# 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](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july) 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](https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches).

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](https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches).

**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:**  **Eccles Parish Church** | **Assessor’s name:**  **Ross Garner** | **Date completed:**  **16/7/20** | **Review date:**  **27/7/20** |

| **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.](https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches) | One point of entry to the church building clearly identified and separate from public entry if possible | Entry for clergy and volunteers by South Door next to toilets. Main entrance for public will be west door under tower. | Authorized personnel only sign on South door | Ross Garner  24/6/20 |
| A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant. | An example can be [found here](https://www.ecclesiastical.com/documents/lone-working.pdf). | Recommended volunteers obtain “Man Down” mobile App and link this to friends and collegues phones |  |
| Buildings have been aired before use. | Completed on 19th June | Ian Blaylock, Mikael Peake, Ross Garner, Susannah Rowles | 19/6/20 |
| Check for animal waste and general cleanliness. | Completed on 19th June | Ian Blaylock, Mikael Peake, Ross Garner, Susannah Rowles | 19/6/20 |
| Ensure water systems are flushed through before use. | Completed on 19th June | Ian Blaylock, Mikael Peake, Ross Garner, Susannah Rowles | 19/6/20 |
| Switch on and check electrical and heating systems if needed. Commission system checks as necessary. | Checked on 19th June.  Heating not working. Service required | Ian Blaylock,  Ian Blaylock to contact British Gas | 19/6/20 |
| Holy water stoups and the font are empty. | Stoups n/a  Font Checked - OK | Ross Garner Ian Blaylock | 19/6/20 |
| Ensure safe use of equipment needed for livestreaming: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets, cables/tripod causing trip hazard | Using online YouTube for time being. No live-streaming |  |  |
| **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. | No conflict of interest anticipated |  |  |
| Update your website, A Church Near You, and any relevant social media. |  | Ross Garner |  |
| Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services |  | Not required |  |
| If opening to tourists consider applying for the Visit Britain ‘Good to Go’ standard mark | [Apply here](https://goodtogo.visitbritain.com/). | Ross Garner |  |
| **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. | Church has been cleaned | Patricia Doherty | 29th June |
| 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**](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Keeping%20church%20buildings%20clean%20v1.pdf)**.** | Ross Garner | 19/6/20 |
| 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. | Point of entry via West doors and exit identified via South porch. Emergency exit via Bridgewater Room if required. One way system clockwise via central aisle across front of nave and back down south aisle. Pitcairn chapel, north aisle and Chancel cordoned off. Notice on Bridgewater “authorized personnel only” + “Fire Exit” | Ian Blaylock, Mikael Peake, Ross Garner, Susannah Rowles | 19/6/20 |
| Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside). | Not considered necessary |  |  |
| Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation. | The task will be completed weekly at day of individual prayer. | Ian Blaylock |  |
| Remove Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets | Completed on 19th June | Ian Blaylock, Mikael Peake, Ross Garner, Susannah Rowles | 19/6/20 |
| Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on) | Completed on 19th June | Ian Blaylock, Mikael Peake, Ross Garner, Susannah Rowles | 19/6/20 |
| Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance | Not deemed necessary as there will be a 72 hour gap between Wednesday private prayer and Sunday service | Not required | 19/6/20 |
| Remove or isolate children’s resources and play areas | Cordon off children’s corner with “not in use” notice | Ross Garner | 1st July |
| 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). | Completed on 19th June | Ian Blaylock, Mikael Peake, Ross Garner, Susannah Rowles | 19/6/20 |
| Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing. | Gold cords used to close off alternate pews and no-go areas. | Ross Garner, | 29/6/20 |
| Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements. | We plan to control the flow of direction with signage and tape markings on floor | Mikael Peake | 22/6/20 |
| Limit access to places were the public does not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon in needed. | Pitcairn chapel, Chancel, children’s corner, tomb “cordoned off”.  Notices made and set up. | Ross Garner | 29/6/20 |
| Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use. | Purchased. | Ian Blaylock | 22/6/20 |
| Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing | N/A | Not required | 19/6/20 |
| Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc. |  | Ross Garner | 29/6/20 |
| 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**](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Keeping%20church%20buildings%20clean%20v1.pdf)**.** |  | part of weekly clean procedure |
| Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels. | Purchased | Susannah Rowles, Ian Blaylock | 29/6/20 |
| Where there are toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available. | Purchased | Susannah Rowles, Ian Blaylock | 29/6/20 |
| Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them. | Purchased | Susannah Rowles, Ian Blaylock, Ross Garner | 29/6/20 |
| If possible, provide safe means for worshippers and visitors to record their name and contact details; retain each day’s record for 21 days | Sign in register for when people enter into church | Sheila Peake | 1/7/20 |
| 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. | This is being communicated on church web site and social media | Ross Garner | Ross Garner 29/6/20 |
| **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**](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Keeping%20church%20buildings%20clean%20v1.pdf)**.** | 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. | This is to be continually reviewed as individual prayer on a Wednesday and Sunday service will naturally allow 72 hours to expire | Not action required at present | No action |
| If 72-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating. | 72 hour gap is possible at the present time | No action required | No action |
| Set up a cleaning rota to cover your opening arrangements. | Cleaning arrangements have been established.  Weekly until 22/7/20 then twice weekly | Ross Garner | Patricia Doherty  29/6 + weekly |
| All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable). | Cleaners have own PPE | Patricia Doherty |  |
| Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned. | Cleaners have own | Patricia Doherty |  |
| Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site. |  | Patricia Doherty |  |
| Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal. |  | Cleaning to take place once a week initially as the church will only be open on a Wednesday. |  |
| **Cleaning the church after known exposure to someone with Coronavirus symptoms** | If possible close the church building for 72 hours with no access permitted. | This 72 hour closure has been established | Ross Garner |  |
| 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.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings) | Not required |  |
| If the building has been quarantined for 72 hours, then carry out cleaning as per the normal advice on cleaning. | Advice on[**cleaning church buildings can be found here**](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Keeping%20church%20buildings%20clean%20v1.pdf)**.** | Patricia Doherty | If quarantine is required |

**Appendix to Risk Assessment**

**concerning Covid-19 Secure Communion Services at Eccles Parish Church**

**Risk of Contagion**

Anyone feeling unwell with any of the [symptoms of Covid-19](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection)  is requested to not attend a service

**Cleaning**

The church will be cleaned on a Saturday prior to the Sunday service as per [guidance from the Church of England](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Keeping%20church%20buildings%20clean%20v.2.pdf). The church will not be used between the Wednesday opening and Saturday to allow time for any Covid-19 virus to die off thus reducing risk considerably for those attending on a Sunday.

**Social Distancing**

Under [guidelines](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/COVID%2019%20advice%20on%20conducting%20public%20worship%20v1.1.pdf) for public worship issued by the Church of England we will be adopting social distancing of 2 metres inside the church apart from the moment of distribution of communion when the priest will wear a face shield to help protect communicants. 2 metre gaps have been marked in the central aisle for when we queue to receive communion. Family groups (from the same “bubble”) may sit together.

**Capacity**

The capacity for Covid-19 Secure services in the nave and centre side aisles of the church is 34 people sitting individually.

**Register**

So that track and trace can contact people in the event of an infected person attending a register of names, addresses and phone numbers will be kept for each service.

**One way system**

In the event that a person with Covid-19 attends a service the virus can be spread by movement around the building. To keep movement to a minimum we have a one way system. People will enter through the main doors and lobby at the rear (West end) of the building and depart via the south porch.

**Communion**

Communion will be in one kind only (bread wafers). Gluten free wafers are available. [Detailed guidance from the Church of England about communion](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/Coronavirus%20Advice%20on%20the%20Administration%20of%20Holy%20Communion%20v3.0.pdf) can be found on this link.

During the Eucharistic prayer the bread will remain covered. Prior to distribution the priest will sanitize his/her hands. The words of invitation etc and final prayer will be said before distribution which will be the final act of the service. The priest will wear a face shield when distributing and will not speak during distribution. Distribution will take place in front of the chancel steps to minimize movement.

Those who wish to receive communion are invited to queue in the centre aisle and leave the church immediately after receiving and will not return to their seats.

**Sharing the peace**

We will not be able to physically greet one another. We may wave our greeting of peace from 2 metres distance.

**Singing**

Singing will not be permitted but we may listen to some pre-recorded music as part of the service.

**Books**

We will not be using books. The liturgy will be projected onto a large screen.

**Refreshments and fellowship**

We will not be serving refreshments after the service. As part of the guidance we would ask that people leave the building as soon as possible after the service ends. We will discourage gathering in groups on the church grounds as that makes it difficult for people to leave whilst maintaining social distancing.

**Service Leaders and Readers**

The service leader (ALM worship) will sit below the pulpit and lead with a fixed microphone. The Celebrant will celebrate in the centre of the chancel and will use the tie-clip radio microphone. The lesson reader will use the lectern. One reader will do both readings unless two people from the same household bubble do a reading each. If a different person does the intercessions they will use the hand-held radio microphone from the body of the church (ie they will not need to leave their seat).

*Appendix prepared by Rev Ross Garner. 16th July 2020*