

# Coronavirus Guidance for Property

**Update 13 July 2021**

## **Changes to Government Guidance**

- One of the aims of the latest government communiqué is to **enable the public to make informed decisions**. We are keen ministers and leadership teams do likewise. We offer these guidelines to help you, and your leadership teams, make decisions linked to your local context.
- The Property Team will be reviewing more detailed Connexional guidance following the Prime Minister's update on the 12 July, and posting this from 19 July, when the Government will lift most restrictions.
- Although there are no specific updates to the government guidance document concerning places of worship yet, the Health Secretary announced to the House of Commons that from the 19 July there will be '...no restrictions on communal worship and singing'. This includes singing at weddings, funerals and baptisms.

## **What will the lifting of restrictions mean for churches and communal worship?**

When government restrictions are removed, the emphasis will be on 'personal responsibility.' Currently, the Government is indicating that this will mean:

- No maximum numbers for meeting in any indoor or outdoor environments, including removing restrictions on group sizes attending communal worship.
- Communal singing can resume.
- All venues currently closed will be allowed to open.
- No restrictions on weddings, funerals or baptisms.
- No requirement for Covid-19 vaccination status certification to enter a venue.
- No legal requirement to wear a face covering, although it will be 'advised' for enclosed and crowded spaces.
- No social distancing rules, although the risks to those deemed vulnerable need to be considered.
- No need for 'Covid-secure' environments.
- Encouragement to continue good cleaning and hygiene procedures.
- Good fresh air supplies into a property will still be encouraged, and steps should be taken to improve it if ventilation is poor.
- There may be temporary local restrictions or additional advice offered by health officials in areas of high infection rates, so this will need monitoring locally.
- No further work-from-home directive.
- An encouragement to continue to use the NHS Test and Trace system.

## **What does the Methodist Church advise?**

The Methodist Church, whilst always adhering to government advice, is urging some caution for the sake of others in the church, community and for self-care.



- Firstly, from a missional perspective, reflect on and continue with the positive changes that have been made during the pandemic. Perhaps this has been live-streaming services or more outward-looking mission into the community through outdoor services, prayer or house groups or other events. Look to improve on these as a means of giving people within and outside the church continued access to worship, teaching and support during this period of transition and change.
- This will help in considering whether it is appropriate to return to a building or whether the mission of God and the work of the church is better done in another way. In some places, the decision might even be not to resume physical worship in the building. This should not be seen as a failure, but as a response to the movement of the Spirit of God as we seek to create new places for new people.

### **What should we consider before reopening our church buildings?**

- If you have not yet reopened the building, we would recommend a cautious, phased return. We encourage dialogue with congregations to ensure they feel safe to return to in-person worship. The aim is to build up the community of believers who feel safe, rather than see them staying away for fear of the virus.
- Likewise, we encourage early discussions with individuals or groups from the wider community who will be returning to use your building to ensure that any concerns and expectations are shared through a transparent process. Work together to risk assess all those using the building and any new bookings with Covid-19 safety measures in mind.

### **How can we make our buildings as safe as possible?**

In returning to buildings, consideration should be given to:

- Appropriate use of face coverings. Would it be sensible as a congregation to wear them for a little longer?
- Good ventilation to properties or considering meeting outdoors.
- Encouraging frequent hand washing and keeping sanitiser out for people to use.
- Encouraging people to stay at home if they are unwell.
- Considering individual risks: such as clinical vulnerabilities, illness and vaccination status.
- Retaining retiring offering or online giving rather than 'passing the offering plate'.
- Deter handshaking and hugging and find other ways to share 'the Peace'.
- Encourage the continued use of personal, not shared items, such as books.

### **Further guidance for ministers and leaders of worship**

- Those who lead worship should bear in mind that the virus is still highly prevalent. Care should be taken to reduce the risk of spreading the virus, including reviewing the length of service and the number of hymns sung (when permitted), avoiding various people handling the same piece of equipment etc.
- For the time being, we suggest ministers should refrain from using the common cup for Holy Communion.



- We recommend keeping the elements to be distributed covered during the thanksgiving prayer if it is deemed inappropriate for the presiding minister to wear a mask. It may be wise for those distributing to wear face coverings.
- Similarly, for the time being, consider retaining the reasonable safe practices for cafes when providing or distributing food and drink, such as after a service or other events.
- Although not required by law, it is probably wise to retain the NHS Test and Trace system for the time being in case of an outbreak in the church community. We would want to be able to inform our neighbours to proceed with caution if someone they had come into contact with had tested positive.
- We do not recommend requesting proof of vaccination before a person is admitted to church.

Careful risk assessment of a building should be carried out before congregations return. See the **Guide to Managing Your Church Building** tab towards the bottom of this page.

Please note that this is for England only. For information in other areas, please click on the links below:

**Scotland** – please refer to the Scottish [Guidance for the Safe Use of Places of Worship](#)

**Wales** – please refer to the [Guidance for Re-Opening Places of Worship](#)

For specific guidance in the **Isle of Man** and **Channel Islands (Guernsey & Jersey)**, please follow the links for specific local regulations and guidance.

## Update 16 June 2021

The government has updated the [Guidance for Weddings & Civil Partnerships](#) in England following the Prime Minister's announcement. It states:

From 21 June, there will no longer be a maximum number cap for attendees set out in law. Instead, the number of attendees at weddings, civil partnerships and receptions will be determined by how many people the venue or space can safely accommodate with social distancing measures in place. This will be based on the COVID-19 risk assessment of the venue or outdoor space, and the measures put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19.

For further information, please refer to the government [Guidance for Weddings & Civil Partnerships](#). Please note that this is only for England.



## Update 17 May 2021

The government has updated the [Safe Use of Places of Worship](#) to include details of how restrictions will be lifted for churches in England. As more information is released, we will update the information below. The key changes involved in each of the remaining Steps include:

### Step 3 - 17 May 2021 (link to poster)

- Most other significant life events can resume, limited to no more than 30 people. This will include events such as private baptisms, and naming ceremonies. Limits at weddings, wedding receptions, wakes and other commemorative events will be increased to 30 people.
- Funerals will have no legal cap on the number of people who can attend. The number of attendees will be determined by how many people the venue can safely accommodate with social distancing measures in place.
- Outdoors most legal restrictions on meeting others will be lifted - although gatherings of over 30 people will remain illegal unless otherwise exempt.
- Support groups and parent and child group gathering limits will increase to 30 people (not including under 5s).

COVID Secure rules, including social distancing requirements, continue to apply in the workplace, and in businesses and public venues.

New guidance on [meeting friends and family](#) emphasises personal responsibility rather than government rules. Social distancing (staying at least 2m away from others) helps to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. The further away you can keep from other people, and the less time you spend in close contact with them, the less likely you are to catch COVID-19 and pass it on to others. Close contact, including hugging, increases the risk of spreading COVID-19.

You should consider the guidance on risks associated with COVID-19 and actions you can take to help keep you and your loved ones safe. Please refer to the guidance on meeting friends and family for further information and the actions to take to reduce the chance of spreading COVID-19.

## Face Coverings

In England, face coverings are required by law to be worn in places of worship. There are valid exemptions for some individuals and groups to not wear a face covering in these settings. In particular, those who are leading permitted services or events in a place of worship, and those who assist them. Please refer to the [guidance on the wearing of face coverings at a place of work](#) and the [guidance on face coverings](#).

## Food and Drink

Where food or drink ('consumables') are essential to the act of worship, they can be used. Hospitality spaces within a place of worship, such as cafes, are permitted to open both inside and outside and managers should follow [hospitality guidance](#).



People may also provide their own food and drink at a place of worship but should ensure actions are taken to reduce the risk of transmission.

When consuming food and drink people should remain seated and take steps to minimise any risk of infection. People should not touch communal or shared objects, or handle items other than their own (for example, avoid the use of shared cutlery, dishes or service sheets).

### **Singing, Chanting and the Use of Musical Instruments**

Where singing takes place, it should follow the [principles of safer singing](#).

- **Indoors:** a group of up to 6 amateur singers can perform, or rehearse for performance with social distancing being maintained at all times. There is no limit on the number of professional singers but they should follow guidance on performing arts. Performances should take place at the front of the place of worship to a seated audience. Indoor communal singing should not take place.
- **Outdoors:** When worship takes place outdoors, the congregation may join in with singing in multiple groups of up to 30. Congregation members should continue to follow social distancing rules. For guidance on singing outdoors outside of acts of communal worship, please refer to the [performing arts guidance](#).

### **Outdoor Worship**

The law allows for multiple groups, each consisting of up to 30 people, to pray with the grounds of a place of worship or its grounds. Participants should continue to follow wider social distancing guidance. A risk assessment must be undertaken and COVID-19 Secure measures implemented. The number of people able to gather will therefore be dependent on the size of the space available. Please refer to **Safe Use of Places of Worship** for further information.

### **Step 4 - no earlier than 21 June**

At Step 4, which will take place no earlier than 21 June, the government aims to remove all limits on life cycle events and other gatherings. This will be subject to the outcome of the scientific Events Research Programme, which will include a series of pilots using enhanced testing approaches and other measures to run events of larger sizes. The pilots have been selected to examine a range of settings, venue types, and activity types (e.g. seated or not, indoor/outdoor etc) so that the data is generalisable and findings can inform thinking on the reopening of similar settings across multiple sectors. This guidance will be updated as new guidance from the government is released ahead of that Step 4.

### **Further details for Step 3**

For the remainder of Step 3, places of worship in England may open for the following purposes:

| Activity | England |
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| <p><b>Private Prayer and Communal Worship</b></p>                                 | <p>From Step 3, in line with indoor social contact limits individuals, groups of six, or larger groups where everyone present is from the same two households may attend. A 'household' can include a linked support bubble, where eligible.</p> <p>The number of individuals or groups permitted in a place of worship at any one time will be dependent on the size of the building and ability to socially distance therein.</p> <p>Limits for communal worship should be decided on the basis of the capacity of the place of worship following an assessment of risk. From Step 3, in line with indoor social contact limits, individuals may attend communal worship in groups of 6, or larger groups where everyone present is from the same 2 households.</p>  |
| <p><b>Funerals</b></p>  | <p>From Step 3, there will be no set numerical limit on the number of people who can attend a funeral. Instead, the number of attendees at a funeral will be determined by how many people the venue can safely accommodate with social distancing measures in place. Please refer to <a href="#"><u>COVID-19: guidance for managing a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic</u></a>.</p> <p>Social distancing (staying at least 2m away from others) helps to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19. The further away you can keep from other people, and the less time you spend in close contact with them, the less likely you are to catch COVID-19 and pass it on to others. Close contact, including hugging, increases the risk of spreading COVID-19.</p> <p>You should consider the guidance on risks associated with COVID-19 and actions you can take to help keep you and your loved ones safe. Please refer to the <a href="#"><u>guidance on meeting friends and family</u></a> for further information and the actions to take to reduce the chance of spreading COVID-19.</p> |
| <p><b>Commemorative events to celebrate the life of a person who has died</b></p> | <p>These activities include the scattering of ashes and stone setting ceremonies. Such events and must have no more than 30 people in attendance. Anyone working is not included as part of the 30 person limit. Please refer to <a href="#"><u>COVID-19: guidance for managing a funeral during the</u></a></p>   |

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|   | <u>coronavirus pandemic.</u>   |
| <b>Significant life events, outside of marriage ceremonies and funerals</b> | Where such events are an element of communal worship, they are subject to the requirements for communal worship set out above. When not taking place as part of regular communal worship, from Step 3 standalone life events can take place with up to 30 people. Anyone working is not included as part of the 30 person limit. Please refer to the guidance on the <u>Safe Use of Places of Worship.</u> |
| <b>Weddings and wedding receptions</b>                                      | There will be no set numerical limit on the number of people who can attend a wedding. Instead, the number of attendees will be determined by how many people the venue can safely accommodate with social distancing measures in place. Please refer to the <u>guidance for small marriages and civil partnerships.</u>   |
| <b>Broadcasting or Filming Worship</b>                                      | Broadcasting or filming an act of worship should only involve those people essential for the content of the service, and for technical support to enable people to watch and worship online or via a television or radio. If musicians or singers usually form part of the act of worship, they may participate.   |
| <b>Essential Voluntary and Public services</b>                              | A place of worship may be used for essential voluntary and public services such as the provision of food banks or other support for the homeless or vulnerable people, blood donation sessions, or support in an emergency. See COVID-19 <u>guidance for voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations.</u>   |
| <b>Support Groups</b>   | Support groups can take place in gatherings of up to 30 (subject to capacity) in a COVID-19 secure community facility if organised by a business, a charitable, benevolent or philanthropic institution or a public body to provide mutual aid, therapy or any other form of support to its members or those who attend its meetings. Those working as part of the   |



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|  | <p>group are not counted towards the limit of 30. Examples of support groups include those that provide support to:</p> <p>Parent and toddler groups up to 30 people (not counting those under the age of 5)</p> <p>Weight loss programs</p> <p>New parents</p> <p>Those who have suffered bereavement</p> <p>Those with, or caring for persons with, any long-term illness or terminal condition or who are vulnerable</p> <p>Vulnerable young people, including to enable them to meet youth workers</p> <p>Victims of crime (including domestic abuse)</p> <p>Those with, or recovering from, addictions (including alcohol, narcotics or other substance addictions) or addictive patterns of behaviour</p> <p>Those facing issues related to their sexuality or identity including those living as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender</p> <p>Please refer to the <a href="#">Safe Use of Multi-Purpose Facilities</a> for more information.</p> |
| <b>Children and Youth Activities</b>       | <p>Out-of-school settings and wraparound childcare providers can offer provisions to all children, without restriction on the reason for which they may attend, both indoor and outdoor.</p> <p>Out-of-school settings and wraparound childcare providers operating from a place of worship should follow the protective measures outlined in this guidance, as well as the guidance on holiday or after-school clubs.</p> <p>Please refer to the <a href="#">Protective Measures for Out of School and Holiday Club Settings</a> or the <a href="#">National Youth Agency Covid-19 Guidance</a> for further information. For more information on pre-schools, please refer to the <a href="#">Guidance for Early Years Education</a>.</p>  |
| <b>Indoor Sport and Leisure Activities</b> | <p>Indoor leisure facilities may open for you to exercise on your own, in groups of up to 6 people or in a group of any size from up to 2 households. Please refer to the <a href="#">guidance on grassroots sports</a> and dance classes should also consider the <a href="#">performing arts guidance</a>.</p>  |
| <b>Extra-curricular</b>                    |   |



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| <b>Activities and Coffee Mornings</b>            | People can visit indoor venues in a group of up to 6 people from different households or a larger group of any size from up to 2 households including support bubbles. Please refer to the <a href="#">Safe Use of Multi-Purpose Facilities</a> for more information.   |
| <b>Church cafes</b>                              | Can open for both indoor and outdoor seating. Please refer to <a href="#">Working Safely in Restaurants and Cafes</a> for more information.   |
| <b>Non-essential retail (charity shops, etc)</b> | Retail shops are open. Please refer to the <a href="#">Working Safely in Shops</a> for more information.  |
| <b>Church council meetings</b>                   | Church council meetings can meet face to face to fulfil their legal duty, but only if it is <b>reasonably necessary</b> , and there are no alternative options. Those in attendance must adhere to the rule of 6 people or 2 households indoors, or 30 people outdoors. Please refer to the safety precautions listed in the <a href="#">Guidance for Church Councils</a> . |

For all other information relating to places of worship, please refer to the [Safe Use of Places of Worship](#) and the [Safe Use of Multi-Purpose Facilities](#), which will give further details.

#### **Guidance for Scotland, Wales, Isle of Man and Channel Islands**

**Scotland** – please refer to the Scottish [Guidance for the Safe Use of Places of Worship](#)

**Wales** –please refer to the [Guidance for Re-Opening Places of Worship](#)

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**Further information can be found on:**

- [Official Coronavirus Guidance from the Methodist Church](#)
- [Methodist Insurance](#)
- [TMCP's Covid 19 FAQ's section](#)

If you have a specific question, please contact your District Property Secretary or [Property Support](#).

Click on each tab to find a range of documents - including risk assessments, cleaning guides and guidance for looking after empty properties.

**Guide Managing Your Church Building (20 Oct\*)**