

The Representative Body of the Church in Wales
Coronavirus - Covid-19: Keeping People Safe
A Self-Assessment Toolkit for opening Churches

Edition 4: Opening for private prayer and communal worship during move from alert level 4 to alert level 3

26 April 2021

Introduction

This guidance has been produced to help those responsible for managing churches assess their buildings and activities and develop a risk assessment to manage the risks posed by Coronavirus Covid-19.

Welsh Government's approach to controlling Coronavirus has developed during 2021. There is a system of Alert levels that describe the broad conditions that would apply to various levels of Coronavirus risk. These can be viewed at <https://gov.wales/covid-19-alert-levels> . On April 26th, the Alert Level remains at 4 but with a clear programme to move to Alert Level 3.

Places of worship can open for worship, private prayer, weddings, funerals and baptisms and this guidance sets out how local churches can consider how to do so safely. Despite an improving picture of the control of the virus and the roll-out of the vaccination programme, it remains vital that local churches take the greatest possible care in assessing risks and setting up risk mitigation measures. The key Welsh Government Guidance documents are available at:

[Current restrictions: frequently asked questions | GOV.WALES](#)

with more detailed information for places of worship at:

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

Buildings will be able to open for limited community use from 3 May. Welsh Government guidance is available at:

[Safe use of multi-purpose community centres \(COVID-19\) | GOV.WALES](#)

It should be noted that the community centres guidance might be applicable to places of worship from which community activity is undertaken and vice versa.

By law, those responsible for places of worship (and community centres) are required to take all reasonable measures to ensure that a 2-metre distance is maintained between persons on the premises. Physical distancing is the most fundamental principle in re-opening any church building. Other risk management measures relate to hygiene (hand washing, sanitising, personal protective equipment) and premises and equipment cleaning though the need for these will vary depending on the activity being undertaken.

PART I of this guide is a checklist to help you to consider your situation and the appropriate steps to manage the risks presented by Covid-19. Take time to work through each of the questions, using the notes provided to help you answer them.

PART 2 is a risk assessment template to enable you to record your proposed actions from the checklist. This should be approved by your Archdeacon (or other nominated person) and shared with your team so all are aware of the arrangements.

Please Note: This guidance is to assist local churches with re-opening their building and reflects but does not substitute, Welsh Government legislation and guidance.

PART I: CHECKLIST

Opening for private prayer and communal worship during move from alert level 4 to alert level 3

During this phase of transition from Alert Level 4, there is a legal right for churches to be opened to enable individuals or households to attend places of worship for:

- Private prayer
- Communal worship including led prayers, devotions or meditations
- Holy Communion subject to appropriate risk mitigation measures (see checklist below)
- Baptisms subject to appropriate risk mitigation measures (see checklist below)
- Funeral and marriage services (for invited guests only) can be undertaken and separate guidance on this is available at on the Church in Wales website

It should be noted that buildings it will be permissible for buildings to opne for limited community use from the 3 May. Further guidance is available on the Church in Wales website.

The following gives a list of key steps to consider in opening your building. The local trustee body (PCC, MAC, LMAC) responsible for each place of worship has a legal responsibility to do all that it reasonably practicable to prevent people from coming to harm from Covid-19 (or any other hazard).

SECTION I: PREPARATIONS

NB Clergy, contractors and authorised volunteers of the PCC/MAC/LMAC are permitted by law to enter the building to make preparations for re-opening.

	Question	Notes
I.	Do you need to open the church at the current time?	You can now consider opening your church or church hall for worship, but you are not obliged to do so. You should only do so when you consider it is safe to do so and alternative to in person worship are not appropriate. Your place of worship should remain closed if you are not satisfied that you are able to adhere to the requirements to maintain social distancing regulations etc. The risk control measures you will need to consider to

		<p>open your building are substantial and there may be other churches (including other denominations) in your area better able to do this. You need to carefully consider clergy attending services at multiple churches and seek to minimise this where possible. You should discuss the principle of opening with your Archdeacon at an early stage as they will need to approve your risk assessment and opening arrangements. You will need to show a comprehensive approach to managing risks.</p>
2.	<p>What opening arrangements will you adopt?</p>	<p>You need to decide when you will open the building. You should define which hours and days each week that the building will be open for private prayer and/or when services will take place. This will be closely linked to your ability to implement the risk control measures required. Do not be over-ambitious as it is vital that risk control measures are robust and workable. Remember that short hours will increase foot fall per hour, but long hours will require more volunteers. Advertising needs to be carefully considered so that you don't create a demand you cannot manage. Services should be concluded in the shortest reasonable time and participants should be encouraged to return home promptly. Fellowship e.g post service coffee is not permitted</p>
3.	<p>Are there sufficient and suitable people to open the church safely?</p>	<p>The single most important risk control measure is maintaining a 2-metre physical distance between persons. You need to consider how you will ensure that is achieved. Whilst this will vary depending on the circumstances of each church, generally, the best way of ensuring this is to have stewards present to monitor and remind people. They can also provide a warm, Christian welcome.</p> <p>It will be necessary for people to open/close the building, direct people and undertake cleaning etc. Lone working should normally be avoided. The risks for any lone workers should be assessed and mitigated.</p> <p>You will need to check that none of your team are in a vulnerable group or are self-isolating. Please note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No one should feel obligated to return to a place of worship, even if they have a volunteering role that they would normally fulfil.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PCCs/MACs should assess the vulnerability of volunteers/staff to Covid-19 using the Government’s advice at: Covid 19 Extremely Vulnerable People and Coronavirus (COVID-19) social distancing guidance for everyone in Wales GOV.WALES • Those in the Extremely Vulnerable Group are advised not to consider employment or volunteering outside their homes. • Those in other ‘at-risk’ groups should discuss their situation with the MAC to decide the type of work or voluntary activity they are able to perform. If the vulnerable person (e.g someone over 70) feels they are in good health and would wish to volunteer, it is reasonable to accept their service but careful thought should be given to appropriate duties, PPE etc. These might include roles that have maximum social distance or minimal direct contact with people. <p>The Government has provided a workforce assessment tool which will help you to consider the vulnerability of staff and volunteers. It is available at: https://gov.wales/covid-19-workforce-risk-assessment-tool Click on Other Workplace Settings.</p> <p>You should put in place arrangements to confirm that each person involved in the opening of the church confirms they are (a) symptom free and (b) not subject to UK or Welsh Government advice to self-isolate.</p> <p>It is vital that all your team are fully trained and briefed on your management arrangements. Working through this checklist with them and sharing the risk assessment will be key.</p>
4.	Have you reviewed Test, Trace and Protect	<p>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.</p> <p>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</p>

		<p>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.</p> <p>A consent form can be found at Test, Trace and Protect - The Church in Wales</p> <p>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)</p> <p>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. NHS COVID-19 app: guidance for businesses and organisations GOV.WALES This system does not replace the physical recording of attendance set out above.</p> <p>It is recommended that all public church premises (including churches, halls, offices etc) should display such a QR code.</p> <p>Further Welsh Government guidance can be found here on how to maintain records and on compliance with GDPR.</p> <p>Further information is available here: Test, trace, protect: coronavirus Sub-topic GOV.WALES</p>
5.	Should we consider lateral flow testing?	<p>Welsh Government is encouraging all those who cannot work from home to access lateral flow self-test kits as they are rolled out across Wales. See Get rapid lateral flow COVID-19 tests if you do not have symptoms GOV.WALES</p>

6.	Have you aired the building?	If the building hasn't been visited often it is likely to be stuffy and musty. Arrange to open doors, vents etc and give the building a thorough airing. Ventilation and changing the air are key parts of Coronavirus risk management in opening your church.
7.	Have you checked for general cleanliness or other maintenance issues?	The building may have built up dust and other debris including animal waste. Whilst clearly the risk of Covid-19 virus being on surfaces is very remote because the building has been closed, you should arrange for a thorough clean of surfaces etc. Check the grounds are tidy and safe.
8.	Have you checked water systems?	These must be thoroughly flushed through before use to reduce the risk of legionella. See Legionella-risks-during-coronavirus-outbreak.htm
9.	Have you checked electrical and heating systems?	These should be switched on and checked. If feasible, it would be a good time to get a suitably qualified contractor to undertake annual checks and servicing.
10.	Have you a stoup or font?	These should be emptied of water. Specific guidance on Baptisms is set out below
11.	Have you checked your fire risk assessment?	Review your fire procedures in the light of your proposed opening. Make sure fire extinguishers are serviced and in date. There is useful guidance at Church: Fire Risk Assessment Risk Management Ecclesiastical
12.	How many people can attend a service/visit the church?	The numbers of people attending a service will depend on the capacity of your building to accommodate people whilst maintaining two- metre distancing. There is no legal limit on numbers, but numbers must be controlled to ensure two-metre distancing is maintained.
13.	What do we do about heating and ventilation?	<p>Ensuring good ventilation of your building before, during and after use are important risk control measures. Where practicable, non-fire doors and windows should be opened to improve ventilation.</p> <p>Heating can generally be used but alongside ventilation so it might be appropriate to ask worshippers to dress appropriately. Types of heating that present a Covid-19 risk are those that take air from one occupied space in a building and move it into another occupied space, i.e. from one room to another. If your heating or ventilation system has this feature it must be turned off so that air is not moved from one space to another. The system can be used with the feature turned off. It is extremely unlikely that a traditional church building will have such a system, but if in doubt ask the company that services your heating. They will know what, if any, adaptation is needed to operate in a Covid-secure way.</p>

14.	Do you intend celebrating Holy Communion?	Holy Communion should be in one kind only (bread). Those giving and receiving should wash/sanitise their hands before and after exchange and avoid contact between the parties where possible. The person administering the bread should release it into the hand only in such a way as to avoid any contact or wear gloves. If contact occurs, hand cleansing should be undertaken immediately. Detailed guidance on administering Holy Communion is available on the Church in Wales website.
15.	Do you anticipate conducting Baptisms?	<p>Government guidance confirms that only small volumes of water should be used and that full immersion should be avoided. Where practical others present should move out of range of any potential splashing and there should be no general sprinkling of water. Physical distancing should be observed where possible.</p> <p>Where an infant is involved, a parent/guardian or members of the infant's regular or extended household should hold the infant. All individuals involved should thoroughly wash their hands before and after the baptism.</p> <p>Detailed guidance is available on the Church in Wales website</p>
16.	Outdoor Activities including worship	From the 26 th April, it is possible for up to 30 people to gather to attend organised activities outdoors. This includes worship. The key point is that such activities 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. Organised activity includes a formal choir but not general congregational singing. Welsh Government guidance should be consulted for specific limitations on permitted activities.
17.	Bellringing	Bell ringing is permissible, but bell ringers should observe two-metre physical distancing and hygiene and cleaning regimes should be implemented. Careful consideration of how bell ringers will access the building suitably distanced from other attendees needs consideration e.g different entry points or staggered arrival times. Bellringing arrangements should comply with guidance available from the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers at https://ccbr.org.uk/coronavirus/

SECTION 2: PHYSICAL DISTANCING

	Question	Notes
1.	How will you keep people apart when they enter/exit the building?	<p>You must make every reasonable effort to encourage strict adherence with physical distancing from the moment people arrive on church grounds including car parks.</p> <p>Clearly, you cannot completely prevent people from deciding to get closer than 2 metres apart but you must use reasonable endeavours to do so. Reasonable measures might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear signage on arrival into the grounds and around the church that two-metre distancing must be maintained. A standard template sign is available from the Church in Wales website. • Signage reminding people who are symptomatic or have a member of their household who is symptomatic, to stay at home. A standard template sign is available from https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/publications/administration-and-business/COVID-19 on the Church in Wales website. • The entrance/porch and exit doors are likely to be ‘pinch’ points. Stewards should be stationed at the entrance/exit to encourage compliance particularly where numbers of people are likely to be more than 10. • Can you use different doors to enter and exit? Consider access for disabled people alongside this. • Direct people to use different paths through the churchyard for entry and exit (if reasonably safe and accessible)
2.	How will people keep apart when they move around the building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A one-way system around the church is a good way to help maintain distancing • Use floor tape or simple barriers to keep people apart where they may be passing each other • Create waiting areas (with floor tape) where people can stand to wait whilst others pass • Restrict access to smaller or unused areas of the church so you don’t create bottle-necks or dead-ends

3.	How will you seat people to maintain 2 metre distancing?	<p>This is likely to be a challenging area for many churches.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 metre distancing is necessary in all directions around someone. • For a church with pews, this could mean one person in every three or so rows. You will need to carefully measure your church's layout to plan where people sit and the numbers of people your church can hold accordingly. • It is worth stating the maximum seating capacity on a sign at the entrance to a church to remind everybody. Entrance stewards should keep count (use a clicker) of how many people enter/exit the building. • Households can, of course, sit together. A pew or row of seats filled by a household may throw out your calculations over distance to other seat places. It could be worth designating an area of the church or certain pews for 'household' seating • Seating positions will need to be clearly marked. You could place signs on pews, use labels or perhaps space hassocks on pews to mark where not to sit • If you have moveable chairs, it will be easier to plan positioning of seats to maintain distancing. Consideration needs to be given if a household wishes to sit together and making sure seats don't get moved as they are used. • In placing seats or marking pew seat positions, you will need to think about how people will move to and from the seat.
4.	Consider carefully how people will leave the building	<p>Pay particular attention to arrangements for people to leave your building after services. The end of a service is a particular time when social distancing can be breached. Generally, controlled exit row-by-row is advised. Clergy should generally avoid standing by entrances or exits to meet and greet people as this can create bottlenecks and bunching.</p>

SECTION 3: HYGIENE

	Question	Notes
1	Can you provide hand sanitiser/washing facilities?	<p>It is vital that all people entering and leaving the building should wash/sanitise their hands.</p> <p>Provide hand sanitiser stations for all visitors. https://www.parishbuying.org.uk/index.php/categories/covid-19-supplies is one possible supplier.</p> <p>Toilets are a particular challenge and will need detailed planning. WG guidance is that toilets can be opened providing that physical distancing and hand hygiene guidance is followed. These areas should be cleaned regularly using normal cleaning products with particular attention to areas that are frequently touched such as door handles and taps. Suitable handwashing facilities should be available including running water and liquid soap. Drying should be by paper towels or hand dryers (not communal towels). Paper towels should be in a dispenser and disposed of carefully. Specific guidance is available at: https://gov.wales/providing-safer-toilets-public-use-coronavirus-html</p> <p>Clear signage instructing people to sanitise their hands-on entry and exit should be erected.</p>
3.	What about Face Coverings?	<p>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.</p> <p>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: Face coverings: guidance for public GOV.WALES</p> <p>and for premises managers at:</p>

		<p>Face coverings: guidance on measures to be taken by employers and managers of premises GOV.WALES</p> <p>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.</p> <p>All attendees at a wedding must wear face coverings but it is reasonable for the couple themselves to remove their coverings for a kiss, for taking vows, walking down the aisle and taking photos indoors as long as other measures are in place to protect people attending the ceremony from the risk of contracting coronavirus, for example, guests staying 2m away from the couple at all times.</p> <p>The public should be reminded of the requirement to wear a face covering and a standard sign can be found on the Church in Wales website.</p>
2.	What other personal protective equipment will you provide?	<p>It is recommended that stewards be provided with disposable gloves (non latex) and that they have access to sanitiser too. Gloves should be bagged at the end of each session and disposed of with waste collections. A flip-top pedal bin with liners is useful.</p> <p>PPE for cleaners is set out in the cleaning section below</p>
3.	Do you have votive candles?	<p>This is clearly a potential area of shared contact so should not be available at this time. Not only are they a point of shared contact and potential gathering but alcohol-based gels and naked flames do not mix.</p>
4.	Do you have devotional or similar communally handled objects?	<p>Individuals should be prevented from making contact with such objects. Use barriers and signage.</p>
5.	Do you have displays, play or other equipment etc that might involve contact?	<p>These should be removed or placed out of reach. The church can only be open for prayer so remove the temptation for other activities. Consider visitor books, shared pens, prayer cards, guides etc – these can all be handled by multiple people.</p>
6.	How will you provide prayer books/service sheets?	<p>Books, reusable or communal resources should be removed from use. It is recommended these are single-use sheets of paper located after the hand sanitising area. If you have</p>

		<p>projection facilities, this could be a good alternative. People might be encouraged to bring their own service books available from: https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/publications/order-books-online/ You might consider lending service books to regular attendees so they can bring their own each time.</p>
7.	What about food and drink?	No food or drink should be made available during or after the service (except in relation to holy communion).
8.	Do you intend seeking donations from visitors?	<p>Cash giving is discouraged at this time. Use online giving (Gift Direct) see: Online Giving by Gift Direct - The Church in Wales where possible.</p> <p>Consider contactless card readers. See Parish Buying - Giving & Payments</p> <p>If cash payments are made, they should be handled wearing gloves and regular cleaning and hygiene maintained.</p>
9.	Ventilation?	It is now clear that ‘changing the air’ is a key risk mitigation measure. The virus can hang in the air as an aerosol and ventilating a building reduces this risk. Where practicable, non-fire doors and windows should be opened to improve ventilation.
10.	What about music?	<p>Singing: Congregational singing should not take place 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.</p> <p>It is permissible for an individual to sing at a service 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.</p>

		<p>Gathering to sing outdoors no longer permissible under Alert level 4 but there are special arrangements for the Christmas period see Singing over the festive period GOV.WALES</p> <p>Choirs: It is possible for an organised group of musicians or singers to 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 Guidance on reopening places of worship: coronavirus [HTML] GOV.WALES</p> <p>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. <u>However, a pipe organ can be played as part of a worship, funeral or wedding service.</u> 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.</p> <p>A pipe organ may also be played for practice or maintenance purposes when the building is closed to the public.</p> <p>NB Whilst the organ can be played, the congregation cannot sing with it. The organ can accompany an individual singer as described above.</p> <p>Specific Guidance on Music and Organs is available on the Church in Wales website.</p>
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SECTION 4: CLEANING

Part	Question	Notes
1.	What cleaning regime should you adopt?	<p>Cleaning helps minimise the spread of Coronavirus Covid-19 so frequent cleaning of all surfaces especially those most frequently touched is important.</p> <p>Government guidance is available at COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings outside the home - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p> <p>The guidance describes the cleaning required, the appropriate disposal of materials, the cleaning of equipment and hard surfaces and the PPE that should be worn.</p> <p>Cleaning should take place after each occasion the church is opened. Focus should be on hard surfaces where people might make contact particularly door handles. Soft furnishings should be minimised where possible as these are more challenging to clean.</p>
2.	Who undertakes your cleaning?	<p>This is likely to be a rota of volunteers. You will need to check that none of your team are in a vulnerable group or are self-isolating. This might be an opportunity to put a call-out in your community for new volunteers to help.</p>
3.	What PPE will you provide for cleaners?	<p>Follow the Government guidance at COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings outside the home - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p> <p>The minimum PPE requirement is disposable gloves and an apron but the guidance should be carefully considered especially where there may be a greater risk of contamination. Face coverings should be worn when people are indoors.</p>
4.	What cleaning materials will you use?	<p>Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned.</p> <p>A possible supplier is:</p> <p>https://www.parishbuying.org.uk/index.php/categories/covid-19-supplies</p>

		<p>Welsh Government recommend the following guidance on the cleaning of historic surfaces and materials at:</p> <p>COVID-19: Cleaning and Disinfecting Historic Surfaces Historic England</p>
5.	<p>What if a confirmed Covid-19 case has visited?</p>	<p>The building should be closed for at least 72 hours after which the building should be thoroughly cleaned in accordance with government guidance. See</p> <p>COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings outside the home - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)</p> <p>Promote a clear point of contact for anyone who develops symptoms after a visit to the church.</p>

PART 2: RISK ASSESSMENT TEMPLATE

Having worked through the checklist, complete the risk assessment proforma below. This should be approved and dated by an authorised representative of the PCC/MAC/LMAC. The completed form should be approved by your Archdeacon.

Name of Church:	Address:		Date:	
Area of Focus	Control Measure <i>These are the main themes from the checklist and guidance. They may not apply in each case.</i>	Detailed arrangements <i>Set out below the detailed arrangements you will implement under each control measure. The boxes will expand as you complete them.</i>	Action by?	Completed
PREPARATIONS	Do you need to open at this time? Defined Opening Times Proposed services and times			
	Staffing arrangements			
	Airing and Cleaning			
	Check services e.g water, electrical, heating systems			
	Fire Risk Assessment			
	Heating and Ventilation			
PHYSICAL DISTANCING	Staffing arrangements incl PPE			
	Signage			
	Entry and Exits			
	One-way system			
	Taped/barriered routes			

	Seating arrangements			
	Restricted areas			
HYGIENE	Hand washing sanitising			
	Face coverings			
	Prayer books and worship sheets			
	Shared objects			
	Music			
CLEANING	Cleaning team			
	PPE			
	Cleaning regime			
SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES	Holy Communion			
	Baptisms			

Compiled By:	Approved by: Incumbent/Area Dean: Archdeacon:	Date:
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