



Re-opening RCCG Parishes following the Phased Lifting of Lockdown Restrictions. Summary Guidance for the safe use of RCCG Parishes in the UK During the Pandemic.¹

19th August 2020

1. Overview

- 1.1. The maintenance of proper hygiene at all Church Venues and Services are of utmost importance. As further restrictions have been lifted, Parishes should be prepared for the 'New Normal'.
- 1.2. **Since the 13th of June, Churches were re-opened for individual prayers while observing social distancing rules. In addition, Churches in England will now be able to re-open from the 4th of July for Congregational Worship as far as the premises are 'COVID-Secure'.**
- 1.3. From the 15th of August, indoor and outdoor performances by both professional and non-professional musicians and singers, small groups, including choirs, will be able to perform in front of worshippers.
- 1.4. **Similar new measures have been announced for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As such, Parishes in those regions are to take steps based on the relevant government guidance in their regions.**
For Scotland see <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/>
For Wales see <https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus>
For Northern Ireland see <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-regulations-guidance-and-what-they-mean-you>
- 1.5. This means a complete review of the physical aspects of church activities using the guidelines provided by the Government. It includes adapting some aspects of worship activities that may result in physical contact.
- 1.6. This summary guidance is to assist RCCG UK Parishes in preventing/limiting the spread of COVID-19 during the Pandemic.
- 1.7. The summary guidance must be read in conjunction with the government's advice on re-opening places of worship, available at: <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-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>
- 1.8. Certain aspects of the guidance have been re-worded for clearer understanding within RCCG UK's denominational context.

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2. Highlights - Adapting Practices to Reduce the Spread of Infection

- 2.1. Parishes should adapt church services, especially where ceremonies would otherwise have taken place over many hours or days, to ensure the safety of those present and minimise the spread of infection. Services should be concluded in the shortest reasonable time.
- 2.2. Once service is over, members attending should be encouraged to move on promptly, to minimise the risk of contact and spread of infection. If appropriate, reconfigure spaces to enable members attending to be seated rather than standing, which reduces the risk of contact.
- 2.3. Parishes should adopt a hybrid approach to live services by continuing to stream their worship services or other events to avoid large gatherings and to continue to reach those individuals who are self-isolating or particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

More specific guidance is as follows:

2.4. The use of shared items

- 2.4.1. Individuals should be prevented from touching objects that are handled communally. Barriers and/or clear signage should be put in place where necessary to avoid this taking place.
- 2.4.2. Reusable and communal resources such as hard copy Bibles, Sunday School Manuals, and other text or devotional materials should be removed from use.
- 2.4.3. In circumstances where worshippers cannot bring their Bibles and Manuals, Parishes could keep a selection of Bibles, Manuals and other devotional texts for individuals to use. Once cleaned, such items should be quarantined for 48 hours since their previous use and should be quarantined for 48 hours again after use. Items which cannot be easily cleaned should also be subject to the 48-hour quarantine after use.

2.5. Food and Drink

- 2.5.1. Where food or drink ('consumables') are essential to the act of worship, such as communion, they can be used; however, the sharing of food should be avoided, as should the use of communal vessels. Only use individual pre-filled communion packs.
- 2.5.2. If it is necessary to handle consumables, those giving and receiving food items should wash their hands thoroughly before and after consumption, or wear gloves.
- 2.5.3. The person distributing the consumable should release it, into the hand only, in such a way to avoid any contact between them and those receiving it, or wear gloves. If accidental contact does occur, both people should cleanse their hands immediately.
- 2.5.4. Other mitigations should also be considered, for example, foodstuffs should be prewrapped, and a system should be in place to prevent individuals from coming into contact with consumables and any dishes and/ or cutlery other than their own (for example the use of shared bowls).
- 2.5.5. Speaking, singing and chanting should not happen across uncovered consumables (other than consumables to be used by the celebrant alone). Instead, consumables must be securely covered, and prior to the receptacle being opened, should be cleaned, hands must be washed or gloves worn.

- 2.5.6. Hospitality spaces within a place of worship, such as cafes or canteens are permitted to open but should be limited to table-service, social distancing should be observed, and with minimal staff and customer contact in line with [hospitality guidance](#).

2.6. Singing, Chanting and the use of Musical Instruments

- 2.6.1. From the 15th of August, indoor and outdoor performances by both professional and non-professional musicians and singers, small groups, including choirs, will be able to perform in front of worshippers.
- 2.6.2. There should be no singing by worshippers or audience participation at this stage.
- 2.6.3. As music plays a big part in worship, consider using recordings where available as an alternative to live singing.
- 2.6.4. Any instrument played during worship should be cleaned thoroughly before and after use.

The government and the medical and scientific communities are urgently engaged in research around transmission risk and how such activities can best be managed safely, and further guidance will follow when available. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts>

2.7. Weddings, Birthdays Events etc.

- 2.7.1. It is strongly advised that only essential aspects of the ceremonies take place at this time.
- 2.7.2. Weddings should have no more than 30 people present.
- 2.7.3. Small wedding receptions classified as sit-down dinners of up to 30 people is allowed from the 15th August 2020.
- 2.7.4. Large wedding receptions or parties should not take place after events.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/covid-19-guidance-for-wedding-and-civil-partnership-receptions-and-celebrations>

2.8. Cash donations

- 2.8.1. Where possible Parishes are to discourage cash donations and continue to use online or contactless giving and resources.
- 2.8.2. Where this is not an option, cash should be collected in a receptacle that is set in one place and handled by one individual, as opposed to being passed around. Regular cleaning and hygiene should be maintained, and gloves worn to handle cash offerings where giving continues.

2.9. Young people and children attending places of worship

- 2.9.1. Young children should be supervised by the parent or guardian. They should wash hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with running water and soap and dry them thoroughly or use hand sanitiser ensuring that all parts of the hands are covered. Places of worship can help remind children and young people, and their parents and guardians, of the important actions they should take during the COVID-19 outbreak to help prevent the spread of the virus. Posters on general hand hygiene can be found on the [eBug website](#).
- 2.9.2. Any shared facilities for children, such as play corners, soft furnishings, soft toys and toys that are hard to clean, should be removed and/or put out of use.

- 2.9.3. Outdoor playgrounds are permitted to open where venue managers risk assess that it is safe to do so, see relevant [guidance](#). Particular attention should be paid to cleaning frequently touched surfaces by children and those that are at child height.
- 2.9.4. Principles in general guidance from the Department for Education should also be followed for any separate children's activities being organised by the place of worship alongside or within a service.
- 2.10. Many places of worship are also workplaces and should, therefore, be aware of their responsibilities as employers under health and safety law.
- 2.11. Places of worship also have a duty of care to volunteers, to ensure that as far as reasonably practicable, they are not exposed to risks to their health and safety.
- 2.12. Church leaders, family, volunteers, staff and members, including children, should stay at home and self-isolating if they have a new, continuous cough or high temperature or loss of or change to sense of smell or taste. This is to minimise the risk of spread of COVID-19 to church members, friends, the wider community, and particularly the vulnerable.
- 2.13. To help decide which actions to take, **a COVID-19 risk assessment should be completed by each place of worship**. This will be in addition to any risk assessment already in place. Please click this link to get the relevant template <https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/risk-assessment-template-and-examples.htm>
- 2.14. From 4th July the two metres, social distancing rules is reduced to 1 metre (plus), where it is not possible to maintain 2 metres. 1 Metre plus means, 1 metre apart while taking mitigating measures such as avoiding face to face seating, face coverings, etc., to reduce the risk.
- 2.15. Choose one point of entry and another point for exit, both of which should be clearly marked.
- 2.16. Have notices in conspicuous places to emphasise the key advice that Members should stay two metres or a metre 'plus' apart from anyone outside of their household. No physical contact is to take place.
- 2.17. If anyone becomes unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 in a place of worship, they should be sent home and advised to follow the [stay at home guidance](#). If they need clinical advice, they should go online to NHS 111 (or call 111 if they do not have internet access). In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk.
- 2.18. **Test and Trace:** The government has launched an [NHS Test and Trace service](#) to manage the risk of the virus re-emerging. The service:
- provides testing for anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 to find out if they have the virus;
 - gets in touch with anyone who has had a positive test result to help them share information about any recent close contacts they have had; and
 - alerts those contacts, where necessary, and notifies them they need to self-isolate to help stop the spread of the virus.
- 2.19. Parishes should assist this service by keeping an accurate temporary record of visitors for 21 days, in a way that is manageable for your Parish. This will help NHS Test and Trace

with requests for that data if needed for contact tracing and the investigation of local outbreaks.

- 2.20. Parishes should consider creating a booking system for visitors, in addition to limiting numbers to adhere to social distancing guidelines.

3. Individuals Aged 70 Years and Over Attending Live Services

- 3.1. Certain groups of people may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, including people who are aged 70 or older, regardless of medical conditions.
- 3.2. Individuals who fall within this group are advised to stay at home as much as possible and, if they do go out, to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside of their household.
- 3.3. Parishes should consider informing these groups in particular of the symptoms of COVID-19 and [current stay alert and social distancing guidance](#).

4. Practical Steps for Church Buildings

- 4.1. Carry out a Risk Assessment. Templates available at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/risk-assessment-template-and-examples.htm>
- 4.2. Air the building to minimise mould spores etc. [where possible engage the services of a good window cleaning professionals to clean the inner and outer sections of the windows]. If your building has been closed completely for the lockdown period, then it is recommended to leave the doors, and any easily opened windows open for at least an hour before spending any time in it.
- 4.3. There is a risk of excessive dust and mould spores having gathered during the closure, which could potentially be a health hazard.
- 4.4. You will need to wait outside the Church while airing it out, both for your own safety and to ensure that nobody else accesses it.
- 4.5. Ensure that the church building interior is appropriately cleaned, paying particular attention to any rodent droppings that may have gathered while the Church was in lockdown.
- 4.6. Run all the taps (to minimise the risk of legionella and other potable water diseases) and flush and clean toilets. Run the water from all taps and other hot and cold water-outlets for at least five minutes to ensure the water system has been thoroughly flush through. If you have any concerns, seek appropriate professional help/advice. (this is very vital because the water system has been left unused for a while, hence the possible growth of harmful bacteria and other germs in the water storage system).
- 4.7. Consider checking general maintenance items such as Electrical Systems; Emergency Lighting and other lighting; check for battery strength and carry out a test on the unit; this could save lives in periods of emergency.
- 4.8. **Fire Alarm Systems:** please carry out a routine check on the system, this a safety mechanism that all RCCG churches should install in their premises and should be routinely maintained and serviced.
- 4.9. **Install health and safety signages/Posters at strategic locations,** e.g. all church entrances and exit points, toilets, and all service areas.
- 4.10. If Pastors or ministers are likely to use the building or sections of it, as part of a rota for prayers, children ministry, meetings or ministration, make sure those parts or sections of

the Church that are touched often (doorknobs, light switches etc.), have been thoroughly cleaned in-between use.

- 4.11. Make sure hand-sanitisers are available at the entrance door and gently ask those attending Church services to wash or sanitise their hands as they enter the premises. Also ensure there is an adequate supply of soap, hand wash liquid or hand gel in cloakrooms, kitchens and any other appropriate areas.

5. Restrictions on Capacity

- 5.1. Limits for communal worship should be decided locally, based on the capacity of the Parish's building following a risk assessment.
- 5.2. The number of people permitted to enter the place of worship at any one time should be limited, so that a safe distance of at least 2 metres, or 1 meter with risk mitigation (where 2 meters is not viable) between households.
- 5.3. The size and circumstance (including ventilation) of the premises will determine the maximum number of people that can be accommodated while also facilitating social distancing; this may, therefore, be lower than the maximum 30 people who can attend life-cycle events such as weddings.
- 5.4. The venue manager should decide on a safe number of people. In defining the number of people that can reasonably follow social distancing, the total floor space, as well as likely pinch points and busy areas, **should be taken into account (such as entrances, exits) and where possible alternative or one-way routes introduced.**

6. Conduct During Services / Other Activities

- 6.1. According to government guidance, in rare circumstances where it is necessary, washing facilities within the place of worship should be used in line with social distancing guidelines and hygiene measures applied. Where ceremonies require water to be applied to the body, small volumes can be splashed onto the body, but full immersion should be avoided. Others present should move out of range of any potential splashing.
- 6.2. We, therefore, recommend that all activities that require physical contact should be avoided, e.g. water baptism.
- 6.3. There should be no embracing, handshaking or other direct physical contacts by members and the Pastorate during and after the Service.
- 6.4. Encourage electronic giving; however, where offerings (donations) are in cash, offering baskets should not be passed around but left in a conspicuous place, and encourage the Ushers to wear gloves and other forms of protective items always.
- 6.5. Money counters should wear face coverings (masks) and gloves, and counting should be carried out in well-ventilated rooms while maintaining social distancing.
- 6.6. Do not share Bibles, prayer books etc. Each person should bring their own books, writing materials, and take them home with them after each service.
- 6.7. Electronic display of church manuals/bulletins should be encouraged rather than handing out the paper version.
- 6.8. If services are being streamed, the filming should be done either with a fixed camera or by a designated member of the multimedia Department.

- 6.9. Please encourage everyone coming to Church to wear face-covering where possible and avoid all forms of embrace and shaking of hands during and after each service.
- 6.10. The “Laying on of hands” and “anointing of oil” should be deferred as it involves direct physical contact.
- 6.11. Where required, members’ bottles of anointing oil can be blessed by the Pastor.
- 6.12. The Holy Communion can be conducted by the distribution of individual Prefilled Celebration Cups.
- 6.13. Pastors / Ministers must wash their hands before and after distributing the Communion elements.

7. Church Equipment

- 7.1. Avoid handling equipment frequently as the study of other coronaviruses found they remained on metal, glass, and plastic for days.
- 7.2. Disinfect microphones before and after each use. The use of wireless microphones is recommended.
- 7.3. Ensure a designated member of the multimedia department handles the media equipment and that surfaces are disinfected before and after use.

8. Common Areas/Church Facility

- 8.1. Ensure **thorough and regular cleaning of surfaces** of door handles, light switches, lift buttons, water taps, water fountain and other amenities.
- 8.2. Ensure there is a regulated cleaning schedule of toilets and convenience rooms during and after services should be put in place. The church cleaning department should set up a 30-minute check on all toilets during periods of church service to mop the floors and sanitised the toilet seats.
- 8.3. **Heating Systems:** there are numerous types of heating systems in play with different installation and service requirement. Please ensure that their service requirements are followed strictly.
- 8.4. **Fridges:** All food storage spaces and cooling systems in the Church premises should be sanitised/cleaned as required. Ensure that all out of date confectionaries are discarded at the Church Office, Children’s Department, hospitality lounge, Staff welfare rooms, Church guest rooms and Pastors Offices, etc.

9. Enforcement

- 9.1. It is important to be aware of the enforcement provisions, as is the case for other sectors.
- 9.2. Where the enforcing authority (your local authority), identifies responsible individuals who are not taking action to comply with the relevant public health legislation and guidance to control public health risks (including this guidance), they will consider taking a range of actions to improve control of risks.
- 9.3. Under existing Health & Safety legislation, failure to complete a COVID-19 risk assessment could constitute a breach, as could having a risk assessment with insufficient measures.
- 9.4. The actions the enforcing authority can take include the provision of specific advice to employers to support them to achieve the required standard, through issuing enforcement notices to help secure improvements. **Serious breaches and failure to**

comply with enforcement notices can constitute a criminal offence, with serious fines and even imprisonment for up to two years.

- 9.5. Employers are expected to respond to such actions of any advice or notices issued by enforcing authorities rapidly and are required to do so within any timescales imposed by the enforcing authority. **Inspectors are carrying out compliance checks nationwide to ensure that employers are taking the necessary steps.**

Please note that there may be spot checks from the government's task force.

Useful Links

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/assets/docs/working-safely-guide.pdf>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/risk-assessment-template-and-examples.htm>

<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-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>

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