

Managing COVID-19 Risk- Guidance for the safe use of places of worship from 4 August

Why is this guidance important?

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.** The communal nature of places of worship makes them particularly vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19.

Who is this guidance for?

This guidance sets out how to ensure that places of worship are COVID-19 secure in preparation to reopen for a broader range of activities. Government guidance on the safe use of places of worship can be found [here](#).

Safety Guidance – gathering limits

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.

Activity	Advised gathering limit
Communal worship, including led prayers, devotions or meditations by a Minister of Religion or lay person.	The capacity of the place of worship should be based on a risk assessment taking into consideration; <ul style="list-style-type: none">• strict social distancing (2 metres or 1 metre with risk mitigation)• size and circumstance (including ventilation)• total floorspace as well as likely pinch points and busy areas• entrances, exits and queue management systems
Marriage ceremonies	No more than 30 people should be in attendance with strict social distancing adherence. See more detail in the Guidance for small marriages and civil partnerships during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic .
Funerals	No more than 30 people should be in attendance with strict social distancing adherence. See more detail in the COVID-19: guidance for managing a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic .
Other life cycle ceremonies	No more than 30 people should be present with strict social distancing adherence, unless the life cycle rite takes place during routine communal worship. Only essential aspects of the ceremonies to take place. No large wedding receptions or parties after life cycle events. See restaurants and other hospitality industries guidance
Outdoor worship	In the grounds of a place of worship <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More than 30 people can pray in a place of worship or its grounds, but a risk assessment should be conducted and COVID-19 Secure measures implemented. The number of

	<p>people who are able to gather will be dependent on the size of the space available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any risk assessment should also consider the security of worshippers. This may require involving local partners such as the police. <p>Public outdoor spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is not illegal under coronavirus legislation to pray in a public outdoor space. A gathering of up to 30 people is permitted, however it should follow social distancing guidelines – that is, individual groups should not interact with anyone outside of the group they are attending the gathering with - so in a group no larger than two households or six people if outdoors.• A gathering of over 30 is not permissible, except where this has been arranged by an organisation such as a business, a charitable, benevolent or philanthropic institution, a public body, or a political body who must take responsibility for ensuring a risk assessment has been undertaken for the gathering and it is managed in a way which minimises risks around transmission of the virus. It is likely that the bodies responsible for most places of worship are charitable, benevolent or philanthropic institutions, but it is for each body to determine whether it falls within this list of exempted organisations.• If anyone is considering arranging an event for more than 30 people in a public outdoor space they should liaise with those responsible for the open space in question to ensure that the event can be staged in a safe way, which includes undertaking a risk assessment that considers security.
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Key principles for safely opening places of worship

Guidance should be applied with reference to specific circumstances for each place of worship.

To help decide which actions to take, a COVID-19 risk assessment – in addition to any risk assessment already in place- should be completed by each place of worship. The risk assessments can be made publicly available online where possible. See here for further [information on completing a risk assessment](#)

Places of worship will have the discretion over when they consider it safe to open and remain closed if they are not able to safely adhere to the guidelines.

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- **See Appendix for detail.**

Many places of worship are also workplaces and should therefore be aware of their responsibilities as employers under existing health and safety law as well as their duty of care to volunteers.

Consideration should be given to how fair and equal access can safely be provided for all users, in line with government guidelines and considering requirements under the Equality Act 2010 where these apply.

General actions to reduce the spread of COVID-19

Symptoms of coronavirus



Anyone showing symptoms of COVID, should self-isolate at home immediately with other members of their household and **order a test via the [NHS Test and Trace Service](#).**

Inform [certain groups of people](#) who may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, of the symptoms and [current stay at home and social distancing guidance](#), and strongly advise remote participation or dedicated time for individual devotions.

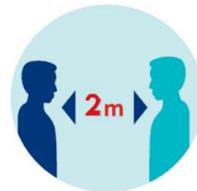
To assist the test and trace service, keep an accurate temporary record of visitors for 21 days. Support will be available to make the process for recording compliant with data protection legislation and as manageable as possible, including the development of digital solutions or a booking system.

Social Distancing

Maintain strict social distancing guidelines between individuals from different households at all times- at least 2 metres or 1 metre with risk mitigation (where 2 metres is not viable).

For 1 metre risk mitigation consider:

- avoiding any face-to-face seating
- reducing the number of people in enclosed spaces
- improving ventilation
- using protective screens and face coverings
- closing non-essential social spaces



Keep a minimum distance of 2 metres where possible



Wash hands frequently (for at least 20 seconds) or use a hand sanitiser with a minimum of 60% alcohol



Clean surfaces frequently including door handles, rails, hoists etc.



Avoid touching your face, nose and eyes

Carefully consider and control the in and out flow of groups, queuing systems and congestion risk within the social distancing guidelines.

Keep time spent in close contact to an essential and absolute minimum.

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.

Consider additional mitigations in your risk assessment. See detail in the [Appendix](#)

Hygiene

- On entering and leaving a place of worship, everyone, including staff, should be asked to wash their hands thoroughly. See [Public Health England poster](#) for further details.
- 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 sanitizer (more than 60% alcohol) in multiple locations in addition to toilet facilities.

Toilets (Portable toilets and larger toilet blocks)

Toilets inside or linked to places of worship should be kept open and carefully managed to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Consider the following 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).
- Enabling good hand hygiene by providing;
 - hand sanitisers (more than 60% alcohol) on entry to toilets where safe and practical,
 - suitable handwashing facilities including running water and liquid soap
 - suitable options for drying (either paper towels or hand dryers)
 - single use paper towels in place of communal towels.
- Set visible clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets, with increased frequency of cleaning in line with usage. [See guidance on cleaning](#)
- Keep the facilities well ventilated, for example by fixing doors open where appropriate and safe to do so.
- 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.
- Sufficient time needs to be allowed for this cleaning to take place, particularly before reopening for the first time
- A decision should be made locally on how frequently cleaning should take place based on an assessment of risk and use of the building.
- See further guidance on [cleaning in non-health care settings](#) and [cleaning historic surfaces](#).

Face coverings

- Face coverings are not a replacement for the other ways of managing risk. Social distancing, minimising time spent in contact, and increasing hand and surface washing remain the best ways of managing risk.
- From 8th August Worshippers, volunteers and staff, must wear face coverings to offer protection to others and 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.

Adapting practices to reduce the spread of infection

Using shared items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid and prevent touching, kissing, handling and use of communal items or property belonging to others including food. • Provide single use alternatives, encourage to bring in their own or keep a selection of clean items for individuals to use where worshippers cannot bring in their own. • Clean and quarantine the selection of items for 48 hours since their previous use and 48 hours again after use. • Items which cannot be easily cleaned should also be subject to the 48 hour quarantine after use.
Food and drink	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No food or drink should be consumed as a part of the life cycle events unless required for the purposes of solemnisation. Only essential aspects of wedding and life cycle ceremonies should take place at this time. • Where food or drink ('consumables') are essential to the act of worship, they can be used with utmost hygiene. • Avoid any contact between persons distributing consumables and those receiving, or wear gloves. If accidental contact does occur, both people should cleanse their hands immediately. • Consider other mitigations; e.g. prewrapped foodstuffs, and a system to prevent individuals from coming into contact with consumables and utensils other than their own. • Hospitality spaces within a place of worship, such as cafes, are permitted to open in line with hospitality guidance.
Singing, Chanting and the use of musical instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be no group singing inside places of worship when worshippers are present. • Outside only, small groups of professional singers will be able to sing in front of worshippers. Singing in groups should be limited to professional singers only and should be limited to a small set group of people. Both the singers and the worshippers should be outdoors. • Indoors - 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. • Avoid singing, shouting, raising voices including during spoken responses and/or playing music at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult to reduce the potential for increased risk of transmission from aerosol and droplets. • Speaking, singing and chanting should not happen across uncovered consumables (other than consumables to be used by the celebrant alone).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
Use of water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any pre-requisite washing/ablution rituals should be carried out prior to arrival for worship. In rare circumstances where it is necessary, use washing facilities within the place of worship in line with social distancing guidelines and hygiene measures. 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 should avoid full immersion and potential splashing of those in range. Where an infant is involved only regular household members should hold the infant. All individuals involved should thoroughly wash their hands before and after and ensure good hygiene.
Cash donations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where possible, 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. Maintain regular cleaning and hygiene, and gloves wearing to handle cash offerings where giving continues.
Young people and children attending places of worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young children should be supervised by members of their household. Remind individuals, of the important infection prevention measures. See the eBug website for posters on general hand hygiene Remove or retire any shared facilities for children, such as play corners, soft furnishings, soft toys and toys that are hard to clean. Outdoor playgrounds are permitted to open where venue managers risk assess that it is safe to do so. See relevant guidance For any separate children's activities organised alongside or within a service, follow general guidance from the Department for Education For formal childcare and educational settings refer to the relevant guidance.

Appendix

Definitions for the purpose of the guidance

Place or worship	Building used for regular religious ceremonies, communal worship or similar gatherings by religious organisations and surrounding grounds. Excludes public parks, private homes, cultural sites and other open spaces.
Life cycle event	Religious ceremonies to mark rites of passage not forming part routine communal worship.
Household and Support Bubble	A household is a person or a group of people who live together in the same accommodation. 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.
“Must”	An activity that “must” take places is a mandated under the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 , and therefore is a requirement in law.
“Should”	An activity that “should” take place is strongly advised but not a legal requirement under the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 .

Further detail on other mitigations to support social distancing:

- 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.
- 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.
- Sing screens, barriers or alternative rooms and spaces to separate worshippers.
- Introducing a booking system to help with managing numbers, particularly for services where demand will be high.
- Venue managers consider 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. If appropriate, you should reconfigure spaces to enable worshippers to be seated rather than standing which reduces the risk of contact.
- 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.
- It is advised that the ceremonies and services should be concluded in the shortest reasonable time and participants encouraged to move on promptly.
- 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.
- 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 here (such as indoor fitness, indoor soft play, indoor performances in front of a live audience, etc).

Relevant guidance for further information

Guidance for the safe use of places of worship from 4 July

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july> (Last updated 3 August 2020)

Guidance of small marriages and civil partnerships during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships> (Published 29 June 2020)

Guidance for managing a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-a-funeral-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic> (Last updated 18 May 2020)

Guidance on working safely during coronavirus- Restaurants and other hospitality industries

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/restaurants-offering-takeaway-or-delivery> (Last updated 24 June 2020)

Managing risks and risk assessment at work- working safely during the coronavirus outbreak

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/risk-assessment-template-and-examples.htm> (Accessed 02 07 2020)

NHS Test and Trace Service

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-an-antigen-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/> (Accessed 02 07 2020)

Guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19#clinically-extremely-vulnerable-groups> (Updated 23 June 2020)

COVID-19: guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>
(Updated 18 June 2020)

COVID-19: cleaning in non-healthcare settings
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings> (Updated 15 May 2020)

COVID-19: Cleaning historic surfaces
<https://historicengland.org.uk/coronavirus/historic-places/cleaning-historic-surfaces/> (Accessed 02 07 2020)

Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19)
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/restaurants-offering-takeaway-or-delivery> (Updated 24 June 2020)

Stop germs spreading with our fun e-Bug resources.
<https://campaignresources.phe.gov.uk/schools>

COVID-19: Guidance for managing playgrounds and outdoor gyms
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms> (Published 26 June 2020)

Part of Coronavirus (COVID-19): Education and childcare
<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/education-and-childcare>

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/350/made> (Accessed 02 07 2020)

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