

Risk Assessment for Opening Church Buildings to the Public

Version Control

Issue Date	Version Number	Issued by
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
1st July 2020	4	The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group

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: Newchurch - St Nicholas w St John and St Michael	Assessor's name: A Abbey	Date completed: 31 July 2020 updated 14 July	Review date: Ongoing
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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	Entry into church will only be by the main door. Signage on door adjacent to carpark directing visitors up the path to main entrance.	N/A	
	A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant.	There will always be at least two volunteers on site to monitor the flow through the Narthex and ensure safe distancing in the church.	N/A	
	Buildings have been aired before use.	Main doors, glass doors, narthex doors and door to the carpark will be open at least 20mins before welcoming visitors to ensure a flow of air through the building.	AA/JB	Each service
	Check for animal waste and general cleanliness.	General walkthrough of areas where visitors will pass to ensure no waste or debris, though not thought to be an issue.	AA/JB	Each service

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	Ensure water systems are flushed through before use.	Refreshments will not be available, therefore the only use of water will be when toilets are used.	AA/JB	Each time church is opened
	Switch on and check electrical and heating systems if needed. Commission system checks as necessary.	Systems on or programmed	N/A	
	Holy water stoups and the font are empty.	Font is empty.	N/A	
	Ensure safe use of equipment needed for livestreaming: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets, cables/tripod causing trip hazard	Only low current or battery power used	AA	
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.	No businesses in immediate area to be affected	N/A	
	Update your website, A Church Near You, and any relevant social media.	On-line media to be updated as appropriate	AA	
	Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services	Contact has been made with parishioners who have ‘on-line’ access with a view to estimating numbers. Similarly contact is being made by telephone to others.	AA/JB	Ongoing
	If opening to tourists consider applying for the Visit Britain ‘Good to Go’ standard mark	N/A		
Preparation of the Church for access by members of the public for any permitted	Confirm that all steps (above) for access by clergy have been carried out before anyone else accesses the building.	Church in vacancy, currently only open for weekly inspection by church wardens	N/A	

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purposes, including worship and tourism	Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the ‘cleaning’ section of this risk assessment (below).			
	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 into church will only be by means of the front main door which will be open, as will all other doors into the body of the church to reduce number of ‘touch points’. Traffic flow will be through narthex into church and exit by the door to the carpark.	AA/JB	AA/JB 7 TH July
	Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside).	Any queues will be through the Narthex and porch. This will minimise the potential for any queuing outside, especially in bad weather.	AA/JB	AA/JB 7 TH July
	Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation.	All doors will be open approx. 20mins before welcoming visitors to generate a flow of air through the building – no windows are available for opening.	AA/JB	AA/JB 7 TH July
	Remove Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets	Tables in the narthex to be cleared of all information sheets. Only one table remaining for hand-sanitiser and logging attendees for ‘Contact and Trace’ recording.	AA/JB	AA/JB 7 TH July

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	Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on)	N/A		
	Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance	Chairs in the narthex will be stacked and 'lone' pew be made unavailable for sitting to encourage movement through the narthex. One volunteer on duty to guide visitors directly into church. Pew felts and cushions removed and stacked at back of church to ensure woodwork can be wiped down.	AA/JB	AA/JB 7 TH July
	Remove or isolate children's resources and play areas	Children's resources to be moved to behind notice boards out of sight in a cordoned off area	AA/JB	AA/JB 7 TH July
	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).	Starting with the front pews, every three pews will be discreetly blocked (we don't want red striped hazard tape all over) Assuming maximum of two visitors per pew will facilitate a maximum of 20 visitors at any one time! Flow will be down the main aisle and out of the bottom	AA/JB	AA/JB 7 TH July

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		door with no return to the narthex.		
	Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing.	Available seats will be marked with a green tick, red crosses will show separation of seating. Once established the number of labelled will be reduced.	AA/JB	AA/JB 7 TH July
	Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements.	One way signs in narthex to show ‘one-way’ traffic flow. Also notice on front pews to show exit out of church.		AA/JB 7 TH July
	Limit access to places were the public does not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon in needed.	Barrier of chairs in narthex to discourage socialising and encourage flow into the church	AA/JB	AA/JB 7 TH July
	Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use.	Hand sanitizers on entry into church and on small table at the exit to car park	AA/JB	2 nd August
	Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing	N/A		
	Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc.	Signs in narthex reminding the need to restrict socialising/chatting. Encourage use of hand sanitisers on entering and leaving church.	AA/JB	AA/JB 7 TH July

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		Try to encourage silence in the church – quiet music playing to encourage this and engender quiet contemplative atmosphere.		
	Ensure high-risk surfaces and touch points have been wiped with appropriate sanitiser spray or disposable wipes	Church will have been closed for 72 hours prior to opening, therefore no need to wipe down surfaces at the beginning or end of services.		AA/JB 2 August
	Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels.	No handwashing facilities, other than in toilets available as kitchen will not be open. Bin in toilets will have plastic bag lining for easy disposal.	AA/JB	AA/JB 7 TH July
	Where there are toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available.	Toilets have liquid soap and paper hand towels etc.	AA/JB	AA/JB 7 TH July
	Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them.	Waste bins to be emptied at the end of each opening. As above, all bins will have disposable linings.	AA	AA/JB 7 TH July
	If possible, provide safe means for worshippers and visitors to record their name and contact details; retain each day's record for 21 days	List to be completed by a volunteer with names and contact details. If booking system adopted this would	JB	Each Service

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		simply be an attendance list. Not appropriate to share pens to complete by individuals		
	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.	Details of reopening measures to be posted in newsletter, website and ACNY both with date and what will be expected when attending.	AA	AA Weekly since 5 th July
Cleaning the church before and after general use (no known exposure to anyone with Coronavirus symptoms) Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here .	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.	Church only open once per week, therefore no need for additional cleaning.		
	If 72-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating.	N/A		
	<i>Set up a cleaning rota to cover your opening arrangements.</i>			
	<i>All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable).</i>	N/A		
	<i>Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned.</i>	N/A		
	Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site.	Churchwarden to remove waste after each opening.	AA	AA at end of each service
	Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal.	As above		

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Cleaning the church after known exposure to someone with Coronavirus symptoms	<p>If possible close the church building for 72 hours with no access permitted.</p>	<p>72 hour closure will be imposed as deep cleaning will not be possible because of the delicate fabric of the building and contents</p>		
	<p>If 72-hour closure is not possible then follow Public Health England guidance on cleaning in non-healthcare settings.</p>	<p>Church will only be open once a week</p>		
	<p>If the building has been quarantined for 72 hours, then carry out cleaning as per the normal advice on cleaning.</p>			