat or religious text, can be brought in but should be removed again by the worshipper.
- In circumstances where worshippers cannot bring their own books, places of worship should keep a selection of clean books for individuals to use. Clean books should be quarantined for 48 hours since their previous use and should be quarantined for 48 hours again after use. Items which cannot be easily cleaned should also be subject to the 48 hour quarantine after use.

Please also refer to specific cleaning advice below.

Food and drink

- Where food or drink ('consumables') are essential to the act of worship, they can be used, however the sharing of food should be avoided, as should the use of communal vessels.
- If it is necessary to handle consumables as a part of a faith practice, those giving and receiving food items should wash their hands thoroughly before and after consumption, or wear gloves.
- The person distributing the consumable should release it, into the hand only, in such a way to avoid any contact between them and those receiving it, or wear gloves. If accidental contact does occur, both people should cleanse their hands immediately.
- Other mitigations should also be considered, for example, foodstuffs should be prewrapped, and a system should be in place to prevent individuals from coming into contact with consumables and any dishes and/ or cutlery other than their own (for example the use of shared bowls).
- Speaking, singing and chanting should not happen across uncovered consumables (other than consumables to be used by the celebrant alone). Instead consumables must be securely covered, and prior to the receptacle being opened, should be cleaned, hands must be washed or gloves worn.

- Hospitality spaces within a place of worship, such as cafes, are permitted to open but should be limited to table-service, social distancing should be observed, and with minimal staff and customer contact in line with [hospitality guidance](#).

Singing, chanting and the use of musical instruments

- People should avoid singing, shouting, raising voices and/or playing music at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult or that may encourage shouting. This is because of the potential for increased risk of transmission from aerosol and droplets.
- Therefore, spoken responses during worship should also not be in a raised voice.
- Activities such as singing, chanting, shouting and/or playing of instruments that are blown into should be specifically avoided in worship or devotions and in rehearsals. This is because there is a possible additional risk of infection in environments where individuals are singing or chanting as a group, and this applies even if social distancing is being observed or face coverings are used.
- Where essential to an act of worship, one individual only should be permitted to sing or chant, and the use of plexi-glass screens should be considered to protect worshippers from them, as this will further prevent transmission and the screen can be easily cleaned.
- Where music plays a big part in worship, and recordings are available, we suggest you consider using these as an alternative to live singing.
- You are advised only to play musical instruments that are not blown into. Organs can be played for faith practices, as well as general maintenance, but should be cleaned thoroughly before and after use.

The government and the medical and scientific communities are urgently engaged in research around transmission risk and how such activities can best be managed safely, and further guidance will follow when available.

Weddings and other life cycle events

It is strongly advised that only essential aspects of the ceremonies take place at this time.

- No food or drink should be consumed as a part of the event unless required for the purposes of solemnisation.
- As stated in Table 1, weddings should have no more than 30 people present. Other life cycle ceremonies should also have no more than 30 people present, unless the event is part of a routine communal worship service. Worshippers should maintain social distancing.
- Large wedding receptions or parties should not take place after life cycle events. See [restaurants](#) and [other hospitality industries](#) guidance for further information.

Use of water

- Any pre-requisite washing/ablution rituals should not be done at the place of worship but carried out prior to arrival.
- In rare circumstances where it is necessary, washing facilities within the place of worship should be used in line with social distancing guidelines and hygiene measures applied.
- People should not wash the body parts of others.
- Where rituals or ceremonies require water to be applied to the body, small volumes can be splashed onto the body, but full immersion should be avoided.
- Others present should move out of range of any potential splashing.
- Where an infant is involved a parent/guardian or other member of the infant's regular household should hold the infant.

- All individuals involved should thoroughly wash their hands before and after and ensure good hygiene.

Cash donations

- Where possible faith leaders should discourage cash donations and continue to use online or contactless giving and resources.
- Where this is not an option, cash should be collected in a receptacle that is set in one place and handled by one individual, as opposed to being passed around. Regular cleaning and hygiene should be maintained, and gloves worn to handle cash offerings where giving continues.

Young people and children attending places of worship

- Young children should be supervised by the parent or guardian. They should wash hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with running water and soap and dry them thoroughly or use hand sanitiser ensuring that all parts of the hands are covered. Places of worship can help remind children and young people, and their parents and guardians, of the important actions they should take during the COVID-19 outbreak to help prevent the spread of the virus. Posters on general hand hygiene can be found on the [eBug website](#).
- Any shared facilities for children, such as play corners, soft furnishings, soft toys and toys that are hard to clean, should be removed and/or put out of use.
- Outdoor playgrounds are permitted to open where venue managers risk assess that it is safe to do so, see relevant [guidance](#). Particular attention should be paid to cleaning frequently touched surfaces by children and those that are at child height.
- Principles in general guidance from the Department for Education should also be followed for any separate children's activities being organised by the place of worship alongside or within a service.
- For formal childcare and educational settings refer to the relevant [guidance](#).

5. General actions to reduce the spread of infection

People should act in a safe and responsible way in order to reduce the spread of infection in our communities.

Test and trace

The government has launched an [NHS Test and Trace service](#) to manage the risk of the virus re-emerging. The service:

- provides testing for anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 to find out if they have the virus
- gets in touch with anyone who has had a positive test result to help them share information about any close recent contacts they have had; and
- alerts those contacts, where necessary, and notifies them they need to self-isolate to help stop the spread of the virus.

Further information can be found online including for contacts of people with possible or confirmed COVID-19 infection who do not live with the person and for [places of work](#).

The opening up of public places following the COVID-19 outbreak is being supported by the NHS Test and Trace service. In line with other government guidance for other venues including in the retail and hospitality sector, you should assist this service by keeping an accurate temporary record of visitors for 21 days, in a way that is manageable for your place of worship, and assist NHS Test and Trace with requests for that data if needed for contact tracing and the investigation of local outbreaks.

We will work with faith leaders and organisations to make the process for recording your customers and visitors compliant with data protection legislation and as manageable as possible, including the development of digital solutions. This may be an additional reason for places of worship to consider a booking system for visitors, in addition to limiting numbers in order to adhere to with social distancing guidelines.

Restrictions on capacity

Limits for communal worship should be decided locally on the basis of the capacity of the place of worship following a risk assessment. The number of people permitted to enter the place of worship at any one time should be limited, so that a safe distance of at least 2 metres, or 1 metre with risk mitigation (where 2 metres is not viable) between households.

- The size and circumstance (including ventilation) of the premises will determine the maximum number of people that can be accommodated whilst also facilitating social distancing; this may therefore be lower than the maximum 30 people who can attend life-cycle events such as weddings.
- The safe number of people should be decided by the venue manager.
- In defining the number of people that can reasonably follow social distancing, the total floorspace as well as likely pinch points and busy areas should be taken into account (such as entrances, exits) and where possible alternative or one-way routes introduced.

Social distancing

All managers and all visitors to a place of worship should follow the guidelines on social distancing including:

- Where possible, adhere to social distancing of at least 2 metres or 1 metre with risk mitigation (where 2 metres is not viable) between households. For frequently used places, mark areas using floor tape or paint to help people maintain social distance.
- You should consider and set out the additional mitigations you will introduce in your risk assessment. These could include, for instance, avoiding any face-to-face seating by changing layouts, reducing the number of people in enclosed spaces, improving ventilation, using protective screens and face coverings, and closing non-essential social spaces, as outlined throughout this guidance.
- Queue management is important so the flow of groups in and out of the premises can be carefully controlled in a socially distanced way, reducing the risk of congestion or contact. Considerations should be made for how to manage those waiting outside a place of worship, including the introduction of socially distanced queuing systems.

All religious practices should be carried out such that adherence to social distancing can be maintained between individuals from different households. This is to reduce the transmission of the virus. There should only be a closer distance when absolutely essential to enable a faith practice to be carried out (for example contact with the faith leader). Time spent in contact should be kept to an absolute minimum.

Other mitigations to support social distancing could include:

- Those leading the worship reminding congregants of the importance of social distancing and hygiene.
- Introducing a one-way flow in and out of the premises with appropriate floor markings or signage, with restrictions on accessing non-essential areas. At the end of worship, this could include worshippers leaving one row at a time, in order to prevent crowding at entry or exit points.
- Multiple entry points could be opened, and clear signposting or assistance could be offered to guide worshippers and to avoid congestion.
- Staggering arrival and departure times will reduce the flow at exits and entrances as well as reduce any impacts on public transport. Venues could also consider introducing a booking system to help facilitate this.

You may want to consider how prioritisation could be given to people who may have a specific need or requirement.

- Sing screens, barriers or alternative rooms and spaces to separate worshippers.
- Any changes to entrances, exits and queues should take into account reasonable adjustments to accommodate those who need them, such as worshippers with physical disabilities.
- Introducing a booking system to help with managing numbers, particularly for services where demand will be high.
- Venue managers advertising set days or times when places of worship are open solely for those particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, such as those over 70 or clinically vulnerable.
- Leading worship in different spaces of the place of worship to limit the number of people in any one location - while avoiding risk of crowding at entry/exit points.
- Where social distancing cannot be maintained, extra attention needs to be paid to cleaning and hygiene to reduce the risk of transmission. Consider how well ventilated the venue is and improve this where possible, for example by fixing doors open where appropriate.
- Following the guidance on hand hygiene:
 - Wash your hands more often than usual, for 20 seconds using soap and water or hand sanitiser, particularly after coughing, sneezing and blowing your nose, or after being in public areas.
 - When you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, or the crook of your sleeved arm (not your hands) if you don't have a tissue, and throw the tissue away hygienically immediately afterwards. Then wash your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds using soap and water or hand sanitiser if hand washing facilities are not available.

The above advice on social distancing also applies when travelling to and from a place of worship. Decisions to reopen car parks are to be made locally and practical measures such as changing the car park layout to help people socially distance should be considered.

Guidance on social distancing relevant to transport, parking and the public realm can be found in the latest [guidance for passengers who need to travel during the coronavirus outbreak](#). This is being regularly reviewed and updated.

People who are symptomatic

Anyone showing symptoms of COVID-19 (a new continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell) should not attend the place of worship due to the risk that they pose to others; they should self-isolate at home immediately with other members of their household. Remote participation should be considered, for example by live streaming. This applies equally to individuals who work at the place of worship.

Individuals who are self-isolating due to a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the household

Where individuals are self-isolating due to a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the household, or because they have been requested to so by NHS Test and Trace, they should participate remotely. See [stay at home guidance for households with possible or confirmed COVID-19](#). Guidance is different for funerals, see guidance on [managing a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic](#).

Hygiene

- On entering and leaving a place of worship, everyone, including staff, should be asked to wash their hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds using soap and water or to use hand sanitiser if hand washing facilities are

not available. Download a [Public Health England poster](#).

- There should be signs and posters to build awareness of good handwashing technique, the need to increase handwashing frequency, avoid touching your face and to cough or sneeze into a tissue which is binned safely, or into the crook of your sleeved arm if a tissue is not available.
- You should provide hand sanitiser in multiple locations in addition to toilet facilities.

Toilets

Toilets inside or linked to places of worship should be kept open and carefully managed to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Steps that will usually be needed to make the use of toilets as safe as possible:

- Using signs and posters (see Hygiene above).
- Using social distancing marking in areas where queues normally form, and the adoption of a limited entry approach, with one in, one out (whilst avoiding the creation of additional bottlenecks).
- To enable good hand hygiene make hand sanitiser available on entry to toilets where safe and practical, and ensure suitable handwashing facilities including running water and liquid soap and suitable options for drying (either paper towels or hand dryers) are available. Communal towels should be removed and replaced with single use paper towels.
- Set clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets, with increased frequency of cleaning in line with usage. Use normal cleaning products, paying attention to frequently hand touched surfaces, and consider the use of disposable cloths or paper roll to clean all hard surfaces.
- Keep the facilities well ventilated, for example by fixing doors open where appropriate and safe to do so.
- Special care should be taken for cleaning of portable toilets and larger toilet blocks.
- Putting up a visible cleaning schedule that is kept up to date and visible.
- Providing more waste facilities and more frequent refuse collection.

Cleaning

- All surfaces, especially those most frequently touched such as door handles and rails, should be regularly cleaned using standard cleaning products. See [guidance](#). Sufficient time needs to be allowed for this cleaning to take place, particularly before reopening for the first time. Frequently used objects, surfaces or spaces, including for example doorways between outside and inside spaces should be given particular attention when cleaning.
- Historic England has also produced [guidance on cleaning historic surfaces](#), which might not be suitable for cleaning using standard cleaning products.
- A decision should be made locally on how frequently cleaning should take place based on an assessment of risk and use of the building.

Face coverings

- Evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does not protect you. However, if you are infected but have not yet developed symptoms, it may provide some protection for others you come into close contact with.
- Face coverings are not a replacement for the other ways of managing risk, including social distancing, minimising time spent in contact, and increasing hand and surface washing. These other measures remain the best ways of managing risk in a place of worship. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you and your household should isolate at home: wearing a face covering does not change this.

Worshippers, volunteers and staff, may choose to wear face coverings to offer protection to others and if so it is important to use them properly:

- Thoroughly wash hands before putting them on and taking them off.
- The key thing is they should cover the mouth and nose and fit well around the face. See [guidance on making face coverings at home](#).
- Face coverings should not be used by young children or those who may find it difficult to manage them correctly. For example, primary age children unassisted, or those with respiratory conditions.
- A face covering is not the same as the surgical masks or respirators used by healthcare and other workers as part of personal protective equipment. These masks and respirators should continue to be reserved for those who need them to protect against risks in their workplace, such as health and care workers, and those in industrial settings, like those exposed to dust hazards who already use these in their daily work.
- In England, members of the public are strongly urged to wear a face covering in hospital and it is mandatory to wear a face covering on public transport, except for those who are excepted in the list here.

Protecting the vulnerable

There should be a particular focus on protecting people who are clinically vulnerable and more likely to develop severe illness. Actions should include:

- Religious leaders, lay people, family, volunteers, staff and members of the public, including children, [staying at home and self-isolating](#) if they have a new, continuous cough or a high temperature or loss of or change to sense of smell or taste. This is to minimise risk of spread of COVID-19 to friends, the wider community, and particularly the vulnerable.
- Individuals who are shielding should continue to follow the government's [advice on shielding](#).
- If anyone becomes unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 in a place of worship they should go home immediately and be advised to follow the [stay at home guidance](#) which covers NHS Test and Trace. If they need clinical advice, they should go online to NHS 111 (or call 111 if they don't have internet access). In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. They should not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

Other people who may have been in contact with the person who has become unwell should wash their hands thoroughly after the interaction, but they do not need to take any other specific action unless they develop symptoms themselves or are advised to do so by NHS Test and Trace. If they do develop symptoms they should follow the [stay at home guidance](#).

Individuals aged 70 years and over attending the place of worship

- 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 and, if they do go out, to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside of their household.
- You should consider informing these groups in particular of the symptoms of COVID-19 and [current stay alert and social distancing guidance](#).

Individuals who are extremely clinically vulnerable/shielding

The NHS has written to around 2.2 million who are considered to be extremely clinically vulnerable to COVID-19, advising them to shield. See the current [guidance for this group](#). Shielded patients are currently advised not to meet more than one person from outside of their own household, and therefore not currently advised to attend places of worship.

From Monday 6 July, those shielding individuals may choose to gather in groups of up to 6 people outdoors and form a support bubble with another household, they will therefore still be advised not to attend places of worship indoors. Advice for both the clinically vulnerable and extremely clinically vulnerable is however advisory and they can choose how to manage their own risks.

6. How can places of worship communicate this guidance to visitors?

- Each place of worship is strongly advised to implement the measures set out in this guidance to ensure that visitors comply with government's guidance, and any risk assessments completed for the venue, for the safety of all those who visit and work there. The government strongly advises each place of worship ensures that visitors comply with the social distancing guidelines.
- Many faiths have issued specific guidance to their faith communities about some of these issues. You may wish to make the government's information on COVID-19 available to your faith community and others, in order to challenge misinformation.
- You should consider informing [certain groups of people](#) who may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, of the symptoms of COVID-19 and [current stay at home and social distancing guidance](#), and strongly discourage them from attending faith gatherings during this time or set aside a time for them to attend for individual devotions.
- Places of worship and faith leaders should consider how guidance can be communicated to visitors, including before they visit, in a way that is accessible and appropriate for the cultures, languages and reading levels of communities served by the place of worship.

7. Protective security

- Adapting a place of worship to COVID-19 measures will inevitably result in changes to operating policies, processes and procedures at the place of worship. Any changes to these should always be considered with regard to security implications.
- In implementing this guidance places of worship should continue to take account of protective security considerations to maintain effective security of the premises, all staff and visitors, especially around entry and exit procedures, and any queueing or crowding outside the building where people can be more exposed.
- Individuals with responsibility for the security of the venue should be consulted and involved throughout to help ensure good security is maintained as far as possible and that there are not any unintended security consequences as a result of any changes that are made. A risk assessment should be undertaken on any new measures or changes in operation to ensure risks have been considered and all practical mitigations identified and implemented.
- It is up to each place of worship to assess the level of risk, and places of worship may choose to delay opening if they do not feel they are able to safely do so under current social distancing measures.

In the process of completing a risk assessment you should consider the security factors at Annex A.

8. Enforcement

It is important to be aware of the enforcement provisions, as is the case for other sectors.

Where the enforcing authority (your local authority), identifies responsible individuals who are not taking action to comply with the relevant public health legislation and guidance to control public health risks (including this guidance), they will consider taking a range of actions to improve control of risks. For example, this would cover employers not taking appropriate action to ensure social distancing, where possible.

Under existing [Health & Safety legislation](#), failure to complete a COVID-19 risk assessment could constitute a breach, as could having a risk assessment with insufficient measures. The actions the enforcing authority can take include the provision of specific advice to employers to support them to achieve the required standard, through to issuing enforcement notices to help secure improvements. Serious breaches and failure to comply with enforcement notices can constitute a criminal offence, with serious fines and even imprisonment for up to two years.

Employers are expected to respond to such actions of any advice or notices issued by enforcing authorities rapidly and are required to do so within any timescales imposed by the enforcing authority. The vast majority of employers are responsible and will join with the UK's fight against COVID-19 by working with the Government and their sector bodies to protect their workers and the public. However, inspectors are carrying out compliance checks nationwide to ensure that employers are taking the necessary steps.

Annex A: Risk assessment for protective security – factors to consider

A risk assessment that considers protective security should be conducted in addition to, or as part of, any health and safety/ fire safety or other broader assessment of the hazards and threats to the people in and around the place of worship as a result of changes made to how that place of worship functions.

Queues, social distancing and security

Whilst dense crowding is unlikely if social distancing is operating correctly, the revised layout of spaces could present new security risks, particularly where multiple queues are created. Consideration should be given to the following:

- Venue managers should wherever possible, and in line with social distancing, organise queuing within existing protected areas; venue managers should not remove any security features or useful street furniture items without considering protective security in the round.
- If queuing is only possible outside of protected areas then venue managers should consider and mitigate any vulnerabilities by: routing queues behind permanent physical structures (such as street furniture, bollards, trolley parks and bike racks) to provide a visual deterrent and delay; closing off vehicle access to shared spaces; adjusting servicing and delivery times; reducing the opportunities for vehicles to interact with pedestrians; erecting robust barriers; introducing a reduced speed limit mandated using traffic calming.
- Venue managers should avoid making public at the site or online, detailed information about queue locations, times and number of people or removal of security features such as street furniture and bollards.

Staff, security officers/ volunteers and stewarding

It is vital for staff to remain vigilant and act on potential security threats including terrorism and wider criminality. They should:

- Continue to ensure that awareness of security threats is raised alongside health and safety risks through staff briefings.
- Whilst stewards, and in some cases security officers, may be focussed on managing people and queues for COVID-19 safety reasons, they should continue to remain vigilant for and report any suspicious activity as soon as possible.
- Ideally consider having separate stewarding for managing social distancing and health and safety aspects, and for security as this will allow proper due attention to be given to keeping the site safe from threats.
- Ensure there is a good communication system in place to inform people of any incident. Carry out a short exercise or test to check procedures and equipment for this are working correctly.

For further information see the Centre for Protection National Infrastructure (CPNI) and National Counter Terrorism Security Office (NaCTSO) for [specific security advice related to COVID-19](#).

Helpful information can also be found at the following websites:

CPNI advice:

- [All COVID-19 security advice](#)
- [Advice on protecting queues from hostile vehicles](#)
- [Advice on hostile reconnaissance](#)
- [COVID-19 workplace actions campaign \(messaging about distancing and hygiene\)](#)

NaCTSO advice:

- [General security advice](#)
- [Sector specific crowded places guidance](#)
- [Action counters terrorism e-learning](#)
- Action counters terrorism mobile app – available at download the Urim app in [Google Play](#) or [App Store](#). Then [↑ email.ctc@highfieldlearning.com](mailto:email.ctc@highfieldlearning.com) to request a user name and password. Please note access is for business/professional use only.

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