

COVID-19 Advice on Individual Prayer by Members of the public in Church Buildings

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12 th January 2021	6.1	The House of Bishops Recovery Group
Updates from version 6: This document has been reviewed following the announcement of the new national lockdown on the 4 th January.		

The Recovery Group has been set up to support the Church of England as government guidance changes through the COVID-19 pandemic. This document has been prepared with information available by the issue date. It will be kept under review and updated as the situation develops, with each update issued as a new version. The current version will always be available to download from the Church of England website via the [Coronavirus FAQs page](#).

This advice seeks to help clergy and church councils with the safe opening of their buildings. It recognises that for all kinds of specific reasons to do with both people and buildings a particular local church may or may not be able to open at the same time as others and collaborative working between local churches is encouraged. Please read this together with [Opening cathedral and church buildings to the public](#).

General questions

1. What should we do in terms of reminding people about hygiene and social distancing?

Please put notices on the door reminding people about hygiene and physical distancing measures, including stressing the critical importance of using the hand sanitizer both going in and going out of the church building. Supplies of hand sanitizer should be available in the porch/inside the main door (or water, soap and paper towels). Some helpful examples of posters can be found [here](#).

You should consider whether there is anything you can do in terms of seating to enable physical distancing. For instance by marking places where people can sit or removing some chairs for churches with movable seating.

2. What about cleaning the church?

- The church should be cleaned regularly in line with the [guidance note](#) on keeping your church building clean.
- Each PCC should assess how regularly this is done, given the likely numbers of people using the church.
- You may want to rope off parts of the church to limit the area to clean.
- It is best to shut away items such as toys, books, etc. which may be difficult to clean or to know if they have been used.

Advice about cleaning including sensitive historic interiors is available on the [national website](#) and from [Historic England](#).

3. Should face coverings be worn?

- In England, face coverings are required by law in places of worship, and in other public indoor settings. There are valid exemptions for some individuals and groups to not wear a face covering (see our [guidance on face coverings](#) for details).
- In particular, those who are officiating at services and presiding at Holy Communion, and those who assist them (for instance by reading, preaching, or leading prayers) do not always need to wear a face covering, although one should be worn especially if physical distancing cannot be maintained (i.e. if gathered at the font). This exemption does not apply to worshippers, who should wear face coverings consistent with the requirements for any other public space.
- [Government guidance](#) indicates some health, age, or equality reasons for which people may not be expected to wear face coverings. We encourage clergy and ministers to be sensitive to the needs of those who rely on lip reading, facial expressions, or clear sound.

4. Should someone be present all the time to monitor the church?

There is no public health need to do this, though the decision will need to be based on your own local situation and risk assessment.

5. What about rough sleepers and other vulnerable people?

Some churches have rough sleepers and those who are vulnerable who use the church as a 'base' during the day when it is open. In the end, managing this has to be a local decision based on pastoral responses. For some, explaining clear 'rules' as to where in the church and when a person may come in might be enough. Others will not respond to this and it may be that for that reason the church cannot be open unless it is possible to have someone on duty. Discussing these issues with your Archdeacon or Area Dean might help to think through how to approach them.

6. Does the church have to be open all the time and do all churches have to open?

No, this will be a local decision based on the local situation. There is no requirement to open all churches, or to open any church all the time. Such decisions should be taken in consultation between the incumbent and the PCC. A [Risk Assessment](#) has been produced for churches to use prior allowing access. Disagreements or concerns should be carefully discussed and you might seek the advice of the Archdeacon or Area Dean.

Whatever you decide to do, think about how best to communicate this to your local community. Remember to agree arrangements to open and close the church.

7. Can we leave out prayer leaflets and books?

It is best not to leave out things that can be touched repeatedly by different individuals, and which may be difficult to clean. This includes pen and paper for prayer requests. Instead you may want to invite people to email or phone in prayer requests.

8. What about lighting candles?

A. The lighting of candles with reusable lighters or similar should not be encouraged, but if they can be lit safely in another way this can be an aid to prayer. Issues of safety must be considered and leaving candles available is only recommended if the church is being supervised.

9. Should we leave our toilets open?

Toilets should be kept open if at all possible and carefully managed to reduce the risk of transmission. Steps that will usually be needed to make the use of toilets as safe as possible:

- signs and posters about safe hygiene which can be downloaded for example [here](#).
- 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).
- If possible, make hand sanitisers available on entry to toilets where safe and practical, and ensure suitable handwashing facilities including running water and liquid soap and suitable options for drying (either paper towels or hand dryers) are available. Communal towels should be removed and replaced with single use paper towels.
- Agree clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets, with increased frequency of cleaning in line with usage. Use normal cleaning products, paying attention to frequently hand touched surfaces, and consider the use of disposable cloths or paper roll to clean all hard surfaces. Special care should be taken for cleaning of portable toilets and larger toilet blocks.
- Keep the facilities well ventilated, for example by fixing doors open where appropriate and safe to do so.
- Putting up a cleaning schedule that is kept up to date and visible.
- Providing more waste facilities and more frequent refuse collection.

10. What about young people and children coming to church for individual prayer?

We warmly welcome all children and young people into our buildings as they explore and grow in their faith. Young children should be supervised by the parent or guardian and appropriate hygiene precautions followed. Children under the age of 11 do not need to wear a face covering.

Places of worship can help remind children and young people, and their parents and guardians, of the important actions they should take during the COVID-19 outbreak to help prevent the spread of the virus. Posters on general hand hygiene can be found on the [eBug](#) website.

Any shared facilities for children, such as play corners, soft furnishings, soft toys and toys that are hard to clean, should be removed and/or put out of use.

Where young people or children are coming unaccompanied then we would advise consulting [Safer Environment and Activities](#) from the National Safeguarding Team and adding a safeguarding assessment as part of the overall risk assessment for opening, particularly sections 1.3 on risk assessment and 2.10 on young people who attend church activities without their parents.

If you are collecting data for NHS Test and Trace the details of the parent or guardian of an accompanied young person or child need only be collected.

For unaccompanied children or young people aged 13 years old or over, they can be asked to provide their details and sign the consent form, or make an individual booking where consent is required. You may need to explain to them what the data is being collected for so they understand what Test and Trace is about, rather than relying on them reading and understanding the privacy notice on their own.

11. What about Test & Trace

Places of worship are not covered in legislation *requiring* use of the NHS Test & Trace service, (except where they offer certain facilities such as a café, or are open as a tourist destination). However, along with other venues where people spend time, churches are **strongly encouraged** to keep a record of those who have attended to facilitate [NHS Test and Trace](#) in the event of an outbreak of coronavirus. Participating in Test & Trace will help to slow the spread of Covid-19.

For full advice please see the guidance note [here](#).