

THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF THE CHURCH IN WALES
CORONAVIRUS – COVID19
GUIDANCE ON MUSIC AND THE PLAYING OF CHURCH ORGANS

Alert Level 2 moving to Alert Level 1

It is now possible to undertake organised choral singing as part of worship and other services. This note seeks to provide guidance on how this might be undertaken in a Covid-19 Safe manner.

Music and singing at services, as well as all other aspects of church opening, needs to be based on a written risk assessment which considers the likely routes of transmission of coronavirus and sets out reasonable mitigation measures. The key measures will be based on two-metre physical distancing, hygiene and cleaning.

Overall Position

From 7th June, Welsh Government has introduced the concept of ‘Regulated gatherings’ and these encompass a broad range of activities that can be attended by people of any age.

Regulated gatherings are those organised by a business, public body or a charitable, benevolent, educational or philanthropic institution, a club or political organisation, or the national governing body of a sport or other activity.

These gatherings also allow for larger scale events:

- regulated outdoor gatherings with a maximum of 4,000 people of any age (standing) and 10000 people of any age seated.
- organised indoor activities for up to 30 adults* (children under 11 and those working/volunteering at the activity do not need to be counted in the 30 limit)

The key point is that such gatherings are organised i.e planned and controlled by a recognisable body such as the PCC/MAC/LMAC. Such activities should be accompanied by a risk assessment to decide the right risk mitigation measures for the activity. Social distancing of two metres must be observed at all times for such activities.

At the Appendix 1, we have reproduced Welsh Government’s advice on music and singing contained within its Places of Worship Guidance. This should be carefully reviewed but below is a summary of the main issues.

Singing:

Congregational singing should not take place indoors given the increased risk of infection from these activities. Recorded music may be appropriate as an alternative to hymn singing. Music should not be at a volume that makes normal conversations difficult.

It is permissible for an individual to sing at a service indoors where it is an essential part of the service. Such a singer should sing behind a plexi-glass screen to protect guests. Physical distancing should be observed at all times. It is possible for more than one individual to sing over the course of the service, but this should not be more than one at a particular time

and there should be separate arrangements to protect from transmission e.g separate plexi-screens or cleaning of screens between each use.

It is possible for an organised outdoor gathering to include congregational singing but subject to a careful risk assessment and maintaining strict social distancing. Raised voices, including singing, appear to be a risk factor for the spread of Covid-19 so it is recommended that loud singing is avoided.

Choirs:

Choirs are permitted to rehearse indoors with up to 30 members under the indoor regulated gathering rules. Guidance on arrangements for rehearsal are available at: [Rehearsing, performing and taking part in the performing arts: guidance for a phased return \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

Capacity for outdoors regulated gatherings, including practice and rehearsal would need to be determined by a risk assessment which includes taking all reasonable measures to minimise the risk of exposure to and spread of coronavirus.

An organised group of musicians or singers can play a part in services but a specific risk assessment listing mitigating actions should be prepared. Organised or choir singing should be facilitated by establishing fixed groups of up to six people who can remain consistent and rehearse and perform together. There should be barriers to transmission between each group of six in rehearsal and performance. However, the guidance is complex and if you plan to start choral singing again you should carefully review the Welsh Government guidance at Appendix 1 and at <https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus-html> .

Musical Instruments:

Welsh Government guidance also states that you should not play musical instruments indoors that are physically blown into e.g wind or brass instruments. However, a pipe organ can be played as part of a worship, funeral or wedding service. The decision to use an organ (which requires a limited quantity of air to pass through the mechanism) should be based on a risk assessment and adherence with social distancing, hand hygiene and cleaning guidance. The use of alternative instruments such as an electronic keyboard or recorded music should still be considered.

A pipe organ may also be played for practice or maintenance purposes when the building is closed to the public.

NB Whilst the organ can be played, the congregation cannot sing with it. The organ can accompany an individual singer as described above.

Considerations for the assessment of risk relating to organs is attached at Appendix 2.

7 June 2021

Appendix I: Extract from Welsh Government Guidance: Guidance on the Reopening of Places of Worship

See: [Guidance on reopening places of worship: coronavirus | GOV.WALES](#)

Singing, chanting and the use of musical instruments

We recognise the importance of music, singing and chanting in worship, religious and belief ceremonies. However, there are significant risks associated with playing wind instruments and with singing or chanting at louder volumes. The risks are associated with the increased spread of droplets or aerosol which rise alongside volume. For this reason activities such as congregational singing, chanting, or shouting should be specifically avoided indoors.

The new variant of the virus poses a much greater risk of transmission and it is particularly important that places of worship take all the steps they can to avoid any risk of people being exposed to the virus or spreading the virus.

It is possible for an organised group or groups of musicians or singers to play a part in worship, but a specific risk assessment and mitigating actions should be put in place to ensure that the environment is as safe as possible to minimise the risk of transmission of coronavirus. Singing or playing in groups should be limited in line with the capacity of the space given appropriate physical distancing requirements.

If singing or the playing of music is to happen it should be accompanied by clear messages that those not in an organised group of musicians or singers should not join in. Organised singing can be facilitated by establishing fixed groups of up to six people who can remain consistent and rehearse and perform together, whilst generally maintaining physical distancing amongst themselves. These groups should prepare for participation in worship by ensuring they understand the importance of keeping volumes low. Only where physical distancing and other mitigations allow, a fixed team of six may perform with other fixed teams to create a larger group but action should be taken to create barriers to transmission between the fixed teams. This approach recognises that for organised groups interaction will be necessary outside the context of the act of worship (for example in rehearsal) and consistent teams of six will allow the whole team to isolate themselves should a positive Covid-19 test necessitate this. In this way, the mitigations that will still be necessary to reduce the chance of transmission to a congregation, will be more effective. If the physical distancing and other mitigations cannot be achieved in this circumstance, a larger group of this kind should not be formed. All performers should be instructed in the use of planned mitigating actions and reminded of the role of volume in increasing transmission risk both for themselves and in creating a risk that congregations will sing, shout or chant at volume alongside the performance.

The number of children aged under 11 who can gather outside the home is not limited in law. However, as young children can still transmit the virus, they should be encouraged to follow hand hygiene measures and keep close contact to a minimum wherever possible. Even with children it is safer to meet in smaller numbers, and to meet the same people regularly rather than a range of different people. Therefore the number of children under 11 in an organised groups should be kept as low as possible.

In some cases congregations might be small and could be accommodated as a single organised group. This is permissible but the same requirements for preparation to sing at low volumes and mitigating actions, including collective exclusion from performing if a positive test is received in the group. Where, all the participants in worship are part of an organised singing group the number should not ordinarily exceed six. It would not be appropriate for larger congregations to utilise the ability to add fixed groups together to circumvent the restrictions on gatherings. It is important that those responsible for places of worship ensure that they maintain a barrier to transmission by making sure that singers are well prepared to sing safely. No gathering of these groups of six should exceed 15 indoors except where the performers are all professional. All rehearsal and performance should be based on a risk assessment.

Specific risk assessments for organised groups who are singing or playing musical instruments should consider;

- Whether the activity is essential
- Physical distancing between individuals
- Physical distancing between fixed groups
- Physical distancing between performers and congregations
- The size and layout of the space
- The ventilation available to prevent the accumulation of aerosol.
- The use of screens or other barriers between individuals and fixed groups
- The positioning of singers and instrumentalists to favour back to back or side to side and reduce face to face performance.
- Reference should be made to the [guidance on performing arts](#), which deals with safe performance for singers, musicians and other performers.

Wind instruments should not be played indoors. The decision whether to play an organ that requires air to be pushed through the mechanism should be based on a specific risk assessment and adherence with hand hygiene and [cleaning guidance](#) and physical distancing, for example from the remainder of the congregation and avoiding use of a registrant. It is advised that you use alternative instruments such as a piano, electronic instruments or recordings.

This guidance relates to musicians playing as part of worship. Other circumstances, such as concerts given to the public should follow the [guidance made available to the performing arts sector](#).

Music should not be played at levels that make normal conversations difficult. This is particularly important before the start or at the end of any service, where people may need to ask members of staff or others helping at the place of worship questions. This is because raised voices or shouting significantly increase the risk of transmission through aerosol and droplets, and even more so with the increased risks of transmission through the new variant. Where a band or recorded music is playing it is advisable to stress to those in attendance the importance of avoiding singing and organisers should consider the impact of the volume or sustained length of music on the likelihood that people will converse with raised voices.

Congregational singing should not occur indoors. If appropriate worshippers can read hymns, songs, prayers or other texts in a lowered voice. Spoken responses should also be made quietly.

Ringling of bells, or similar, may take place. The risk assessment should consider the number of people attending to peal the bells; how they will enter and leave the building, room or bell tower; how they will maintain 2 meter distance between individual bell ringers and if this is not possible what other mitigations will be put in place; the protocols for hand hygiene while pealing the bells and how they will maintain physical distancing between other members of the congregation.

Appendix 2: Risk Assessment considerations for Organs

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| Physical Distancing | <p>A clear 2-metre distancing should be maintained between the organist and any other person. This might be demarked by floor tape and signage where the organ is accessible to service attendees. Signage on organ loft entrances should be considered. The organist should play alone i.e no page-turner or registrant should be present (unless a member of the organist's household)</p> <p>It is advised that 2 metre distancing should be maintained between people and the organ itself. Whilst air movement from organs is minimal, this is safe precaution especially for certain instruments like pedal-powered harmoniums.</p> <p>Consider access routes to and from the organ or organ loft.</p> |
| Hygiene | <p>As for all other attendees at the church, sanitiser should be available at entry and exit points. It is advised to provide sanitiser specifically for the organist near to the organ or loft.</p> <p>Face coverings should be worn by all person aged over 11 gathering inside the building.</p> <p>It is sensible to ensure a break of 72 hours between different organists using the instrument if rigorous surface cleaning cannot be achieved between users. Prevent anyone else from touching the instrument during such a break too.</p> <p>Music scores, books and sheets no scores to be left in situ following occupancy or shared unless a 72-hour break between use can be guaranteed. Hand sanitize before and after use.</p> |
| Cleaning | <p>The touched surfaces of the organ should be cleaned before and after use. Cleaning wipes can be used for this and bagged and disposed of carefully after use.</p> <p>Keyboards and stops are obvious points of contact but also consider handles, doors, handrails, organ seat and other areas around the organ which will be touched.</p> <p>Cleaning of the organ surfaces should sit alongside the Covid-19 cleaning regime of the wider church.</p> |