# Risk Assessment Template for Outdoor Worship

**Version Control**

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| Issue Date  | Version Number  | Issued by  |
| 25th March 2021 | 3 | The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group |

*This update has been reviewed to reflect the* [*roadmap to ease restrictions*](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021-summary) *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](https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance#documents).

The [government guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic/covid-19-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](https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches).

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](https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches).

Guidance indicating how churches might arrange access and events in a Covid-safe way have 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](https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches).

**Carrying out a risk assessment**

1. Agree what activities you are planning for:
	* Public worship
	* Congregational singing as part of an act of worship
	* Other public outdoor activities e.g. fetes, concerts etc.
2. Consider the hazards:
	* Transmission of COVID-19
	* Hazards arising from using the church and churchyard in a different way to usual, especially uneven outdoor areas and use when it is dark

Read the guidance and think about how it relates specifically to your church and/or the outdoor setting you will be using. What constraints are there? Consider how people will arrive and move across the site; circulation around the churchyard; also access to other areas or the interior of the church including the toilet(s).

1. 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 real but they are in many ways less than those for indoor worship as long as they are properly managed, but having more people coming to an event 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. 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.
2. 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**

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| **Church:** | **Assessor’s name:** | **Date completed:** | **Review date:** |

| **Area of Focus**  | **Controls required**  | **Additional information** | **Action by whom?** | **Completed – date and name**  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Deciding whether it is safe to hold outdoor worship****Risk:** contracting or spreading the virus by not social distancing or by touching contaminated services | Consider if anyone required for the running of the service is clinically extremely vulnerable or has household members who are. Can someone else fulfil their role? Ensure that the people who need to attend the site to enable the service to take place are willing to do so and can do so safely. |  |  |  |
| Consult the guidance on what is permitted at the different steps of the lockdown in relation to the particular circumstances of the site and the worship envisaged. For gathered congregations or one-off services drawing people from a wide area, consider the implications of where people travel from and the distance involved. | Guidance on Permitted Activities from the 29th March can be found [here](https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance#documents).  |  |  |
| Assess the site, taking into account the need for people from different households to remain 2m apart from each other, and the recommendation that outdoor events have seats for audiences. Consider if the capacity of the site will work with the service(s) you are planning. |  |  |  |
| Assess the availability of utilities such as electricity that might be needed, especially for services taking place in the hours of darkness e.g. for lights, microphones. Do you have the correct safety equipment for outdoor use? |  |  |  |
| Consider accessibility issues such as access to the site for those who use wheelchairs or have difficulty walking, and also how people who are deaf or hearing impaired will be able to participate (make use of microphones and good lighting). |  |  |  |
| Discuss with nearby venues and businesses to ensure that the timing and practical arrangements for using the church are compatible. |  |  |  |
| Consider if a booking and seat- or place-allocation system is needed; consider staggered arrival times. |  |  |  |
| Communicate with nearby churches to ensure offered provisions are complementary. |  |  |  |
| **Congregational singing as part of a public act of worship** | Check current guidance on singing to establish what is permitted. This can be found in the Church of England [guidance](https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance#documents) on conducting public worship and on in the Government guidance for [places of worship](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-2-december). |  |  |  |
| 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). |  |  |  |
|  | Put in place measures to create a physical barrier between singers and any congregation. |  |  |  |
| **Preparation of the site for access by members of the public for outdoor worship or any other permitted public event****Risk:** Getting or spreading coronavirus in common use or high traffic areas such as entry points; ensuring safe operation of service. | Check the guidance on permitted activities to ensure that the event you are planning is permitted under the current step of the roadmap. | Guidance on Permitted Activities from the 29th March and on the Government’s four step roadmap can be found [here](https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance#documents). |  |  |
| Set up a one-way route around the site to aid distancing measures. Indicate this with notices, keeping emergency exits available at all times. |  |  |  |
| If relevant, clearly mark out seating or (if seating is not possible) standing areas, including exclusion zones to maintain distancing. |  |  |  |
| If ticketing/booking is being used, decide how best to manage that process e.g. specific points of entry, barriers. |  |  |  |
| Ensure safe use of equipment needed, e.g. lighting, microphone: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets or cables/equipment causing trip hazard |  |  |  |
| 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). |  |  |  |
| 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. | Advice on face coverings can be found [here](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/COVID%2019%20advice%20on%20face%20coverings%20v3.1.pdf). |  |  |
| Identify where you can reduce the contact ofpeople with surfaces, e.g. by using electronic documents rather than paperwork. If paper service sheets are to be used agree a process for handing them out safely and encourage people to take them home with them. |  |  |  |
| 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](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/COVID%2019%20NHS%20Test%20and%20Trace%20v4_0.pdf). |  |  |
| 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. Remind people who are clinically extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 to stay at home as much as possible and observe social distancing guidance, and either strongly discourage them from attending services in person during this time or indicate a time for them to attend for individual devotions. |  |  |  |
| Limit access to places were the public does not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon if needed. |  |  |  |
| Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc. |  |  |  |
| Provide adequate hand cleansing stations. Provide hand sanitiser for the occasions when people can’t wash their hands. | Register with [Parish Buying](https://www.parishbuying.org.uk/) for procurement options. |  |  |
| Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels. | Register with [Parish Buying](https://www.parishbuying.org.uk/) for procurement options. |  |  |
| 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](https://www.parishbuying.org.uk/) for procurement options. |  |  |
| Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them. |  |  |  |
| If other organisations are part of the event – e.g. stallholders at a fete (when permitted) – ensure they have completed their own risk assessments for their setup and you have a copy. If in doubt, check with your insurer. |  |  |  |
| **Closing the site down after outdoor worship and events****Risk: Getting or spreading coronavirus among event organisers.** | Ensure that safety procedures are in place for closing the site down – e.g. providing gloves and masks to those stacking chairs or moving electrical/staging equipment. |  |  |  |