

COVID-19 New Lockdown Guidance

Issue Date	Version	Issued by
4 th November 2020	1.0	The House of Bishops Recovery Group

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](#).

Context for this Guidance

As our Archbishops acknowledged in their letter of 4th November, these are deeply challenging and difficult times for us all. We have been called to prayer and invited to respond to the current situation with *calm*, *courage* and *compassion* as all of us are asked to play our part in bringing the increased spread of the virus under control.

This guidance is written to support churches as they make decisions about steps they need to take as the new lockdown comes into force on the 5th November. We have learned much from our previous experience that will help us at this time – how to have churches open for private prayer, how to offer high quality streamed worship, how to have our churches open as venues for food banks etc.

Rather than seeking to give direction on the minutiae of the many choices that must be taken, the aim of the guidance contained here is to point to sources of information where understanding can be gained on specific issues and to set out some principles which can help guide decisions more generally. It's important to recognise that what can happen in any particular place will differ according to a whole host of factors such as churches' size and context, staffing and whether key personnel are shielding or not.

Above all, this guidance seeks to help churches continue as beacons of hope and lights in the darkness of these difficult days. It seeks to enable churches to do all they can to maintain the prayer and worship which is the wellspring of our life and action within our local communities.

This guidance will necessarily evolve as more information from government becomes available. As with so much of the pandemic, this asks of us all a kindness and generosity as we seek to navigate such uncertain times. The Archbishops have written about us being caught in a storm which often feels overwhelming. With them, we invite you to read this guidance looking to Jesus, in the boat with us, who calms the storm and comforts us in our fear.

Key Guidance Documents

While we are in this period of lockdown there are some key guidance documents that support activities we can do published by the Government, other organisations and on the Church of England's national coronavirus [webpage](#). These are there to help you make decisions locally, recognising that every place has its own circumstances and will need to address these in its own way.

Our churches can remain open for individual prayer, which is defined as a person or household entering the venue to pray on their own and not as part of a group, led prayer or communal act.

Collective or congregational prayer and regular scheduled services are not permitted. This includes a Minister of religion or lay person/volunteer leading devotions or prayer of any sort. If possible, arrangements should be made to broadcast services, enabling people to watch and worship at home.

For those broadcasting a service, they can bring together those people essential for the content of the service, and for technical support. If musicians or singers usually form part of the service being broadcast, they may participate but only if they are essential to the delivery of the service. The numbers or people involved should be kept as small as possible to minimise risks and participants should follow strict hygiene and physical distancing measures. No congregation may be present.

Support groups (to provide mutual aid, therapy or any other form of support) are permitted to go ahead as with the previous guidance can take place in gatherings of groups of 15 (subject to capacity) again with appropriate COVID-19 secure arrangements in place. Support groups for new parents and vulnerable young people can continue and a new [FAQ](#) has been introduced to highlight this in the section on 'Schools, nurseries and Youth Provision'.

Please note amateur choir practice or group bell ringing is not permitted at this time.

The Government sources include:

- [Places of Worship Guidance](#)
- [Performing Arts Guidance](#)
- [The safe use of community multi-use facilities](#)

Remember it is the nature of the activity which defines which guidance we should be using, not the status of the building.

From the Church of England's national [webpage](#), the key resource documents are:

- Individual Private Prayer
- Funerals
- Livestreaming
- Pastoral Encounters
- Keeping church buildings clean
- Safeguarding FAQs
- Test and Trace
- Church Heating

Other guidance documents are remaining available on the coronavirus web page for reference but may not be applicable under current restrictions.

For our church buildings to be open we need to have conducted a risk assessment for which a template [example](#) is given. The Safer Churches document also illustrates safe ways to manage the flow of people into and out of the building while noting that corporate worship and some of the other activities it mentions are not possible at this time.

The webpage also links to resources on [prayer and worship](#) as well as [digital](#) resources. As we approach Christmas there are resources provided as part of the [Comfort and Joy](#) campaign that can help with online and at home offerings by churches to their communities.