

Risk Assessment Template for Opening Church Buildings to the Public

Version Control

Issue Date	Version Number	Issued by
25 th March 2021	9	The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group

This update has been reviewed to reflect the [roadmap to ease restrictions](#) 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](#).

The [government 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](#).

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](#).

Guidance indicating how churches might arrange access and events in a Covid-safe way has 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](#).

Carrying out a risk assessment

1. Agree what activities you are planning for:
 - **Private prayer**
 - **Public worship**
 - **Funerals, weddings, baptisms, ordinations**
 - **Livestreaming or recording services**
 - **A choir or music group singing indoors as part of a public, livestreamed or recorded service (congregational singing may take place outside, but at present is not permitted indoors)**
 - Formal childcare or where part of a school
 - Essential voluntary and public services
 - Use as a vaccination centre
 - Other exempted activities such as support groups
 - Provision of youth services
 - Opening shops/cafes (may be permitted in Step 2, depending on access arrangements)
 - Opening for visitors/tourists/educational visits as a heritage attraction (not permitted until Step 3)
 - Opening for concerts, plays etc (not permitted until Step 3)
2. Consider the hazards:
 - Transmission of COVID-19
 - Hazards arising from using the church in a different way to usual

Read the guidance and think about how it relates specifically to your church. What constraints are there? Consider how people will arrive at the church, including if they will need to wait or queue outside; how people will enter and leave the church; circulation inside: from the entrance to the worship space and out again; circulation within the worship space; also access to other areas including the toilet(s).

3. 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 not different for larger churches as long as they are properly managed, but having any significant numbers of people coming through your building makes the possible impact – in particular someone with COVID-19 coming into contact with others – higher than in smaller churches 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.

4. 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

Church: St. Bartholomew's Otford	Assessor's name: Janet Hunt	Date completed: 31 March 2021	Review date: 30/4/2021
--	---------------------------------------	---	----------------------------------

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name	
Access to church buildings for purposes of recording and/or livestreaming services (with no congregation present) Risk: contracting or spreading the virus by not social distancing or by touching contaminated services	Consider if anyone required for recording or broadcasting is clinically extremely vulnerable or has household members who are. Can someone else fulfil their role in the recording/livestreaming? Ensure that the people who need to attend the church building to enable the livestreaming or recording to take place are willing to do so and can do so safely. Make sure that only those essential for livestreaming or recording enter the church.	Advice on livestreaming and recording can be found here .	Team providing streaming services, all reminded of risks posed. Team will enter the building prior to the arrival of members of the Congregation.	8/3/2021 all members of streaming teams reminded of considerations before undertaking role.	
	Identify one point of entry to the church building, and a separate exit if possible.			Original plans ongoing	19/6/2020
	A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant.		An example can be found here .	No lone working when opening for Services. Door to office	19/6/2020 CS & SR

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
			corridor kept locked during working hours. Emergency exit through Church Centre.	
	Consider staggered arrival times if multiple people from different households are coming into the building.	Congregation will arrive at differing times, a Warden will be on duty to ensure social distancing guidelines observed.	Wardens and members of the Congregation	Reviewed 8/3/2021 JH
	Holy water stoups and the font are empty.			19/6/2020
	Ensure safe use of equipment needed for livestreaming: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets, cables/tripod causing trip hazard	RE has checked the loads on sockets and cables. Care has been taken to ensure no trip hazards exist.	RE 8/3/2021	30/4/2021
	Provide adequate hand cleansing stations. Provide hand sanitiser for the occasions when people can't wash their hands.	Hand sanitiser stations by North and South Doors and can be moved outside if weather permits.		19/6/2020
	Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the 'cleaning' section of this risk assessment (below).	Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here .	Reviewed and schedule prepared prior to re-opening in June 2020. Still relevant to date.	19/6/2020 & 8/3/2021

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Read the CofE guide on face coverings and produce or download signage or other relevant materials to indicate compliance with the law and requiring these for all except those exempt.	Advice on face coverings can be found here .	Notices in place to remind visitors to the Church to wear masks.	19/6/2020 & reviewed 8/3/2021
	Identify where you can reduce the contact of people with surfaces, e.g. by leaving open doors that are not fire doors, using electronic documents rather than paperwork.	Doors into Church left open, services displayed on screen for in person services. Service sheet used once per week on a Wednesday only.	CS, SR	Reviewed 8/3/2021
	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 .	In place used & checked	8/3/2021
Deciding whether to open to the public for private prayer, public worship and other permitted activities	Consider how the national lockdown applies to the particular circumstances of the church and the worship or other activities envisaged. For gathered congregations or other activities drawing people from a wide area, consider the implications of where people travel from and the distance involved.	Furthest travel from Swanley, Tonbridge & Sevenoaks. No wider travel anticipated.	No undue travel envisaged – main service Live Streamed	8/3/2021
	Discuss with nearby venues and businesses to ensure that the timing and practical arrangements for using the church are compatible.	Church opening does not impact on nearby businesses		8/3/2021
	Check if any clergy, staff or volunteers required for opening to the public fall into clinically extremely vulnerable categories or have members of their household who do, and ensure there are enough people safely able and willing to facilitate opening and cleaning the building.	No volunteers, staff or clergy fall into this category.		Reviewed 8/3/2021

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Consider whether to discourage clinically extremely vulnerable members of the congregation or visitors from attending services altogether or setting aside a time for them to attend for individual devotions.	Church is open Monday – Friday for private prayer. System of yellow tokens to indicate where people visiting have sat		31/3/2021
	Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services	Booking system in place for all in person services	Seats allocated to ensure social distancing maintained	CS&SR updated 8/3/2021
	Communicate with nearby churches to ensure offered provisions are complementary.	All Churches in Otford are now offering in person Services. Methodist church also live stream		8/3/2021
Deciding whether to have a choir or music group singing/performing Risk: Aerosol spread of coronavirus may be increased by singing and playing of wind instruments	Check current guidance on singing to establish what is permitted. This can be found in the Church of England guidance on conducting public worship and on in the Government guidance for places of worship .	New risk assessment completed by KG organist & Choir Master to allow members of the choir to sing at services following guidelines		31/3/2021
	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).	Chairs set out in Lady Chapel to ensure social distancing maintained. Also choir stalls utilised to ensure social distancing		31/3/2021 reviewed by JH & KG
	Put in place measures to create a physical barrier between singers and any congregation.	Lady Chapel is separate from congregation, accessed by steps which will ensure social distance maintained.		31/3/2021 JH, KG

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Remind any members of congregation present that at present they are not allowed to sing indoors.	Leader of the service reminds the congregation at the start of the first hymn	Service Leader	JH, DG & Lay Readers
#Preparation of the Church for access by members of the public for any permitted purposes Risk: Getting or spreading coronavirus in common use high traffic areas such as corridors, toilet facilities, entry/exit points and other communal areas.	Confirm that all steps (above) for access for livestreaming/broadcast have been carried out before anyone else accesses the building.	All steps above reviewed and carried out	All	8/3/2021 & 31/3/2021 JH
	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. Clearly state the limits on attendance for weddings, funerals, commemorative events and any other permitted activities where upper limits apply (or provide a link to this document).	DG has updated A Church Near You and social media. Church notices advise that booking will be required with Church Office to enable allocation of suitable seating. New notice for notice boards outside Church & Church Hall prepared	DG,CS	JH 31/3/3021
	Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the 'cleaning' section of this risk assessment (below).	Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here .	Reviewed and in place	19/6/2020 Reviewed 8/3/2021 & 31/3/2021
	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 .	In place	8/3/2021 & reviewed 31/3/2021 JH
	Choose one point of entry into the church to manage flow of people and indicate this with notices, keeping emergency exits available at all times. Where possible use a different exit.	In place for re-opening 19/6/2020	CS has replaced worn tape	31/3/2021

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside).	People wait outside Church building until lobby is clear – if weather permits hand sanitiser placed outside buildings to prevent build up of people.		Reviewed 19/6/2020 & 8/3/2021
	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).	Car park sufficiently separated from Church to allow for Social distancing – as is the approach to the entry to the Church		19/6/2020 & 8/3/2021
	Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation.	Doors kept open during the Service		8/3/2020 & 31/3/2021
	If heating is required check your system is safe to use and test it before people are allowed in.	Guidance on church heating can be found here .	Tested prior to putting heat on in the Autumn	31/3/2021
	Remove items such as Bibles, prayer and hymn books that are used by multiple people.	You could consider a long-term loan system for Bibles and other books to ensure people have access to these.	Previously undertaken	19/6/2020
	If providing single-use service sheets or prayer cards, either place these on sheets or ask people to sanitise hands before picking one up, and request that people take these home with them.	Only used on a Wednesday – all congregation to sanitise before admittance to the Church		8/3/2021 & 31/3/2021
	Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on)		Previously done	June 2020

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance on soft surfaces.	Previously removed		June 2020
	Remove or isolate children’s resources and play areas.	Previously removed		June 2020
	Walk through the church to plan for physical distancing in seats, aisles, at the altar rail, including safe flow of visitors. Remember 2m in all directions from each person (or 1m with risk mitigation if absolutely necessary).	Safer churches guidance, including ideas on floor plans, is available here .	Measurements taken prior to re-opening in June 2020	Previous measures all still relevant and in place 31/3/2021
	Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing.	Pews have signage on to indicate which ones are in use		June 2020
	Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements.	Flow marked out on the ground with tape		Markings checked 31/3/2021
	Limit access to places where the public does not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon is needed.	Ropes and barriers in place to indicate flow for opening for prayer		Reviewed 31/3/2021
	Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use.	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.	In north and south porches	31/3/2021 – moved outside north door for services when weather permits to make flow easier

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing	Consult advice on gaining temporary permissions .	None	June 2020
	Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc.	Notices on board in north porch entry		June 2020
	Ensure high-risk surfaces and touch points have been wiped with appropriate sanitiser spray or disposable wipes	Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here .	High risk areas are cleaned on a regular basis after each service	Reviewed 31/3/2021
	Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels.	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.	Checked weekly by admin team	Reviewed 31/3/2021
	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 for procurement options.	Checked weekly by admin team	Reviewed 31/3/2021
	Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them.		In place	Reviewed 31/3/3021
Use of the church for baptisms, weddings, funerals, commemorative services and ordinations	Consider the specific guidance in place for those activities and assess the additional controls and limits on attendance in place.	<p>Advice on baptisms can be found here.</p> <p>Advice on weddings can be found here (scroll down to Can weddings go ahead?).</p> <p>Advice on funerals can be found here.</p>	<p>None held or planned</p> <p>Weddings Scheduled for May 2021</p> <p>Funerals – Government guidance</p>	31/3/2021

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
		The government’s advice on commemorative events can be found here .	followed in relation to number of attendees	
Use of the church for permitted activities other than private prayer or worship	Consider the specific guidance in place for those activities and assess the additional controls and limits on attendance in place. Check that any external group using the church has COVID-secure working practices in place, including their own risk assessment where necessary, and will comply with what is required by the church.	<p>The government’s guidance on the safe use of multi-purpose community facilities for permitted activities (including formal childcare and support groups) can be found here.</p> <p>Advice on use of churches as vaccination centres can be found here.</p> <p>The government’s guidance on the use of hospitality spaces can be found here.</p>	Church is not used for any permitted activities other than private prayer or worship	31/3/2021
Cleaning the church before and after general use (no known exposure to anyone with Coronavirus symptoms) Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here .	If the church building has been closed for 48 hours between periods of being open then there is no need for extra cleaning to remove the virus from surfaces.	Church is cleaned daily prior to closing – after being open for private prayer	Team in place to open / close & clean on a daily basis.	Reviewed 31/3/2021
	If 48-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating.			
	Identify surfaces that are frequently touched and by many people (often common areas), e.g.	Schedule of cleaning drawn up to ensure high frequency surfaces cleaned daily		Reviewed 31/3/2021

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
Risk: Getting or spreading coronavirus by not cleaning surfaces, equipment and shared facilities.	handrails, door handles, shared equipment, toilets, and specify the frequency and level of cleaning and by whom.			
	Keep surfaces clear to make it easier to clean and reduce the likelihood of contaminating objects.	Surfaces in the church are left clear at the end of services		Reviewed 31/3/2021
	Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets deemed essential for services should be quarantined for 48 hours after use.	Service sheets for Wednesday Service used once per week. Service sheets for 8.00 Communion used once per week. Morning service on screen or live streamed		Reviewed 31/3/2021
	All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable).	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.	Gloves available in corridor	31/3/2021
	Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned.	Register with Parish Buying for procurement options.	Cleaning materials available in corridor	31/3/2021
	Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site.	Potentially contaminated waste is removed by the person cleaning at the end of each day		Reviewed 31//2021
	Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal.	Weekly removal on a Friday		31/3/2021
Cleaning the church after known exposure to	If possible close the church building for 48 hours with no access permitted.	Church would be closed if known exposure notified		Ongoing

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
someone with Coronavirus symptoms	If 48-hour closure is not possible then follow Public Health England guidance on cleaning in non-healthcare settings.	Public Health England guidance available here.	N/A	
	If the building has been quarantined for 48 hours, then carry out cleaning as per the normal advice on cleaning.	Advice on cleaning church buildings can be found here.	Building would be cleaned once more prior to re-opening should this occur.	Reviewed 31/32021