

THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF THE CHURCH IN WALES

CORONAVIRUS – COVID19

GUIDANCE ON CONDUCTING BAPTISMS

Alert Level Zero

As the foundation of Christian life, baptism is a time of joy and celebration for candidates, parents, godparents and the whole church family.

The following advice is intended to assist clergy as they think through the best way of celebrating baptisms as part of their Covid Risk Assessment process. It is not exhaustive but addresses essential issues that should be considered.

This advice should be read alongside the guidance Covid 19 Churches Risk Assessment Guidance Alert Level 0 'available on the Church in Wales Website at

<https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/clergy-and-members/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/>

Introduction

At Alert Level Zero, from August 7th 2021, there are no legal limits (for Covid reasons) on the number of people who can meet, including in private homes, public places or at events. In addition, all businesses and premises may be open and activities can fully resume.

However, the Welsh Government has kept a small but significant number of legal requirements to help reduce the spread of the virus and help protect the most vulnerable. Businesses, employers and other organisations have a duty to protect their employees and customers while on their premises. There are three legal requirements that remain at Alert Level Zero:

1. Businesses, employers and other organisations, including activity and event organisers, must undertake a coronavirus risk assessment of their premises and activities and take reasonable measures to minimise exposure to, and the spread of, coronavirus based on that risk assessment.
2. Everyone must still self-isolate for 10 days if they test positive for COVID-19. If you are a close contact of someone who has tested positive and you are not fully vaccinated you must also self-isolate for 10 days as instructed by the Test Trace Protect system.
3. Adults and children over 12 must wear face-coverings in indoor public places including churches, church halls and community buildings.

It will be noted that social distancing is no longer a legal requirement. However, it is a very useful risk mitigation measure so it is generally recommended that social distancing measures be retained where practical.

It is a general legal duty to protect all people who come into your building/s, or who could be affected by your activities, from harm. This includes taking reasonable steps to protect your clergy, volunteers, members of the congregation or visitors from coronavirus (as with

other hazards). This is called a COVID-19 risk assessment and it will help you manage risk and protect people.

PCCs/MACs need to develop their risk assessment for their activities, and this note seeks to suggest reasonable measures that might be considered to control the risk of Covid transmission.

General questions

Q. What should I do before the baptism?

A. It is important that interaction with the candidate/families must be done as safely as possible. This might mean meeting, at least initially, via video link or talking on the telephone. If face to face meetings are held, they should not be held in the house of anyone who is self-isolating or who is in a vulnerable group.

You should discuss whether all people attending the meeting have been fully vaccinated and hold the meeting in a place where other precautions are in place such as hand sanitising and premises cleaning.

It is important that all concerned feel comfortable with the arrangements for meeting and that they are discussed in advance.

It is still recommended that you avoid sharing documents, books, photos etc and to remember to wash hands thoroughly before and after the meeting.

The health implications for those in a vulnerable group should be discussed and if some people in these groups intend to be present at the baptism, their welfare should be kept to the fore. These will include advising other attendees that there is a vulnerable person attending, reminding them to take particular care and refraining from attending themselves if they feel unwell. You might like to ensure physical distancing in such circumstances.

If someone from a vulnerable group intends to be present, they should be advised to travel to the church in the safest way possible, preferably in a car by themselves or with someone from their household.

Q. How many people can attend the baptism?

A. The numbers of people attending any service will depend on your Church's risk assessment.

The legal requirement to maintain social distancing between persons or households has been withdrawn but that does not mean it is not an excellent risk control measure. It should still be considered in any risk management regime.

There are clearly lower risks between people who have been fully vaccinated particularly where hand washing and premises cleaning regimes are robust.

It is generally recommended that social distancing measures be retained where practical. Why sit people close to each other if it is not necessary?

The candidate, his/her parents, godparents and the minister are all that are required to be present for baptism and parents might wish to keep to this number, if they remain nervous about the risk of Covid transmission.

Q. What special steps should I take during the baptism?

Not everyone is comfortable with gathering yet so it is still recommended that you consider ways in which others may be able to join the service, perhaps through an audio or video link. If this is not possible, a recording of the service might be appropriate.

To minimise risk of transmission, the following measures might be considered:

- only clergy and parents should be at the font while godparents and others should maintain physical distance.
- Where an infant is involved, a parent/guardian or members of the infant's regular or extended household should hold the infant including during the baptism itself.
- the minister to sanitize their hands before and after the Signing with the Cross on the candidate. In some churches, candidates are anointed with oil at the Signing with the Cross. This is an optional component of the service. If oil is used, it should be applied with an implement which can be thoroughly cleaned or disposed of
- Water can be poured over the candidate's forehead using an appropriate implement to pour the water such as a shell.
- Baptisms by immersion are difficult to conduct in a way which minimises risk of transmission
- Paper towels could be used to wipe the forehead of the baptized person and then disposed of
- It is suggested, no one should sign themselves with the baptismal water or be sprinkled with the water after the baptism.
- If a lighted candle is given, the presenting person should sanitize their hands before and after doing so.

However, in the light of your risk assessment, you may feel these suggestions can be relaxed depending on the physical layout of your building and if all adults are fully vaccinated.

Q. What about face coverings?

A. All persons aged over 11 gathering indoors should wear a face covering. This applies to all activities and services within the church or church hall.

There are exceptions to the requirement to wear a face covering for medical reasons, and it is permitted to remove the covering "to communicate with another person who has difficulty communicating (in relation to speech, language or otherwise)".

Further guidance for the public is available at:

<https://gov.wales/face-coverings-guidance-public>

and for premises managers at:

<https://gov.wales/face-coverings-guidance-measures-be-taken-employers-and-managers-premises>

Worship leaders need not wear a face covering where it is impractical to do so but they should consider a range of other mitigations to provide a barrier to transmission including increasing distancing, screens, visors and additional hygiene measures.

The public should be reminded of the requirement to wear a face covering and a standard sign/poster can be found on the Church in Wales website

Q. Test Trace and Protect?

A. The Welsh Government Test, Trace, Protect strategy sets out the approach to tackling coronavirus, testing people with symptoms in the community, tracing those who have come into close contact with people who have tested positive for coronavirus and protecting family, friends and our community by self-isolating.

All persons entering places of worship should be asked to complete a record of attendance which records their name, contact telephone number and date and time of visit but people cannot be required to do so. In the case of access to church halls or churches for permitted community activity and by general visitors, it is a requirement that attendees are recorded before being admitted. These records must be handled in accordance with GDPR to protect the individuals' privacy. These records should be kept for 21 days after the event and then destroyed.

A consent form can be found at [Test, Trace and Protect - The Church in Wales](#)

You should also provide a revised privacy notice and templates can be found at the same link. There is a version if you collect this information in advance online rather than 'at the door'. The 'online' privacy notice should be made available on your website, and the 'at the door' privacy notice should be available for inspection (perhaps on the table where people are completing forms and on the church noticeboard)

The new NHS COVID-19 app is intended to help in this process but is not mandatory. The system involves the creation of a site specific QR code which allows people visiting to use the App. See <https://gov.wales/nhs-covid-19-app-guidance-businesses-and-organisations> This system does not replace the physical recording of attendance set out above.

It is recommended that all public church premises (including churches, halls, offices etc) should display such a QR code.

Further Welsh Government guidance [can be found here](#) on how to maintain records and on compliance with GDPR.

Further information [about Test, Trace, Protect](#) is available here.

