

Risk Assessment for Opening Church Buildings to the Public

Version Control

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22 nd May 2020	1	The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group
8 th June 2020	2	The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group
12 th June 2020	3	The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group
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Churches and cathedrals have been legally permitted to open for purposes of individual private prayer from 13th June. House of Bishops guidance provided for churches to open for funerals from 15th June. Public worship, with measures in place for social distancing, are allowed from 4th July. Other activities, except for a few still prohibited by law, may also take place in churches, subject to the government guidance in place for the relevant sector.

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, it 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. You should read the advice on re-opening buildings and the guidance on public worship before completing this assessment. Both are available 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.

A separate risk assessment relating to contractors and construction workers is available on the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](#).

Carrying out a risk assessment

1. Agree what activities you are planning for:

- Private prayer (clergy only)
- Livestreaming services (clergy only)
- Private prayer (general public)
- Public worship
- Rites of passage services
- Opening for visitors and tourists

2. Consider the hazards:

- Transmission of COVID-19
- Hazards arising from the temporary closure of the church
- Hazards arising from now using the church in a different way

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 so long as they are properly managed, but having more people coming through your building makes the possible impact – for example of 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.

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:	Assessor's name:	Date completed:	Review date:
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Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
Access to church buildings for clergy for purposes of private prayer and/or livestreaming General advice on accessing church buildings can be found here.	One point of entry to the church building clearly identified and separate from public entry if possible			
	A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant.	An example can be found here .		
	Buildings have been aired before use.			
	Check for animal waste and general cleanliness.			
	Ensure water systems are flushed through before use.	See Government Guidance for organisations on supplying safe water supplies		
	Switch on and check electrical and heating systems if needed. Commission system checks as necessary.			
	Holy water stoups and the font are empty.			
	Ensure safe use of equipment needed for livestreaming: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets, cables/tripod causing trip hazard			
Deciding whether to open to the public	Discuss with nearby venues and businesses to ensure that the timing and practical arrangements for using the church are compatible.			
	Update your website, A Church Near You, and any relevant social media.			

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services			
	If opening to tourists consider applying for the Visit Britain ‘Good to Go’ standard mark	Apply here.		
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.			
	Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the ‘cleaning’ section of this risk assessment (below).	Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here.		
	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.			
	Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside).			
	Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation.			
	Remove Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets			
	Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on)			
	Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance			
	Remove or isolate children’s resources and play areas			

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	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).			
	Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing.			
	Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements.			
	Limit access to places where the public does not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon in needed.			
	Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use.	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.		
	Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing	Consult advice on gaining temporary permissions .		
	Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc.			
	Ensure high-risk surfaces and touch points have been wiped with appropriate sanitiser spray or disposable wipes	Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here .		
	Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels.	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.		
	Where there are toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available.	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.		

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them.			
	If possible, provide safe means for worshippers and visitors to record their name and contact details; retain each day's record for 21 days			
	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.			
Cleaning the church before and after general use (no known exposure to anyone with Coronavirus symptoms)	If the church building has been closed for 72 hours between periods of being open then there is no need for extra cleaning to remove the virus from surfaces.			
Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here.	If 72-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating.			
	Set up a cleaning rota to cover your opening arrangements.			
	All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable).	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.		
	Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned.	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.		
	Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site.			

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal.			
Cleaning the church after known exposure to someone with Coronavirus symptoms	If possible close the church building for 72 hours with no access permitted.			
	If 72-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 72 hours, then carry out cleaning as per the normal advice on cleaning.	Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here.		