

## COVID-19 Advice for clergy conducting weddings

Issue Date	Version	Issued by
21 <sup>st</sup> July 2020	4	The House of Bishops Recovery Group
Updates from version 3: This version has been updated to reflect updated Government guidance for places of worship and small marriages issued on 17 <sup>th</sup> July. The italicized heading paragraphs and <b>3. Q.</b> have been edited to encourage the use of face coverings and <b>6. Q.</b> about wedding receptions.		

*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](#).*

*We strongly advise that face coverings should be worn by all those attending a place of worship, including ministers, worshippers, staff, volunteers, contractors and visitors, where there may be other people present; remembering that they are mainly intended to protect other people, not the wearer, from coronavirus (COVID-19) and that they are not a replacement for social distancing and regular hand washing. More detailed guidance on face coverings can be found [here](#).*

*This document should be read in conjunction with '[Conducting Public Worship](#)' if the marriage is within a celebration of Holy Communion the advice on Holy Communion should also be followed.*

Many couples will be looking forward to getting married in church now that weddings in church buildings will be possible from July 4<sup>th</sup>. At the same time, they might be concerned about what type of service they will be able to have, given on-going restrictions. Others will be trying to rearrange weddings that had to be postponed.

Our intention is to ensure that weddings can be as joyful and fulfilling an experience as possible while continuing to follow best public health practice and government guidance.

### **1. Q. Who can attend the service?**

A. From 4<sup>th</sup> July the government strongly advises that numbers are restricted to 30 for public health reasons. This maximum number includes all those at the ceremony, including the couple, witnesses, officiant and guests. It also includes any workers who are not employed by the church such as photographers. It does not include staff or volunteers employed by the church such as vergers or churchwardens.

### **2. Q. What about the length of the service?**

A. In keeping with government guidance, we advise that the service should be kept concise while still consistent with the nature of the occasion, focusing on those parts of the marriage that are required in order to be legally binding under the law of England and Wales.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of the Church of England, this means, for instance, the parts of the Marriage Service included in the Structure on p.103 of *Common Worship: Pastoral Services* read with the Notes to that service.

Legally, if anyone wishes to lodge an objection to the wedding, they are entitled to do so, and provision must be made to enable them to make their point while observing physical distancing. While this is likely to be a very rare event, it emphasises the importance of having someone present to control access to the building during the service.

### **3. Q. What special provisions should I make during the service?**

A. The church building must be risk assessed and appropriate physical distancing and Public Health hygiene practices put in place so that the ceremony is conducted in a safe way – please see the guidance for [public worship](#).

Apart from the bride and groom, who join hands as an essential part of the marriage ceremony, a physical distance of 2 metres should be observed between individuals as far as is possible. Please note that the minister does not have to touch the rings at the Giving of Rings, nor does he or she have to touch the couple's hands as part of a prayer or blessing.

Where rings are touched by anyone other than the bride and groom alone, hands should be washed or sanitized before and after. The rings should be handled by as few people as possible.

During the service, those participating should not project their voices to minimise risk of droplet spread and the use of face coverings is encouraged.

Hymns and singing are not advised as this may encourage droplet and aerosol spread.

The organist may play for the ceremony.

If the bride is to be 'walked down the aisle' she should only be accompanied by a member of her household, while bridesmaids should be careful to observe physical distancing unless also from the same household.

Good public health hygiene should be observed throughout with hand sanitizers available at the door. If the church is to be used again within 72 hours it should be cleaned after the service following the guidelines [here](#).

### **4. Q. What about signing the register?**

A. All those signing the register should sanitize their hands before signing, complete all the signatures necessary for them and then sanitize them again. Apart from the bride and groom, all those signing should maintain physical distancing if practicable and, where available, individual pens for each signatory can be used.

### **5. Q. What about legal aspects of weddings?**

A. The following should cover most situations, but if in doubt, please consult your surrogate or the diocesan registrar:

- Please make sure that you know where you stand on the banns being read – and on the necessity for attendance to establish a connection if this was required. A Common Licence or a Special Licence may be appropriate in some cases, or a postponement of the wedding for others.
- If a couple want to cancel their wedding, the statutory fees will not be payable and must be refunded in full if already paid. Alternatively, they might wish to postpone their wedding to a mutually convenient date. If issues arise with regard to repayments including deposits, the DBF portion of the statutory fees and any other payments made prior for the marriage, advice should be sought from the diocesan registrar.
- You might wish to suggest that if the wedding goes ahead with restricted numbers, there could be a blessing in the year ahead with all guests present.

**6. Q. Can the couple have a wedding reception?**

A. Wedding receptions or parties are permitted for up to 30 people after the marriage ceremony. These celebrations should only take place if physical distancing and Public Health hygiene guidelines can be observed.

**7. Q. What is the advice about booking future weddings?**

A. Given the on-going uncertainties about how COVID19 will progress during the coming months it would be prudent to ensure that when booking weddings for later in 2020 or 2021 couples are advised that there may still be a possibility that their wedding may not be able to take place or that it may be subject to restrictions which are imposed at some future time.

It is therefore recommended that you write to or email the couple to make clear that while we will do all we can to make sure the day goes as planned, we are not in control of the circumstances. Couples may wish to postpone their weddings and indeed the church may have to cancel dates that have been booked. In these circumstances the provision of extras such as music and bell ringing can only be provisional and couples may wish to consider taking out insurance.

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