# 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:**  **Christ Church Walshaw** | **Assessor’s name:**  **Pat White** | **Date completed:**  **24/07/2021** | **Review date:**  **01/09/2021** |

| **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 |  | Wardens and Vicar | Week prior to opening on 12/07/2020 |
| A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant. | An example can be [found here](https://www.ecclesiastical.com/documents/lone-working.pdf). | Wardens, Vicar, Bill, Andrew |  |
| Buildings have been aired before use. |  | Wardens | Week prior to opening on 12/07/2020 |
| Check for animal waste and general cleanliness. |  | Wardens & cleaners | Week prior to opening on 12/07/2020 & ongoing. |
| Ensure water systems are flushed through before use. | See [Government Guidance for organisations on supplying safe water supplies](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-organisations-on-supplying-safe-water-supplies?utm_source=a85cd421-5f76-4767-95f7-da69aa76fe3d&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate) | Wardens | Week prior to opening on 12/07/2020 |
| Switch on and check electrical and heating systems if needed. Commission system checks as necessary. |  | Andrew | Week prior to opening and ongoing in Winter months |
| Holy water stoups and the font are empty. |  | N/A | N/A |
| Ensure safe use of equipment needed for livestreaming: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets, cables/tripod causing trip hazard | Live streaming is not taking place at the moment | N/A | N/A |
| **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. |  | N/A | N/A |
| Update your website, A Church Near You, and any relevant social media. |  | Vicar | As necessary |
| Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services |  | N/A | N/A |
| If opening to tourists consider applying for the Visit Britain ‘Good to Go’ standard mark |  | N/A | N/A |
| **Preparation of the Church for access by members of the public for any permitted purposes, including worship and tourism.**  **Ensure People are Safe at Worship Services**  **Ensuring people are safe at worship services** | Confirm that all steps (above) for access by clergy have been carried out before anyone else accesses the building. |  | Wardens and Bill | As required |
| 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 church buildings clean v1.pdf)**.** | Wardens and Vicar | Weeks prior to lifting restrictions on 24/07/2021 |
| 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 - The main door  Exit – The side door | Wardens and Vicar | Week prior to opening on 12/07/2020 |
| Make arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside). | N/A after 19th July 2021 | N/A | From 24/07/2021 |
| Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation. |  | Wardens | Week prior to opening on 12/07/2020 |
| Remove Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets |  | Wardens | Week prior to opening on 12/07/2020 & ongoing |
| Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on) |  | Wardens & Vicar | Week prior to opening on 12/07/2020 & ongoing |
| Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance | None available | N/A | N/A |
| Remove or isolate children’s resources and play areas |  | Wardens | Week prior to opening on 12/07/2020 & ongoing |
| 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). | Chairs restored to pre covid numbers and layout | Wardens & Vicar | Week prior to 24/07/2021 & ongoing |
| Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing. | Social Distancing guidance on the floor removed and relevant signs | Wardens & Vicar | Week prior to 24/07/2021 |
| Limit access to places were the public does not need to go, maybe with a temporary cordon in needed. |  | Wardens & Vicar | Week prior to opening on 12/07/2020 |
| Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use.  Wardens and sides people to encourage the use of hand sanitiser by everyone on entry and when leaving the church. | Register with [Parish Buying](https://www.parishbuying.org.uk/) for procurement options. | Wardens & sidespeople | Week prior to opening on 24/07/2021 & ongoing |
| After 19th July decision made to relax social distancing rules. People can sit where they like and chat to one another. However caution to be exercised and people given the option to not sit next to anyone if they wish | Use of cards to place on seats on either side of people that want to sit alone | Wardens & Vicar | 24/07/2021 & ongoing |
| Notices to remain in place to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g.limited physical contact, hand washing, face masks, sanitizer etc. |  | Wardens | Week prior to opening on 12/07/2020 & ongoing |
| Ensure high-risk surfaces and touch points have been wiped with appropriate sanitiser spray or disposable wipes.  Ensure toilets are cleaned with antiseptic wipes after use at services and by other groups | Advice on[**cleaning church buildings can be found here**](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Keeping church buildings clean v1.pdf)**.**  N/A after 19/07/2021 unless a member of the congregation tests positive for Covid | Wardens & cleaners  Wardens, sidespersons and leaders of groups. | From 24/07/2021  Ongoing |
| Check that hand washing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels. | Register with [Parish Buying](https://www.parishbuying.org.uk/) for procurement options. | Wardens | Ongoing |
| Where there are toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available. | Register with [Parish Buying](https://www.parishbuying.org.uk/) for procurement options. | Wardens | Ongoing |
| Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them. |  | Wardens | Ongoing |
| 1. Clean surfaces with antiseptic wipes. 2. If necessary people queue outside (observing social distancing) to allow people to distance inside for ’track and trace’ etc 3. Encourage everyone to wear face covering, unless officially exempt. 4. Encourage people to use hand sanitiser on entry and leaving. 5. People can sit where they choose and make their way to their seats without escort. But people can choose if they want to sit alone. 6. Limited socialising and chatting but not in large group near the main door. 7. No singing inside. 8. People guided to leave by the side door. 9. Encourage hand sanitising on leaving church. | Not required after 19/07/2021 unless person in congregation tests Covid positive  Not necessary after 19/07/2021  Not mandatory after 19/07/2021  Not mandatory after 19/07/2021  After 19/07/2021. Carss to be available for people to put on the seats next to them.  People will no longer be discouraged from chatting.  Limited singing outside  No change from previous arrangements | Wardens and Sidespeople  Wardens and sidespersons  Wardens and sidespersons  Cards distributed by wardens sidespersons | On going procedures as necessary.  From 24/07/2021  From 24/07/2021  From 24/07/2021  Ongoing.  Ongoing |
| **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 church buildings clean v1.pdf)**.** | No longer necessary unless someone attending church has tested positive for Covid | Church is usually closed for at least 72 hours between services. | Wardens and sidespersons | Ongoing |
| If 72-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating. | See above | N/A | N/A |
| Set up a cleaning rota to cover your opening arrangements. |  | Wardens | In progress & ongoing. |
| All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable). | Register with [Parish Buying](https://www.parishbuying.org.uk/) for procurement options. | Wardens | Available from 4th July 2020 |
| Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned. | Register with [Parish Buying](https://www.parishbuying.org.uk/) for procurement options. | Wardens | Available from 4th July 2020 |
| Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site. |  | Wardens |  |
| Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal. | To be removed after every service | Wardens | After every service. Ongoing. |
| **Cleaning the church after known exposure to someone with Coronavirus symptoms** | If possible close the church building for 72 hours with no access permitted. SEE ABOVE | Church will be closed for at least 72 hours between services. | Wardens & Vicar | As required |
| 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) | N/A | N/A |
| 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 church buildings clean v1.pdf)**.** | Wardens & cleaners | As required & ongoing. |