

Risk Assessment Template for Opening Church Buildings to the Public

Version Control

Issue Date	Version Number	Issued by
25 th March 2021	9	The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group

This update has been reviewed to reflect the [roadmap to ease restrictions](#) issued by the UK government and is intended for use from 29th March onwards ('phase 1b'). It incorporates sections on singing, workplace testing, and planning for wider use of buildings including for non-worship purposes. At all times churches should check national and, if relevant, local restrictions to ensure the activity planned is currently permitted. Risk assessments carried out using an earlier template may still be valid but should be reviewed regularly and checked against this latest version of the risk assessment.

England entered the government's roadmap out of lockdown on 8th March with the re-opening of schools and other education settings, and an increase in permitted reasons to leave home to meet one person outside for social purposes. As they have been throughout the third lockdown (from 5th January) churches are permitted to open for communal worship, private prayer and a number of essential purposes where they can be carried out in a Covid-safe way. There may be specific local regulations recommended by local authorities, that place additional restrictions on certain activities. Before completing this risk assessment you can see what is permitted by checking the guidance on permitted activities on the national church coronavirus webpage. Guidance on opening cathedral and church buildings to the public during COVID-19 can also be found [there](#).

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, the template 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. Specific guidance linking to advice on the lockdown period is available on the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](#).

The government acknowledges that 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 also makes them places that are particularly vulnerable to the spread of the virus. In drawing up a risk assessment for your church, or revising it in the light of the current situation, you will need to think carefully whether the public benefits you achieve by opening are justified by the risks involved, however much you can mitigate them. This judgement will vary depending on the location and nature of your church building and the make up of your congregation and visitor profile. You will need to discuss the factors with your governing body,

whether the PCC or chapter. Remember that this is your collective choice whether to open: while our churches are permitted by government to open, they are not obliged to do so. If you decide not to open, you can continue to have a valuable role serving the community in a number of ways. Guidance on this can be found on the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](#).

Guidance indicating how churches might arrange access and events in a Covid-safe way has been produced as part of a government initiative to encourage re-opening in a safe and reasonable way. This includes a number of case studies that may help you think about your church building.

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.

Separate risk assessments for outdoor worship and for access by contractors and construction workers are available on the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](#).

Carrying out a risk assessment

1. Agree what activities you are planning for:
 - Private prayer
 - Public worship
 - Funerals, weddings, baptisms, ordinations
 - Livestreaming or recording services
 - A choir or music group singing indoors as part of a public, livestreamed or recorded service (congregational singing may take place outside, but at present is not permitted indoors)
 - Formal childcare or where part of a school
 - Essential voluntary and public services
 - Use as a vaccination centre
 - Other exempted activities such as support groups
 - Provision of youth services
 - Opening shops/cafes (may be permitted in Step 2, depending on access arrangements)
 - Opening for visitors/tourists/educational visits as a heritage attraction (not permitted until Step 3)
 - Opening for concerts, plays etc (not permitted until Step 3)
2. Consider the hazards:
 - Transmission of COVID-19
 - Hazards arising from using the church in a different way to usual

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 as long as they are properly managed, but having any significant numbers of people coming through your building makes the possible impact – in particular someone with COVID-19 coming into contact with others – higher than in smaller churches with fewer people. Consider your particular circumstances and adapt the checklist below as appropriate. Gathered congregations and major services may attract people from far afield, which is likely to add to the risk profile and go against the general guidance that people should stay local for any activities outside the home. Consider whether you need to consult your wider membership and users.

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: St Mary's Selly Oak	Assessor's name: Revd Hazel White, Vicar	Date completed: 12 th April 2021	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 purposes of recording and/or livestreaming services (with no congregation present) Risk: contracting or spreading the virus by not social distancing or by touching contaminated services	Consider if anyone required for recording or broadcasting is clinically extremely vulnerable or has household members who are. Can someone else fulfil their role in the recording/livestreaming? Ensure that the people who need to attend the church building to enable the livestreaming or recording to take place are willing to do so and can do so safely. Make sure that only those essential for livestreaming or recording enter the church.	Advice on livestreaming and recording can be found here .	N/A	N/A Recording/livestreaming not taking place
	Identify one point of entry to the church building, and a separate exit if possible.		N/A	N/A
	A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant.	An example can be found here .	N/A	N/A
	Consider staggered arrival times if multiple people from different households are coming into the building.		N/A	N/A
	Holy water stoups and the font are empty.		N/A	N/A

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Ensure safe use of equipment needed for livestreaming: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets, cables/tripod causing trip hazard		N/A	N/A
	Provide adequate hand cleansing stations. Provide hand sanitiser for the occasions when people can't wash their hands.		N/A	N/A
	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 .	N/A	N/A
	Read the CofE guide on face coverings and produce or download signage or other relevant materials to indicate compliance with the law and requiring these for all except those exempt.	Advice on face coverings can be found here .	N/A	N/A
	Identify where you can reduce the contact of people with surfaces, e.g. by leaving open doors that are not fire doors, using electronic documents rather than paperwork.		N/A	N/A
	Ensure you have an NHS Track and Trace QR code available, with an alternative option for those who cannot use that system.	Consult advice on complying with Track and Trace .	N/A	N/A

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
Deciding whether to open to the public for private prayer, public worship and other permitted activities	Consider how the national lockdown applies to the particular circumstances of the church and the worship or other activities envisaged. For gathered congregations or other activities drawing people from a wide area, consider the implications of where people travel from and the distance involved.	We have decided that we have adequate measures in place to enable us to safely open to the public.	Standing Committee discussion and decision, PCC support confirmed by email.	5th January 2021, reviewed regularly
	Discuss with nearby venues and businesses to ensure that the timing and practical arrangements for using the church are compatible.	N/A, church accessed by own private drive with plenty of space for parking, nearby venues and businesses not impacted.	N/A	N/A
	Check if any clergy, staff or volunteers required for opening to the public fall into clinically extremely vulnerable categories or have members of their household who do, and ensure there are enough people safely able and willing to facilitate opening and cleaning the building.	All ministry team willing to contribute to services. Rota of stewards managed by Kate Cheyney. All stewards given option to stay at home. Paid cleaners employed for weekly cleaning.	Ministry Team Kate Cheyney Paid Cleaners	12 th January 2021, reviewed regularly

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Consider whether to discourage clinically extremely vulnerable members of the congregation or visitors from attending services altogether or setting aside a time for them to attend for individual devotions.	Clinically extremely vulnerable members of the congregation shielding or isolating at home. Contact maintained by members of ministry team.	Ministry Team	Ongoing
	Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services	Booking system not considered necessary for 10am Sunday and 10am Wednesday services as attendance is nowhere near our covid safe capacity. For Funerals, Weddings and Baptisms, officiating clergy will communicate numbers allowed with those responsible for the booking.	Clergy Team	As needed
	Communicate with nearby churches to ensure offered provisions are complementary.	Informal conversations ongoing through cluster and churches together.	Incumbent	As needed

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
<p>Deciding whether to have a choir or music group singing/ performing</p> <p>Risk: Aerosol spread of coronavirus may be increased by singing and playing of wind instruments</p>	<p>Check current guidance on singing to establish what is permitted. This can be found in the Church of England guidance on conducting public worship and on in the Government guidance for places of worship.</p>	<p>Current guidance: “from 28th March indoors a single small group of singers is allowed to perform, or rehearse for performance, where essential to an act of communal worship. This should be limited to as few singers as possible. Communal singing should not take place and strict physical distancing should be observed”.</p> <p>We consider music at St Mary’s to be an important element of our worship therefore reintroducing an element of choral singing when it is deemed safe to do so enhances our mission and ministry.</p>	<p>Incumbent in consultation with Choir Master</p>	<p>Agreement of PCC</p>

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Ensure that singers from different households can be socially distanced from one another, and from anyone else present (including a conductor, camera or microphone operator or, if present, a congregation).	Soloist to be positioned near high altar which allows significant space. Singers to be positioned in South Transept with at least 2m distance between each singer and also between singers and members of the congregation at all times.	Choir master and singers	Soloist from Easter 2021 Quartet from step 3 of Government roadmap, no sooner than 17 th May 2021
	Put in place measures to create a physical barrier between singers and any congregation.	Physical barriers not possible, however we strongly advise those singing to obtain a negative lateral flow test prior to singing in public worship in order to mitigate any risk.	Choir members	From step 3 of Government roadmap, no sooner than 17 th May 2021
	Remind any members of congregation present that at present they are not allowed to sing indoors.	Reminders to be given by those leading worship.	Ministry Team	As needed
#Preparation of the Church for access by members of the public	Confirm that all steps (above) for access for livestreaming/broadcast have been carried out before anyone else accesses the building.		Incumbent and a Warden	Revd Hazel White & George Harrison, reviewed weekly

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<p>for any permitted purposes</p> <p>Risk: Getting or spreading coronavirus in common use high traffic areas such as corridors, toilet facilities, entry/exit points and other communal areas.</p>	<p>Update your website, A Church Near You, and any relevant social media with information for visitors. Communicate details on requirements such as bringing a face covering. Clearly state the limits on attendance for weddings, funerals, commemorative events and any other permitted activities where upper limits apply (or provide a link to this document).</p>	<p>A Church near you, parish website, and ‘the weekly sheet’ updated weekly.</p> <p>Limits on attendance for funerals communicated by officiating clergy via undertakers. For weddings officiating clergy will liaise with the couple.</p>	<p>Incumbent</p> <p>Clergy team</p>	<p>Revd Hazel White, weekly</p> <p>Revd Hazel White, Revd Jayne Adams, Revd David Parker, as needed</p>
	<p>Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the ‘cleaning’ section of this risk assessment (below).</p>	<p>Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here.</p>	<p>Incumbent and a Warden</p>	<p>Initially completed by 16th June 2020, reviewed regularly</p>
	<p>Read the CofE guide on face coverings and produce signage or other relevant materials to indicate compliance with the law requiring these for all except those exempt.</p>	<p>Advice on face coverings can be found here. Clearly stated on website and noticeboards that face coverings must be worn. Stewards ensure no-one comes in without one and that they are worn correctly. Spare face coverings available in church.</p>	<p>Incumbent and Stewards</p>	<p>At every service and every time the church is open</p>

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	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.	Entry via church porch with social distancing in place. Managed by stewards on duty. After the Sunday 10am Service West door can be used in addition as exit if needed, however steps make access unsuitable for those with mobility issues.	A rota of people in place for the Sunday 10am service to manage entry and exit	In place for every Sunday
	Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside).	One steward to be outside the building to manage social distancing at entry. At end of service, people are directed to leave by a steward, ensuring social distancing is maintained.	Rota of stewards in place	Organised weekly by Kate Cheyney
	Make any temporary arrangements for managing the approaches to the entry points and any parking areas to ensure social distancing can be observed (taking into account any consequential risks arising from changes to circulation).	As above	As above	As above
	Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation.	Doors regularly opened by stewards.	Rota of stewards	As above
	If heating is required check your system is safe to use and test it before people are allowed in.	Guidance on church heating can be found here .	Gerald Fage	Weekly checks on heating system carried out by Gerald Fage

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Remove items such as Bibles, prayer and hymn books that are used by multiple people.	Bibles, prayer and hymn books not used on Sundays. On Wednesdays BCP books used and then left in place for more than 48 hours before being used again.	Managed by clergy team and stewards	From Weds 17 th June 2020
	If providing single-use service sheets or prayer cards, either place these on sheets or ask people to sanitise hands before picking one up, and request that people take these home with them.	Single use photocopied leaflets containing prayers for personal use available. For Sunday and Wednesday 10am services, service books put out in allocated seating spaces and left in place for more than 48 hours between use.	Managed by volunteers on duty. Where there is a need to move any books or service sheets, disposable gloves worn	From Weds 17 th June 2020
	Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on)	Lectern and Bible temporarily moved to avoid touch by multiple users. Those reading in church given a printed paper copy.	Warden Clergy	Weds 1 st July 2020, Revd David Parker & George Harrison Single use paper copies of readings provided each week from 5 th July

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance on soft surfaces.	Guidance on Keeping Church buildings clean suggests that unless they have been soiled soft furnishings do not need to be cleaned other than as part of your usual cleaning processes, which may include vacuuming with a soft brush attachment.	Removal not necessary. Weekly cleaning by paid church cleaner	Weekly, Jenny Smirthwaite
	Remove or isolate children’s resources and play areas.	Children’s books and toys temporarily removed, parents asked when attending worship to bring anything needed for their child.	Incumbent	Revd Hazel White, 12 th July 2020
	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).	2m distancing throughout, one way system in main body of church in place for administration of communion. 65 individuals can be accommodated in the main body of the church seated 2m apart utilising all areas with chairs and pews.	Clergy team Incumbent has measured distances	Revd Hazel White, 5 th July 2020
	Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing.	Chairs moved to maintain social distancing, pews marked with tape.	Incumbent and a warden	Revd Hazel White & George Harrison, 17 th June 2020

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements.	Movement to be managed by volunteers on duty, also communicated verbally and in written notices.	Incumbent, clergy team and stewards on duty	From Sunday 5 th July 2020
	Limit access to places where the public does not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon is needed.	Pews marked with tape to indicate which are available.	Incumbent and Warden	Revd Hazel White & George Harrison, 17 th June 2020
	Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use.	Hand sanitiser available at entry, before receiving communion, and for use of Priest at High Altar	Incumbent	Revd Hazel White, Sunday 5 th July 2020
	Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing	Consult advice on gaining temporary permissions .	N/A	N/A
	Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc.	Written information with reminders to be in each pew/seat via weekly sheet.	Incumbent	Revd Hazel White, Sunday 5 th July 2020 and weekly for each Sunday
	Ensure high-risk surfaces and touch points have been wiped with appropriate sanitiser spray or disposable wipes	Cleaner has sourced sanitiser spray. Wipes available.	Cleaner & others as needed	Jenny Smirthwaite, weekly clean after Sunday use & at other times as needed
	Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels.	Paper towels and liquid soap provided at all sinks and a larger bin provided in toilet.	Treasurer & Warden Cleaner	John Surtees & George Harrison, completed 17 th June, checked weekly thereafter by Jenny Smirthwaite

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	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.	Cleaner	Checked weekly by Jenny Smirthwaite
	Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them.	Disposable liners in all bins.	Cleaner	Completed by 17 th June, checked weekly by Jenny Smirthwaite
Use of the church for baptisms, weddings, funerals, commemorative services and ordinations	Consider the specific guidance in place for those activities and assess the additional controls and limits on attendance in place.	<p>Baptisms not taking place unless in emergency, to resume after step 4 of Government roadmap.</p> <p>Weddings booked for May after step 3 of Government roadmap will be subject to the limit of 30 attendees, after step 4 no limits on numbers.</p> <p>Funerals coming into church subject to the limit of 30 attendees, after step 4 no limits on numbers.</p> <p>Commemorative services will only be booked for after step 4.</p>	<p>Incumbent regularly reviews guidance and communicates with clergy team and others eg: baptism families, wedding couples, funeral directors.</p> <p>Vergers help to manage numbers and seating.</p>	Revd Hazel White, ongoing as needed

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
Use of the church for permitted activities other than private prayer or worship	Consider the specific guidance in place for those activities and assess the additional controls and limits on attendance in place. Check that any external group using the church has COVID-secure working practices in place, including their own risk assessment where necessary, and will comply with what is required by the church.	The church building is not in use as a community facility, or a vaccination centre, or a hospitality space. Building only in use for activities relating to private prayer or public worship.	N/A	N/A
Cleaning the church before and after general use (no known exposure to anyone with Coronavirus symptoms)	If the church building has been closed for 48 hours between periods of being open then there is no need for extra cleaning to remove the virus from surfaces.	Church is closed for more than 48 hours between Sunday and Wednesday mornings therefore no additional cleaning needed. Weekly clean on Tuesdays by paid cleaner.	N/A	N/A
Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here .	If 48-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating.	Where a funeral or wedding comes into church as an additional service 48-hour closure may not be possible, in which case the clergy responsible for the service will ensure adequate cleaning, enlisting help as needed.	Incumbent and clergy team	Revd Hazel White, Revd David Parker, Revd Jayne Adams, as needed
Risk: Getting or spreading coronavirus by not cleaning surfaces, equipment and shared facilities.	Identify surfaces that are frequently touched and by many people (often common areas), e.g. handrails, door handles, shared equipment, toilets, and specify the frequency and level of cleaning and by whom.	As above	As above	As above

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Keep surfaces clear to make it easier to clean and reduce the likelihood of contaminating objects.	Surfaces kept clean and tidy.	Church cleaner	Jenny Smirthwaite, weekly clean
	Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets deemed essential for services should be quarantined for 48 hours after use.	Where church service books are used they are put out in allocated seating spaces and left in place for more than 48 hours between use. Single use service sheets or leaflets are taken away by those attending worship. Stewards handling service sheets use disposable gloves.	Rota of stewards	Stewards organised weekly by Kate Cheyney
	All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable).	Disposable gloves available.	Treasurer	John Surtees, June 17 th 2020 and supply replenished as needed
	Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned.	Cleaning materials provided by paid cleaner.	Cleaner	Jenny Smirthwaite, from 17 th June 2020
	Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site.	Paid cleaner.	Cleaner	Jenny Smirthwaite, weekly from 17 th June 2020

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.	Weekly clean, with Incumbent or someone to whom she may delegate checking for removal of waste in between.	Cleaner and Incumbent	Every Monday or Tuesday and at other times as needed, Jenny Smirthwaite & Revd Hazel White
Cleaning the church after known exposure to someone with Coronavirus symptoms	If possible close the church building for 48 hours with no access permitted.	This will automatically be the case between church opening on a Wednesday morning and Sunday mornings, unless a wedding or funeral comes into church, in which case guidance will be sought from Public Health England.	Incumbent and wardens	As needed
	If 48-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 48 hours, then carry out cleaning as per the normal advice on cleaning.	Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here.		