# Risk Assessment for Opening Church Buildings to the Public

**Version Control**

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| Issue Date | Version Number | Issued by |
| 22nd May 2020 | 1 | The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group |
| 8th June 2020 | 2 | The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group |
| 12th June 2020 | 3 | The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group |
| 1st July 2020 | 4 | The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group |

Churches and cathedrals have been legally permitted to open for purposes of individual private prayer from 13th June. House of Bishops guidance provided for churches to open for funerals from 15th June. Public worship, with measures in place for social distancing, are allowed from 4th July. Other activities, except for a few still prohibited by law, may also take place in churches, subject to the government guidance in place for the relevant sector.

The [government guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic](about:blank) requires a COVID-19 risk assessment to be carried out for every building and site open to the public. This document provides a template risk assessment, with links to the relevant advice notes. It relates to opening up church and cathedral buildings to clergy and members of the public entering for any permitted purposes. As well as offering guidance on best-practice, it is also intended to help parishes make a decision on whether to open for any or all of these purposes or not, based on their local circumstances, resources and context. You should read the advice on re-opening buildings and the guidance on public worship before completing this assessment. Both are available on the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](about:blank).

Future versions of this document will be produced when there is any substantive change to the guidance on the safe use of places of worship.

A separate risk assessment relating to contractors and construction workers is available on the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](about:blank).

**Carrying out a risk assessment**

1. Agree what activities you are planning for:
   * Private prayer (clergy only)
   * Livestreaming services (clergy only)
   * Private prayer (general public)
   * Public worship
   * Rites of passage services
   * Opening for visitors and tourists
2. Consider the hazards:
   * Transmission of COVID-19
   * Hazards arising from the temporary closure of the church
   * Hazards arising from now using the church in a different way

Read the guidance and think about how it relates specifically to your church. What constraints are there? Consider how people will arrive at the church, including if they will need to wait or queue outside; how people will enter and leave the church; circulation inside: from the entrance to the worship space and out again; circulation within the worship space; also access to other areas including the toilet(s).

1. Consider who might be harmed and how? Read the guidance and think about how the activities you are planning will affect different groups of people. The risks are not different for larger churches so long as they are properly managed, but having more people coming through your building makes the possible impact – for example of someone with COVID-19 coming into contact with others – higher than in smaller venues with fewer people. Consider your particular circumstances and adapt the checklist below as appropriate.
2. Using the risk assessment checklist below as a template:
   * add in mitigations for any risks that are particular to your circumstances that may not be on the list;
   * record what you need to do for each activity to go ahead safely;
   * consider any equipment you need and any temporary changes you might need to make to the church;
   * check back against your list of activities to confirm which ones can go ahead and when.

**Risk assessment template**

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| **Church:**  St Helen’s, Ainderby Steeple | **Assessor’s name:**  Brian Phillips – Church Warden | **Date completed:**  30th July 2020 | **Review date:**  **As advised by** |

| **Area of Focus** | **Controls required** | **Additional information** | **Action by whom?** | **Completed – date and name** |
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| **Access to church buildings for clergy for purposes of private prayer and/or livestreaming**  [General advice on accessing church buildings can be found here.](about:blank) | One point of entry to the church building, clearly identified and separate from public entry if possible | Not possible | B Phillips | B Phillips  27/07/2020 |
| A suitable lone working policy has been consulted in case of need | An example can be [found here](about:blank). | PCC |  |
| Buildings have been aired before use | Yes | B Phillips | BP 27/07/2020 |
| Check for animal waste and general cleanliness | Done | B Phillips | BP 27/07/2020 |
| Ensure water systems are flushed through before use. | See [Government Guidance for organisations on supplying safe water supplies](about:blank) | B Phillips | BP 27/07/2020 |
| Switch on and check electrical and heating systems if needed. Commission system checks as necessary. | Done including full inspection  By AGE. Contractor | B Phillips | BP 27/07/2020 |
| Holy water stoups and the font are empty | Checked empty | B Phillips | BP 27/07/2020 |
| Ensure safe use of equipment needed for livestreaming: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets, cables/tripod causing trip hazard | When required and in use | Service Leader | BP 27/07/2020 |
| **Deciding whether to open to the public** | Discuss with nearby venues and businesses to ensure that the timing and practical arrangements for using the church are compatible. | Wellington Heifer opposite, car park is separate, no mixing of public. | B Phillips | BP 27/07/2020 |
| Update your website, A Church Near You, and any relevant social media. | Website administrator to upload details to website | Website Administrator |  |
| Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services | Booking system in place for Private worship has been updated for Service access. |  |  |
| If opening to tourists consider applying for the Visit Britain ‘Good to Go’ standard mark | [Apply here](about:blank). NA | NA | NA |
| **Preparation of the Church for access by members of the public for any permitted purposes, including worship and tourism** | Confirm that all steps (above) for access by clergy have been carried out before anyone else accesses the building. | Carried out and included in the Opening for Private Prayer assessment from 15 June 2020 | B Phillips | BP  27/07/2020 |
| Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the ‘cleaning’ section of this risk assessment (below). | Advice on[**cleaning church buildings can be found here**](about:blank)**.** |  |  |
| Choose one point of entry into the church to manage flow of people and indicate this with notices, keeping emergency exits available at all times. Where possible use a different exit. | Entry through Main Entrance on South Aisle. Exit via Main Entrance South Aisle. | B Phillips | BP 30/07/2020 |
| Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside). | Set up Markers on path leading to main entrance showing 2 Metre intervals.  Not for normal services, due to low numbers. | B Phillips | As required according to service schedule. |
| Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation. | Open door 30 minutes before service start times | B Phillips | According to service schedule. |
| Remove Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets. Alternatively, service books can be used by individuals at one service and then deposited in a box and stored for 72 hours minimum before next use. | Alternative system to be used for service books, no hymns | B Phillips |  |
| Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on) | Completed | B Phillips |  |
| Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance | Pew cushions and kneelers not removed | B Phillips | 27/07/2020 |
| Remove or isolate children’s resources and play areas | Isolated | B Phillips | 27/07/2020 |
| Walk through the church to plan for physical distancing in seats, aisles, at the altar rail, including safe flow of visitors. Remember 2m in all directions from each person (or 1m with risk mitigation if absolutely necessary). | Plan carried out and alternate pews to be used, with staggered spacing. | B Phillips | 27/07/2020 |
| Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing. | The pews to be used marked out. Judgements will have to be made on day depending on social units. | B Phillips | 27/07/2020 |
| Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements. | One-way system controlled by instruction | B Phillips, Service Leader | Service schedule |
| Limit access to places were the public does not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon in needed. | Not applicable |  |  |
| Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use. | Hand sanitiser points established at entrance and exit points. PCC Administrator has registered with [Parish Buying](about:blank) and local supplier for resources. | B Phillips & Benefice Administrator | B Phillips and Benefice Administrator |
| Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing | Survey carried out and deduction made that no temporary changes to the building are required that are not already included in the Covid -19 precautions within the building. [Consult [advice on gaining temporary permissions](about:blank). ] | B Phillips |  |
| Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc. | Download/produce and display relevant notices. | B Phillips & Benefice Administrator |  |
| Ensure high-risk surfaces and touch points have been wiped with appropriate sanitiser spray or disposable wipes | Advice on[**cleaning church buildings can be found here**](about:blank)**.** | B Phillips |  |
| Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels. | Benefice Administrator registered with [Parish Buying](about:blank) to obtain supplies. | NA |  |
| Where there are toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available. | Supplied | B Phillips | BP 27/07/2020 |
| Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them. | Rubbish to be double-bagged and sealed. | B Phillips | BP 27/07/2020 |
| If possible, provide safe means for worshippers and visitors to record their name and contact details; retain each day’s record for 21 days | New sign-in sheets to be provided for services | B Phillips | Service schedule |
| Give due notice of the resumption of use of the building to neighbours, congregation and wider community, ensuring that visitors and worshippers will know what to expect when they come. | Website and notices | Churchwarden & website administrator | July 2020 |
| **Cleaning the church before and after general use (no known exposure to anyone with Coronavirus symptoms)**  Advice on[**cleaning church buildings can be found here**](about:blank)**.** | If the church building has been closed for 72 hours between periods of being open then there is no need for extra cleaning to remove the virus from surfaces. | Normal cleaning rota  Weekly services only, unless a funeral is called | Church cleaners | July 2020 and ongoing |
| If 72-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating. | NA |  |  |
| Set up a cleaning rota to cover your opening arrangements. | To fit in with service schedule | Church cleaners | July 2020 and ongoing |
| All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable).PCC Administrator | PCC Administrator registered with Parish Buying to obtain supplies. | Benefice Administrator & Church Wardens |  |
| Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned. | Resources to be obtained by those cleaning church, following guidelines provided. | Church Cleaners | Ongoing |
| Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site. |  |  |  |
| Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal. | To be carried out at the end of every service | Sidepersons on rota | As required for services |
| **Cleaning the church after known exposure to someone with Coronavirus symptoms** | If possible close the church building for 72 hours with no access permitted. | Closure of church building for 72 hours after a service will be the normal routine. Points of contact (doors etc ) will be disinfected as a routine. |  |  |
| If 72-hour closure is not possible then follow Public Health England guidance on cleaning in non-healthcare settings. | [**Public Health England guidance** available here.](about:blank) | NA |  |
| If the building has been quarantined for 72 hours, then carry out cleaning as per the normal advice on cleaning. | Normal cleaning team as per the cleaning rota [Advice on[**cleaning church buildings can be found here**](about:blank)**.}** |  | Recorded on completion |
| **Re-introducing Holy Communion during some services** | Ensure sufficient supplies of bread (host) are available that are in date and useable. Wine is not to be offered. | Clergy to check stock and if necessary order new stock. | Clergy |  |
| Put in place a one-way system for communicants to provide safe flow around the church. | Churchwarden to assess suitability of church to offer Holy Communion and to put in place a one-way system from pew to Chancel steps and back to pew without meeting others. | Churchwarden | Depending on service schedule |
| Provide protection for clergy and others administering Communion. | Clergy and others administering Communion to be provided with own hand sanitiser, gloves and face visor. Tweezers to be used to handle bread. Hands to be sanitised prior to handling bread. | Clergy |  |
| Provide hand sanitiser for all communicants prior to and after taking Communion. | All communicants to be asked to sanitise their hands prior to and after taking Communion. | All participants | Service schedule |
| Communion is not to be offered at the altar rail. Communicants should stand to receive Communion, as far as practically possible from the Priest. | Churchwarden to decide upon a suitable location in which to administer Communion, ideally Chancel steps. Social distancing to remain where possible. | Churchwarden |  |
| Bread and wine that is blessed by the Priest and shown to the congregation must be consumed by the Priest only. All other bread to be covered. |  | Clergy |  |