

Risk Assessment for Opening Church Buildings to the Public

Version Control

Issue Date	Version Number	Issued by
6 th August 2020	5	The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group

This update includes risk factors around the requirement to wear face coverings in places of worship from 8th August.

Churches and cathedrals have been legally permitted to open for purposes of individual private prayer from 13th June. House of Bishops guidance provided for churches to open for funerals from 15th June. Public worship, with measures in place for social distancing, are allowed from 4th July. Other activities, except for a few still prohibited by law, may also take place in churches, subject to the government guidance in place for the relevant sector.

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, it 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. You should read the advice on re-opening buildings and the guidance on public worship before completing this assessment. Both are available on the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](#).

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.

A separate risk assessment relating to contractors and construction workers is available on the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](#).

Carrying out a risk assessment

1. Agree what activities you are planning for:

- Private prayer (clergy only)
- Livestreaming services (clergy only)
- Private prayer (general public)
- Public worship
- Rites of passage services
- Opening for visitors and tourists

2. Consider the hazards:

- Transmission of COVID-19
- Hazards arising from the temporary closure of the church
- Hazards arising from now using the church in a different way

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 so long as they are properly managed, but having more people coming through your building 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.

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: Smithills Chapel	Assessor's name: Ross Pyle/Helen Stainthorpe/Elian Winstanley	Date completed: 03/08/20	Review date:
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Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
Access to church buildings for clergy for purposes of private prayer and/or livestreaming General advice on accessing church buildings can be found here.	One point of entry to the church building clearly identified and separate from public entry if possible	This building is not used by clergy for private prayer	N/A	
	A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant.		N/A	
	Buildings have been aired before use.	Verger or member of Leadership Team to open up in advance	Verger/Ross Pyle/Member of Leadership Team	Day before wedding or funeral
	Check for animal waste and general cleanliness.	Before each use of church	Verger/Member of Leadership Team	On the day
	Ensure water systems are flushed through before use.	The toilets for church are rarely used. Therefore, they will be opened up the day before a wedding or funeral and the water run for 5 minutes and the toilet flushed several times.	Verger/Ross Pyle/Member of Leadership Team	Day before wedding or funeral
	Switch on and check electrical and heating systems if needed. Commission system checks as necessary.	Smithills Hall are responsible for the maintenance of the building. Visual checks to be made the day before.	Member of Leadership Team	Day before wedding or funeral

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Holy water stoups and the font are empty.	No font or holy water stoups in this building.	N/A	
	Ensure safe use of equipment needed for livestreaming: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets, cables/tripod causing trip hazard	Leadership Team to liaise with Ken/whoever is doing A/V for the service and ensure it is safe.	Member of Leadership Team	Planned in advance, checked on the day
Deciding whether to open to the public	Discuss with nearby venues and businesses to ensure that the timing and practical arrangements for using the church are compatible.	Smithills Hall are already made aware of the wedding/funeral bookings by the Parish Office. Inform Poppins Tea Rooms if they are going to be open on the day of a wedding or funeral.	Parish Office Ross Pyle	1 week before the wedding or funeral
	Update your website, A Church Near You, and any relevant social media.		N/A	
	Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services	Work with the family to create a safe seating plan based on family/household bubbles	Verger/Ross Pyle/ Member of Leadership Team designated to liaise with the family	1 week before the wedding or funeral
	If opening to tourists consider applying for the Visit Britain 'Good to Go' standard mark		N/A	
	Include details on requirements such as bringing a face covering in communications.	For weddings and funerals, advise family that they and guests need to bring with them and	Verger/Ross Pyle	1 week before the wedding or funeral

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
		wear a face covering (unless exempt) as these are mandatory in church buildings.		
Preparation of the Church for access by members of the public for any permitted purposes, including worship and tourism	Confirm that all steps (above) for access by clergy have been carried out before anyone else accesses the building.		Ross Pyle	
	Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the 'cleaning' section of this risk assessment (below).	The building is to be left 72-hours after a wedding or funeral.		
	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.	Signage displayed stating 'Face coverings are MANDATORY in places of worship except for those who are exempt'	Parish Office to produce signage	17/08/20
	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.	Doors to be propped open in advance to ensure 'no touch' access. The flow of people is to be controlled by stewards so that people directed to their seats when area is not congested.	Verger/stewards	On the day
	Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside).	Signage outside church to say 'Please maintain social distancing when waiting to enter the church. The outside of the quadrangle is to be used to queue, if necessary'	Verger/stewards Parish Office to produce signage	Verger/stewards to put sign out an hour before the event. 17/08/20

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	Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation.	Main double doors to be left wide open or ajar (if weather inclement) to ensure air flow	Verger/stewards	On the day
	Remove Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets	These are not in-situ in the pews. Order of services to be removed by individual attendees - verger/stewards to remind them to do so, if necessary.	Verger/stewards	On the day
	Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on)		N/A	
	Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance	Pew cushions can remain as there will be a 72-hour quarantine period before the chapel will be used again.		
	Remove or isolate children's resources and play areas		N/A	
	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).	Seating plan to be arranged for each individual wedding or funeral to ensure 2m social distancing.	Member of Leadership Team designated to liaise with the family	
	Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing.	Tape to be used to mark off the areas not to be seated in.	Member of Leadership Team	

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements.	Entrance and exit signs to be placed on relevant doors.	Parish Office to produce signage	17/08/20
	Limit access to places where the public does not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon if needed.	Tape to be placed across the corridor to the balcony stairs with signage 'No admittance permitted'	Parish Office to produce signage	17/08/20
	Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use.	Hand sanitisers to be available in the entrance with signage to encourage use.	Parish Office to produce signage Ross Pyle	17/08/20 Day before wedding or funeral
	Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing	Fixed seating so pews will be cordoned off.	Member of Leadership Team designated to liaise with the family to produce a seating plan	Day before wedding or funeral
	Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc.	E-mail Parish Office with signage requests	Ross	13/08/20
	Ensure high-risk surfaces and touch points have been wiped with appropriate sanitiser spray or disposable wipes	Touch points to be cleaned thoroughly after use. Building to be closed for 72 hours after wedding or funeral.	Verger/stewards	On the day

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels.	Handwashing facilities are available in the toilet facilities and are suitably replenished.	Member of Leadership Team opening up the day before the wedding or funeral	Day before wedding or funeral
	Where there are toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available.	Helen/Ross to check this	Helen/Ross	Day before wedding or funeral
	Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them.	Helen/Ross to check this	Helen/Ross	Day before wedding or funeral
	If possible, provide safe means for worshippers and visitors to record their name and contact details; retain each day's record for 21 days	List of congregation given by family concerned for purposes of seating plan. Family asked to ensure they have contact details. Notice placed at the entrance advising anyone with symptoms of coronavirus not to enter and to seek medical assistance.	Member of Leadership Team designated to liaise with the family Parish Office to produce signage	1 week before the wedding or funeral 17/08/20
	Give due notice of the resumption of use of the building to neighbours, congregation and wider community, ensuring that visitors and worshippers will know what to expect when they come.	Make family aware of the Covid-19 restrictions and ask them to remind their guests that there will be social distancing etc.	Member of Leadership Team	1 week before the wedding or funeral

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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 72 hours between periods of being open then there is no need for extra cleaning to remove the virus from surfaces.	Remind Smithills Hall that the chapel has been used for a funeral or wedding and therefore should be out of bounds for 72 hours	Parish Office	1 week before the wedding or funeral
	If 72-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating.	N/A		
	Set up a cleaning rota to cover your opening arrangements.	N/A		
	All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable).	Disposable gloves to be available in the building	Helen/Ross	Day before wedding or funeral
	Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned.	Helen/Ross to check this	Helen/Ross to check this	Day before wedding or funeral
	Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site.	Verger to do this at the end of the service. Gloves to be available to tie bag and remove.	Verger	On the day
	Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal.	After each wedding or funeral.	Verger	On the day
Cleaning the church after known exposure to someone with Coronavirus symptoms	If possible close the church building for 72 hours with no access permitted.	The chapel will be closed for 72 hours after each wedding or funeral		
	If 72-hour closure is not possible then follow Public Health England guidance on cleaning in non-healthcare settings.	N/A		

Area of Focus	Controls required	Additional information	Action by whom?	Completed – date and name
	If the building has been quarantined for 72 hours, then carry out cleaning as per the normal advice on cleaning.	Verger/stewards to do this following a wedding or funeral	Verger/stewards	On the day