

THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF THE CHURCH IN WALES
CORONAVIRUS – COVID19
GUIDANCE ON RE-OPENING OF CHURCH HALLS AND COMMUNITY CENTRES

Alert Level I

Introduction

This guidance outlines the general approach to opening buildings for community use at this time. Typically, within the Church in Wales, such buildings are Church Halls but can include multi-purpose churches too.

Details of what Alert Level I means in Wales can be found at:

[Current restrictions | Sub-topic | GOV.WALES](#)

Permitted Activities

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. These activities include activities that were previously referred to as organised activities and allow for larger scale events.

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.

Places of worship and buildings used for community activities, such as church halls, can now be open. Of relevance to local churches, the following activities are now permitted:

- regulated outdoor gatherings with no limit on numbers
- organised indoor activities for up to 1,000 seated or 200 standing (children under 11 and those working/volunteering at the activity do not need to be counted in the limit)
- opening to visitors but with access carefully planned and controlled to maintain social distancing
- indoor supervised activities for children including parties. Welsh Government has published guidance on how children’s parties can be permitted in community buildings such as halls and churches. Please see:

[Guidance on children and young people’s parties: coronavirus | GOV.WALES](#)

- wedding receptions and funeral wakes

NB the maximum number who can actually attend an organised event will be limited to the safe capacity of the building to maintain social distance between persons, households or bubbles.

Use for Music Rehearsals

Choirs and bands are permitted to rehearse indoors.

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](#)

Food and Drink

It is possible to serve food and drink in relation to an organised event but people should be seated in groups of six or by household.

If your parish operates a community café or similar these can be open at this time but there is separate guidance from Welsh Government for hospitality venues on how to do this safely. In summary, such venues are required to take all reasonable measures to minimise the risk of exposure to coronavirus. For example:

- customers will be encouraged to pre-book with details of all members of the group.
- contact details will be required for contact tracing purposes
- entry to the premises will be controlled
- licenced premises should provide table service only
- all food and drink should be consumed at tables
- physical distancing measures will be applied, such as tables being spaced out
- face coverings must be worn other than when seated to eat or drink

When utilising outdoor spaces, hospitality venues are required to ensure that the use of physical coverings, awnings, gazebos, marquees and similar structures are implemented in a way that is aligned with current public health advice. Generally, this means that structures with a roof or ceiling must be open-sided (at least 3 sides or more than 51% open).

Considerations for the Re-opening of Church Halls and other buildings for community activity

It is strongly recommended that any decision to re-open a hall and to permit community activities (either directly organised or by hire to third parties), should be clearly minuted by the PCC/MAC, with an explanation of the reasoning adopted in coming to that decision in case questions are raised at a later date.

In opening the hall, you are obliged by law to take all reasonable precautions to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

The operation of the hall, and any activities within it must comply with Covid-19 secure guidelines. 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.

You should carefully review the Track Trace and Protect guidance referenced in the Welsh Government guidance. NB The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations place a duty on those responsible for the community centre 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.

The 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.

Church Halls are facilities provided by a MAC/PCC as building manager in which activities are organised. Some of these activities are operated directly by the MAC/PCC whilst others are operated by a third party (a user/hirer).

Considerations for the MAC/PCC as Building Manager

As the building manager, the MAC/PCC has an overall duty to make sure the building is used in such a way as to prevent the spread of coronavirus. This means you should take reasonable steps to ensure activity organisers plan their activities appropriately. It is not sufficient to 'leave it to the user'. You should:

1. *Review the Guidance:* Take time to work through the guidance from Welsh Government at [Safe use of multi-purpose community centres \(COVID-19\) | GOV.WALES](#)
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 different activities whilst maintaining 2-metre distancing between persons or households. With this information, you can discuss detailed use arrangements with each user.
4. *Signage*: Ensure signage is in place to remind people of requirements. See [Safety and physical distancing signs for employers: coronavirus | GOV.WALES](#)
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 Infection Control 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*: Whilst activity organisers are likely to include this in their own precautions, you should ensure sanitizer/hand washing facilities are available.
7. *Face Coverings*: It is a requirement that all persons aged over 11 gathering indoors should wear a face covering. This applies to all activities and services within the building.

Further guidance for the public is available at:

[Face coverings: guidance for public | GOV.WALES](#)

and for premises managers at:

[Face coverings: guidance on measures to be taken by employers and managers of premises | GOV.WALES](#)

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.

8. *Ventilation and Heating*: 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.

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. 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.

9. *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 [Providing safer toilets for public use: coronavirus \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

10. *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.
11. *Liaise with Activity Organisers:* Make contact with your activity organisers to start discussing appropriate risk mitigation measures. You should check carefully that their activity is permissible under the latest regulations. They should provide you with a risk assessment for their activities within your building. This should be based on any government guidance for the safe operation of their particular activity. You should carefully study this to make sure that it dovetails with your own arrangements. Make sure they understand your arrangements for Track, Trace and Protect.

A major part of managing physical distancing, so as not to exceed the safe capacity of your hall, is to control access carefully. Generally, it should be for activity organisers to manage this as they are inviting people to attend. This will be easiest for pre-booked attendees. If attendees can simply 'turn up', the activity organiser will need to consider stewarding arrangements.

If the PCC/MAC is not satisfied that proper arrangements can be put in place for safe operation, the activity should not be permitted. There may be sense in re-opening for a limited range of activities as a first stage. Groups that make use of the hall on a very regular basis e.g nurseries, would be a good place to start. It makes sense to work with trusted users as you develop your procedures.

Considerations for MAC/PCC when directly organising an activity in the hall

1. *Permissible activity:* You should check carefully that the activity is permissible under the latest regulations.
2. *Consider the activities you wish to undertake:* The way these are undertaken will need to change to ensure appropriate precautions. Be creative to ensure activities can be undertaken safely but also enjoyably. Don't forget that some elements of your activity might be most safely conducted on-line rather than in person.
3. *Risk Assessment:* Prepare a written risk assessment setting out how you will operate the activity to comply with government guidance. The focus should be on physical distancing, hygiene and cleaning arrangements. The risk assessment template can be easily adapted for this purpose. You should prepare a risk assessment for each separate activity. This should be discussed and shared with all involved with running the activity.
4. *Physical Distancing Issues:* It may be that essential activity will require some breaching of the two-metre distancing. You will need to consider carefully how this will be

safely managed. This might include rigorous hand washing regimes before and after such a breach.

17th July 2021

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			
	Ventilation and Heating			
	Review Fire Risk Assessment			
PHYSICAL DISTANCING	Building capacity calculations for different types of activity (subject to limit of 15 people)			
	Signage			
	Entry and Exit routes including car parks			

	One-way systems			
	Taped/barriered routes			
	Seating arrangements			
	Restricted areas			
HYGIENE	Hand washing sanitising			
	Toilet arrangements			
CLEANING	Cleaning regime			
	PPE			
	Cleaning team details			
OTHER	Liaison/communication with activity organisers			
	Liaison/communication with staff and volunteers			