

THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF THE CHURCH IN WALES

CORONAVIRUS – COVID19

GUIDANCE ON OPENING CHURCHES FOR VISITORS

The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 2) (Wales) Regulations 2020 permit visitor attractions, museums, galleries to be open to the public¹. Places of Worship can, therefore, be legally open for visitors outside of private prayer, worship and occasional offices. There is specific guidance for opening for worship and occasional offices on the Church in Wales website, but this guidance focuses on opening churches to permit general visitors to the church.

Such opening must be conducted after the preparation of written risk assessment setting out the precautions that will be put in place to prevent the spread of Coronavirus. This risk assessment should be approved by your Archdeacon.

The principles of these are the same as for opening churches or any other building: maintaining two-metre physical distancing between people, ensuring regular hand washing/sanitizing and regular cleaning of premises especially surfaces. However, opening for visitors presents particular challenges as numbers of attendees are difficult to predict and may come from a wide geographical area. You are obliged by law to take all reasonable precautions to prevent the spread of coronavirus as such you need to be able to demonstrate that you have adequate systems in place. Government guidance is key to deciding what to do in each circumstance. Reasonable precautions are explained in detail at <https://gov.wales/taking-all-reasonable-measures-minimise-risk-exposure-coronavirus-workplaces-and-premises-open>

Welsh Government has provided detailed guidance for re-opening visitor activities at: <https://gov.wales/culture-and-heritage-destinations-and-venues-guidance-phased-return.html#section-45352>

NB It should be noted that the current version of this guidance references places of worship in the context of former buildings used for visitor opening. However, we believe the guidance is relevant to all places of worship who seek to open to visitors and should be followed.

General Considerations

There is no obligation to re-open for visitors. Only do so where, following a careful risk assessment, you have the capacity to do so safely and where it is worthwhile to your mission.

Your opening arrangements must be planned around the capacity of your building to hold people at safe 2-metre distancing and your organisational capacity to ensure that distancing and other precautions are maintained.

¹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-08/the-health-protection-coronavirus-restrictions-no.2-wales-regulations-2020-as-amended.pdf>

The general guidance for opening churches for worship etc ([Link to Amber Guidance](#)) is a useful starting point to consider the key issues involved in opening your church.

Our general advice is that if you are to open for visitors, it should only be done where stewards can be on duty to manage access and encourage correct behaviour. Simply allowing people to enter a building with no one in attendance does not demonstrate a reasonable approach to preventing the spread of Coronavirus (except for open air sites or places where you can show visitor numbers on any one day would be very small, say, 10 people).

You should carefully review the Track Trace and Protect guidance referenced in the Welsh Government guidance. NB Regulation 12 of the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No 2) (Wales) Regulations 2020 places a duty to collect contact information from each person at the premises or, in relation to persons from the same household, from one of them, and retaining it for 21 days for the purpose of providing it to the Welsh Ministers or to a public health officer upon either's request. A consent form and privacy notice can be found on the Church in Wales website.

Where you intend opening on a regular basis for visitors, or visitors forms a significant part of your mission and income, it would be worth considering registration for the Good to Go scheme which gives you an on line risk assessment tool and certificate to re-assure visitors you have taken sensible precautions. See

<https://goodtogo.visitbritain.com/your-business-good-to-go-wales>

Detailed Considerations

1. *Review the Guidance:* Take time to work through the specific guidance for heritage attractions from Welsh Government at <https://gov.wales/culture-and-heritage-destinations-and-venues-guidance-phased-return-html#section-45352>
2. *Prepare:* Make sure the building is ready for use including maintenance checks, electrical and heating checks, check water systems (e.g legionnaires disease measures). The grounds and access routes should be tidy and safe
3. *Survey and measure:* Survey the building to think about how its layout would impact on maintaining 2-metre distancing. Consider walkways and access routes in and around the building. You need to calculate the safe capacity for visitors to move around the building, inspect different elements and to sit and pause. It is difficult to predict where people might go around your building so a one-way system may be the most effective approach.
4. *Signage:* Ensure signage is in place to remind people of requirements. See <https://gov.wales/safety-and-physical-distancing-signs-employers-coronavirus> and https://churcheinwales.contentfiles.net/media/documents/C19_Safety_posters_v2_-_English.pdf
5. *Plan your cleaning regime:* The general requirement is that areas of buildings that are used are cleaned before and after use. The section in the Welsh Government guidance headed Cleaning and Hygiene Arrangements is very useful in helping you think about your cleaning regime. You should review your cleaning arrangements to ensure that an appropriate cleaning regime is reliably implemented.

6. *Hygiene*: You should ensure sanitizer/hand washing facilities are available.
7. *Face Coverings*: From September 14 2020, it is a requirement that all persons aged over 11 (including ministers) gathering indoors should wear a face covering. This applies to all activities and services within the church including visitor opening.

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>

The public should be reminded of the requirement to wear a face covering and a standard sign can be found [HERE](#)

8. *Toilets*: 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>
9. *Record your arrangements (Risk Assessment)*: You must complete a risk assessment before re-opening. This should set out the precautions and mitigation measures you will put in place. This should then be shared with users/activity organisers. You should share this Risk Assessment with your Archdeacon too. A template risk assessment document is attached.

Covid-19 Risk Assessment Proforma – Visitor Opening				
Name of Church Hall:	Address:			Date:
Area of Focus	Control Measure <i>These are the main themes to consider in opening your hall. They may not apply in each case.</i>	Detailed arrangements <i>Set out below the detailed arrangements you will implement under each control measure.</i>	Action by?	Completed
PREPARATIONS	Maintenance Checks			
	Check services e.g water, electrical, heating systems			
	Access Routes			
	Car Parks			
	Airing and Cleaning			
	Review Fire Risk Assessment			
PHYSICAL DISTANCING	Building capacity calculations			
	Entry and Exit routes including car parks			
	Signage			
	One-way systems			
	Taped/barriered routes			

	Seating arrangements			
	Restricted areas			
	Group tours			
HYGIENE	Hand washing sanitising			
	Toilet arrangements			
CLEANING	Cleaning regime			
	PPE			
	Cleaning team details			
OTHER	Publicity arrangements			
	Liaison/communication with staff and volunteers			
	Test, Trace and Protect			