

Coronavirus: Guidance on Opening Baptist church buildings

The UK population is now being asked to get used to living with COVID-19 for the foreseeable future.

Through 2020 and 2021, our guidance has been concerned with minimising risk, partly to protect those within our worshipping communities and partly as an act of care for the communities in which each church sits.

In the light of being asked to think how we live with COVID indefinitely, we now encourage you to focus on how to sustain the mission to which God is calling your church. It might be helpful to recall or review whom you feel God has laid on the heart of your church to support, serve and evangelise. How might this mission be fostered, whilst still acting in ways that sensibly offer protection to those who gather and whom you encounter?

We still strongly recommend you fulfil your legal duty to manage risks to those who attend your buildings or events through the regular review of your risk assessments. Below you will find a list of factors we recommend that you consider. Nevertheless, we suggest that this risk management takes into account the ongoing call of Christ to his church to go and make disciples of all nations.

This is a difficult balancing act and within each church there are likely to be different and sometimes wholly opposing views on the best way forward. We still appeal to everyone involved to be kind to each other, to listen well, to appreciate the pressure leaders are under, and to compromise accordingly. We note again the exhortation in Ephesians 4 to "be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

Queries or comments about this leaflet should be directed to supportservices@baptist.org.uk.

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Recent Revisions:

Date	Version	Updates Made
27/01/22	4.00	Major Re-write for endemic phase of pandemic
13/01/22	3.09	Revisions to front page text. Removal of references to self-isolation for Omicron case contacts. Revision of text on protecting the clinically vulnerable Revision of text on handling someone developing symptoms whilst in the building. Revision of text on NHS COVID-Pass to make clear that worship events are exempt and provide links to relevant guidance for very large events. Revision of guidance on symptom checks on entry. Simplification of guidance on managing traffic flow through buildings. Other minor textual revisions throughout.
23/12/21	3.08	Updates to reflect move of Wales to Alert Level 2 from 26 December 2021, including revisions to text on the front page and sections 3 and 7.
10/12/21	3.07	Updated Section 3 and section 7 to reflect publication of UK government guidance on face coverings for England.
09/12/21	3.06	Updated front page to reflect UK government announcement on 8 December of move to "Plan B." Updated section 3 to reflect the new requirement to wear a face covering in places of worship in England from 10 December 2021. Updates made section 2 and 6 relating to contamination of surfaces and cleaning requirements to align to the government guidance. Paragraph added to section 5 to make clear that NHS COVID Passes are not required for places of worship. Updated Section 7 to note the guidance to work from home where you can in England.
02/12/21	3.05	Updated to reflect changes in guidance following the emergence of the Omicron variant and the obligation to self-isolate if in contact with a suspected Omicron Case. Updates to sections 4 and 5 to remove the recommendation to record a full seating plan and also to make clear that we recommend informing all attendees of a subsequent positive case.
04/11/21	3.04	Creation of a new Section 4 (and renumbering of subsequent sections) to make it easier to find the guidance on handling cases of COVID-19 in the church building that was previously at the end of Section 3. Revisions to the wording of this new section. Amendments to the wording of the section on recording attendees in the building. Updated link to guidance for churches in Wales on first page. Review and update of all hyperlinks to ensure they are still pointing to live documents.
12/08/21	3.03	Changes throughout reflecting the move to Alert Level 0 in Wales.
05/08/21	3.02	Comments added to reflect the removal of the need to self-isolate in Wales for fully vaccinated adults who are close contacts of someone with coronavirus.
22/07/21	3.01	Amendments to reflect that England has now moved to Step 4 and to incorporate the published government guidance for Places of Worship in England
15/07/21	3.00	Amendments to incorporate the move to Step 4 in England from 19 July 2021 and move to Alert Level 1 in Wales from 17 July 2021.

Section 1: Summary of Current Government Guidance

England (as of 27 January 2022)

- All legal requirements regarding the size and type of gatherings have been removed.
- Face coverings are no longer mandatory in public spaces, including churches.
- Self-isolation for positive cases remains a legal requirement, although that is due to end on 24 March 2022.
- Working from home guidance has now ended.
- The UK Government continues to recommend taking voluntary measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, such as
 - encouraging vaccination
 - ventilating spaces
 - meeting outdoors
 - wearing face coverings in crowded and enclosed spaces when with people you do not normally meet
 - regular lateral flow testing
 - limiting close contact with people you do not usually live with
 - careful hygiene
 - being mindful of those who are vulnerable.

Wales (As of 28 January 2022)

- There is no limit on the number that may meet for any purpose outdoors. Indoors, there is no limit for worship, weddings, wedding receptions, funerals or wakes. But we believe that all other organised events should have a maximum of 30 people present – we will confirm this as soon as we can.
- Face coverings are still a requirement indoors in public spaces including church buildings, for those not exempt.
- There is no requirement to maintain 2m social distancing.
- COVID passes are required only for outdoor non-seated events of over 4,000 and for events of any type which have more than 10,000 people in attendance.
- Working from home where practical is now guidance rather than law.
- The Welsh Government continues to recommend taking voluntary measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, such as
 - encouraging vaccination
 - ventilating spaces
 - meeting outdoors
 - regular lateral flow testing
 - limiting close contact with people you do not usually live with
 - careful hygiene; and
 - being mindful of those who are vulnerable.

Section 2: Process for managing the risk from Coronavirus in your buildings

We recommend that you take the following overall steps to manage the risk relating to Coronavirus in your building. Some notes on your legal obligations in respect of opening your premises are included in Appendix 1.

Step 1: Conduct a risk assessment

You should have an up-to-date risk assessment in relation to transmission of Coronavirus in your building. This may be incorporated into the general risk assessment for your premises. In Wales this must satisfy the requirements of regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. These regulations include specific requirements to review the risk assessment if circumstances change significantly and to specifically consider the risks to those under 18. In England there is no longer a requirement to have a specific Coronavirus risk assessment, but the risks should still be assessed as part of your duty of care to the public under Health and Safety legislation. The Health & Safety Executive publish [guidance on risk assessment](#) to help churches to comply with these regulations. In Wales there is also a specific requirement that in formulating the risk assessment there is consultation with those working on the premises (which includes any paid staff or volunteers). We recommend that churches in England do this as well as it represents good practice.

[A template for this risk assessment](#) is provided alongside this guidance.

Step 2: Agree Appropriate Control Measures

Once completed you have assessed the risks your Church leadership need to agree as a group what measures should be taken to manage the risk from Coronavirus. It is not sufficient for one or two Trustees to carry out this alone on behalf of the Trustees without it being reviewed by the whole group. You may wish to consult with your church membership to get their input and support, noting that there will likely be a range of views that cannot be fully reconciled.

The remainder of this document goes through a set of practical guidance to consider when dealing with the risks identified in the risk assessment. We suggest you read this document prior to conducting your risk assessment and then again once your risk assessment is complete, to decide on the exact actions you will take.

When considering measures, it is important that you work consider what it appropriate to your circumstances and the missional priorities of your church. We recommend that you

- 1) Plan for the long term. Your measures need to be something you can sustain for an extended period and be consistent with normal ongoing practice as a church
- 2) Select Proportionate measures. Any measures will have some adverse impacts. Try to select those that have the best ratio of benefits to adverse impact. There is no "one-size fits all" set of measures as everything will depend upon your circumstances (e.g., building size vs attendance, congregation demographics, missional priorities)
- 3) Consult with your fellowship. You will almost certainly not be able to please everyone but need to consider a range of views. There is value in ensuring that all views are heard, even if you can't satisfy them all. It is important to set the right tone, accepting that risk perceptions vary significantly.

This guidance leaflet is primarily about practical issues, but it is important to remember that dealing with practical issues contributes to our mission as the Church. Coronavirus is a serious risk to the health and wellbeing of our communities and therefore it is part of our care for our neighbours to take appropriate precautions to manage the risk of infection. We therefore urge churches to take this issue seriously as not doing so could impact upon the reputation of your church and thereby harm your ability to reach your community with the Gospel.

Step 3: Implement your plans

We strongly recommend that your action plans and procedures are put in writing so that you can use them to demonstrate the action you have taken should this ever be queried by your members, a member of the public or statutory authorities. This is also helpful in sharing your plans, thereby ensuring that everyone is aware of what is to be done.

However, having a documented plan is only a first step. Plans must then be communicated in appropriate detail to all who need to know about them, including ministers, leaders, stewards, members, attendees etc. This may include publishing some elements on your website.

Part of this communication will be putting in place appropriate signage. We have put together a [collection of posters](#) churches may find helpful in doing this.

Plans must then be implemented, by ensuring everyone knows what they are responsible for doing and confirming that they have carried out their tasks. Implementation should be monitored so that tasks are completed.

Beautifully documented plans are no use unless they are put into action!

Step 4: Review

With the unpredictable nature of the disease, it is important to regularly review the situation. Our suggestion would be that a monthly review would be appropriate at this stage. This will include listening to feedback from your congregation and monitoring the situation locally and nationally. You should consider what might be triggers for removing any measures or adding measures.

Section 3: Preparing your building for opening

Preparing for re-opening for the first time

After any extended period of closure, it is important that the building is checked over to ensure it is safe in advance of opening to the church staff, volunteers, members, congregation and/or the general public. The building should be thoroughly checked over for any safety hazards using the 'Reoccupation Checklist' template (Appendix 2). You may also need to bring up to date any routine maintenance that may have been paused during lockdown (e.g., servicing of fire extinguishers).

Checks prior to each service, gathering or event

It is important that, prior to each event you have in your premises, you check your church building is in an appropriate state and that you have the team and procedures in place to be able to manage the event safely. We recommend you develop a pre-event checklist. A template for such a checklist is provided in Appendix 3 to this document.

Section 4: Operating Church Services and Church gatherings

Our main guidance on the operation of church services, including weddings, funerals and baptisms is contained in our parallel leaflet [Coronavirus: Guidance on Church Worship](#). The following paragraphs cover some specific issues that relate particularly to managing church premises.

We have also published [guidance for children's, youth and families ministry](#), which sits alongside the government [guidance for "out of school settings" for children](#). These give guidance on putting on sessions for children, either during services or as a stand-alone activity.

Handling multiple services (including tenant congregations)

Where you have multiple congregations using the building you should consider the risks involved in this, such as surfaces remaining infected or one group arriving as the previous group leaves.

Church Members' Meetings

Church Members' Meetings are a key feature of Baptist practice and important to the functioning of the church. Our view is that a Church Members' Meeting, which should include elements of worship and prayer and collective discernment of the mind of Christ falls within the definition of "communal worship" described in the government guidance. It is therefore subject to the same guidance as for church services in general.

If you are considering holding a Church Members Meeting (or indeed a church AGM), you should consult our [Guidance Leaflet L18: Covid-19 Coronavirus Legal Issues](#) which sets out the different legal implications for unincorporated churches and church CIOs and a discussion of the options available to you.

Streaming of services

Many of our churches have been live streaming services throughout lockdown and are continuing to do so when they reopen. The government guidance encourages churches to continue to do this to reduce the size of physical gatherings and continue to reach those who are self-isolating or otherwise unable or unwilling to attend.

There are data protection and licensing issues to be addressed when streaming services (either live or pre-recorded) and churches should consult our [Guidance Leaflet L18: Covid-19 Coronavirus Legal Issues](#) for more detail on these topics.

In addition to data protection issues, there are also considerable technical and practical issues in trying to produce a service that works well both for those attending live and those joining online. You may wish to consider doing a live service for those attending in person and a separate service for broadcast, or editing footage recorded at a live service for later broadcast.

Section 5: Review of possible measures to take

Enhanced ventilation

The Health and Safety Executive has produced brief [guidance on air conditioning and ventilation during the pandemic](#), and the government has produced this [short film](#) about the benefits of ventilation.

Generally, fresh air ventilation is helpful to disperse any particles carrying infection, increasing the fresh air ventilation is desirable. This could include opening windows and doors to encourage ventilation where possible, bearing in mind any security concerns that might arise and maintaining a comfortable temperature. Where there are few windows and doors that can be opened, you may wish to consider use of fans to increase the flow of fresh air from the outside.

In some church buildings the settings of the controls on heating, air conditioning and ventilation, where such controls are available, can help to reduce the risk of disease transmission. Where a controlled ventilation system is in place these should be set in line with recommendations from heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) engineers or advisers. You are likely to find that the organisation contracted to maintain such systems will be able to advise you.

Enhanced Cleaning practices

Good cleaning practices can assist in reducing the transmission of Coronavirus via surfaces. The government has produced specific Coronavirus [guidance on cleaning in non-healthcare settings outside the home](#). Churches should follow this guidance. Churches with historic buildings, including but not limited to buildings formally listed should also refer to the [Historic England guidance on cleaning historic surfaces](#). The Government has also published [guidance on disposal of waste during the pandemic](#). The cleaning guidance says that PPE above and beyond that normally used for cleaning is not needed other than when a known or suspected Coronavirus case has been present. However, churches may wish to review what PPE is needed for their usual cleaning in the light of the infection risks highlighted by the outbreak.

Generally, it will be sufficient to clean the premises in line with your normal practices prior to any event, such as a church service. However, in some cases there may be frequently touched surfaces that need to be cleaned during the period of opening, such as handrails on stairs, where this is practical.

Where a known or suspected case has been present enhanced cleaning practice needs to be followed:

- Cleaners should wear suitable PPE, which means disposable or washing up gloves and aprons for general cleaning tasks. Hard surfaces are to be cleaned with warm soapy water using a disposable cloth, paying attention to frequently touched areas and surfaces (e.g., doors, toilets, stair rails). Avoid creating splashes and spray when cleaning.
- For any areas of heavy contamination where there may be bodily fluids, such as toilets, these should be cleaned as mentioned but with the PPE for protection for the eyes, mouth and nose (e.g., a face shield) as well as gloves and aprons.
- All waste, including waste from bins, any PPE, cleaning waste and disposable cloths should be treated as if contaminated with Coronavirus as it is not possible to prove otherwise. Waste should be double bagged and stored securely for 72 hours before being thrown away in general waste.

Use the '*Cleaning Checklist for suspected Coronavirus contamination*' template (Appendix 4) to record the cleaning carried out and for additional detailed guidance.

Social Distancing

There is no longer any legal requirement for social distancing in England. However, churches may still implement their own social distancing policy for their premises.

In Wales, from 26 December 2021, 2 metre social distancing is required in all public buildings.

Please note that in an emergency such as a fire or accident, people do not have to stay socially distanced if it would be unsafe. People involved in the provision of assistance to others should pay attention to sanitation measures immediately afterwards, including washing/sanitisation of hands.

Good Hygiene practices

Good hygiene practices can prevent transmission from an infected person to a non-infected person, either directly or via a surface. You may wish to ask everyone attending the church premises to demonstrate good hygiene practices including:

- All attendees to wash or sanitise hands on entry. We recommend provision of hand sanitiser at all entrances and exits to enable this.
- Management of coughs and sneezes – cover mouth and nose with tissue or sleeve. Dispose of used tissues immediately.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds or more. Use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available.
- Do not touch eyes, nose or mouth.
- Minimising unnecessary hand contact with surfaces such as doorknobs.
- Avoid multiple people handling the same objects, such as pens, books, service sheets, chairs, etc. Where this cannot be avoided, ensure that hands are cleaned prior to handling such objects.
- Individuals should be requested not to touch or kiss anyone outside their household group.

Use of Face coverings

In England, Face coverings are no longer required by law. The [UK Government's guidance on face coverings](#) suggests that "you continue to wear a face covering in crowded and enclosed spaces where you may come into contact with other people you do not normally meet."

The wearing of a face covering which covers the nose and mouth is still mandatory inside a place of worship by law in Wales. A face covering is not required outdoors in the grounds of a place of

worship. The Welsh government has published in [Face coverings: guidance for public](#), which includes guidance on exemptions. A face covering may be removed when leading a worship service or preaching but should be replaced when not actively leading the service. Face shields or visors are not an alternative to face coverings because they do not securely cover the nose and mouth.

Seating arrangements and seating capacity

You may be able to use seating arrangements to reduce risk, such as only using alternate rows or leaving gaps between household groups. What is possible and/or appropriate will depend upon the size and layout of your building.

To cater for the needs of those who are more vulnerable or cautious you may wish to have different approaches to separation of seating in different parts of your building. For example, you may have an area reserved for those would prefer social distancing to be maintained and other areas where it is not. This will very much depend upon the space you have available and the needs of your church attendees.

You may wish to limit overall capacity based on the numbers that can be accommodated safely and accounting for any pinch points with people entering and leaving the premises. There are currently no absolute upper limits on the numbers, but larger gatherings increase the risks in terms of likelihood of an infected person coming and number of people potentially exposed if they do.

If you do limit capacity, how to manage this is a complex practical issue that you need to consider in the context of your church congregation, building and the type of event being held. You may wish to test an approach and assess and develop your approach over time as circumstances evolve and you gain experience of what works or not in your context. Some options to consider:

- Invitation only – this is probably best where potential attendance far exceeds capacity, and you can pro-actively manage the best use of the space you do have.
- Pre-booking – similar to invitation only but requires individuals to be pro-active. There is likely to be considerable administration involved in handling bookings and cancellations. There is also some complexity in working out how the bookings fit with your available space.
- Close doors when capacity reached – This is the more reactive approach and requires careful stewarding and potentially results in appearing inhospitable when the doors are shut. It may also result in queuing at the door that is hard to manage in line with social distancing.

Use of Outside Spaces

Using outside space has advantages as it is generally understood that the coronavirus is less likely to be transmitted outside due to the dispersal of virus particles. It may also be that you can accommodate more people outside if you have sufficient space. You do need to consider how you might deal with inclement weather and also noise disturbance to neighbouring properties.

There are no legal limits on the size of gatherings outdoors.

Special measures for the clinically vulnerable

In England the government has published [guidance on protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable](#) and likewise the Welsh government has published [guidance on protecting people who are extremely vulnerable](#). Both of these documents advise that shielding is no longer advised, but that those who are vulnerable may consider taking additional precautions, such as not attending larger gatherings. However, the government guidance does make clear that these decisions are for the individual because the risk is to them, and they do not present any higher risk for other attendees. You should consider making provision for those who consider themselves vulnerable, such as an area of seating that offers enhanced social distancing

NHS COVID Pass

Worship services are exempt from any requirement to check for proof of vaccination status using the NHS COVID Pass and we recommend that churches do not attempt to implement it voluntarily as it will appear unwelcoming to visitors.

Checks for Symptoms on Entry to the Church

We recommend asking people who feel unwell to not attend the building.

You could consider actively asking anyone attending the building to confirm they do not currently have any symptoms or have been asked to self-isolate by NHS Track and Trace or NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect. This could be managed by a steward at the main entrance; however, this does run the risk of appearing unwelcoming.

We do not recommend carrying out temperature checks as the proximity involved (even with a contactless infra-red thermometer) brings transmission risk. Temperature is also not a particularly accurate way to assess risk of COVID-19 as it is possible some will be contagious but have no fever. Similarly, a raised temperature is not necessarily indicative of COVID-19 (e.g., running can raise skin temperature), meaning you may decide to exclude someone who is safe to attend.

Recording attendees in the building

It is good practice, but not mandatory, to ask for the name and contact details of anyone who enters the building, with details of the time of their visit. This will allow you to inform all attendees should anyone in attendance subsequently develop symptoms or receive a positive test. It will also allow you to help NHS Track and Trace or NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect should they get in touch. In Wales, recording is not required if 2m social distancing can be maintained but is still encouraged. In England, you should make clear that providing this data is optional to enter a place of worship and people who refuse should still be allowed entry.

Churches in both England and Wales are still encouraged (but not obliged) to generate an official NHS QR code for your building (one for each building if you have more than one) and display this on posters at each entrance. You can do this on [the UK government website](#). This QR code will allow people to check in at your building and log their visit using the NHS COVID-19 app. Churches should still request collect contact details from those using the NHS QR code to check in.

You should ask people attending to notify the church if they show symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 so you can take appropriate action (See Section 4 for details of how to handle such cases).

The collection of data needs to be done in compliance with data protection legislation. The ICO has helpfully set out five simple steps on how to ensure data protection is not a barrier to reopening:

A – Ask for only what’s needed: e.g., name, contact details and time of arrival. You may find a paper attendance register used by a steward on the door is the easiest way to achieve this.

B – Be transparent: be clear, open and honest about what you are doing with their personal information. Tell them why you need it and what you’ll do with it by displaying a notice and using a privacy statement. A sample privacy statement is provided in Appendix 5.

C – Carefully store the data: Keep it secure on a device if collecting records digitally or keep paper records locked away.

D – Don’t use it for other purposes: e.g., don’t use this contact tracing information for other reasons e.g., for direct marketing, inviting people to church events or profiling.

E – Erase it in line with Government guidance: dispose of the data securely to reduce the risk of someone else accessing the data. Shred paper documents or permanently delete digital files from your recycling bin or cloud storage backup files. Records should be destroyed after 21 days.

Because the collection of data is not compulsory for places of worship, the [ICO guidance](#) recommends relying on consent as the basis for the collection of data. A sample privacy statement that could be given to attendees is provided in Appendix 5. The following are two possible options for meeting the requirements for consent in practice (you may find others that work):

- A steward requests and records the contact details provided and ticks a column to confirm the privacy statement was made available and specific consent was verbally provided. The privacy statement would need to be displayed clearly for people to read, e.g., on a poster.
- Printed sheets with the privacy statement and a contact details form, and pens could be provided, allowing people to sign to confirm their consent, which they then deposit in a box.

Managing arrivals, departures and traffic flow through the building

You should consider where the pinch-points might be in your building where people are brought together into close proximity such as entry and exit points and circulation spaces and how you manage high volumes of people moving at the same time and the beginning and end of events or services. You can consider measures to reduce this risk. Possible measures include signage and floor markings, a 1-way system, pro-active stewarding and leaving doors open to avoid transmission via door handles. You should consider how any measures will affect disability access and make arrangements to ensure equal access can still be achieved.

Section 6: Handling Cases of COVID-19 in the building

What to do if someone develops symptoms whilst in the Church

It is unlikely that symptoms of COVID-19 will suddenly emerge when someone is in the building. However, we recommend that attendees are asked to return home if they start to feel unwell.

What to do if someone who has been in your building tests positive for coronavirus or develops coronavirus symptoms

Should you be informed that someone attending your church premises or service has subsequently developed Coronavirus symptoms and/or received a positive test result, it is good practice to inform anyone who also attended the same church event(s) within the week before their symptoms or positive test. You do not have to share the name of the person who has developed symptoms or received a positive test and certainly must not do so without their explicit consent. It is down to those informed in this way to determine what to do with the information. Though contacts no longer have to self-isolate (unless the person is not vaccinated), they may wish, for example, to take a test themselves, or to avoid visiting any vulnerable people for a while. The person showing symptoms or who has received a positive test should be asked who they sat near and/or mixed with so that any such close contacts can be informed of this. However, because the person testing positive may not know everyone's name or may not remember, it is still helpful to record those who attend events (see Section 5), and we recommend informing all attendees that there has been a positive case.

If there is a risk the building may still be contaminated with Coronavirus, then you may wish to follow the cleaning checklist provided in Appendix 4.

In general, you should expect NHS Test and Trace or NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect to contact you, where they feel it is needed, to advise on the action to take and to request data from you. However, if you feel you need to take proactive action, perhaps because a number of people have developed symptoms or received a positive test following an event when they were together, you should contact your local Health Protection Team. You should refer to [contact details for Local Health Protection Teams in England](#) or [contact details for Local Health Protection Teams in Wales](#) to find the relevant contact details.

Section 7: Other Uses of the Church Building

Use of the church office

From 20 January 2021, the UK government no longer advises workers to work from home if they can.

From 28 January 2022 the guidance in place in Wales is that workers should work from home if they can, but this is now only guidance rather than law.

If you do feel it is appropriate to re-open the church office, this should be considered in line with the government [guidance on use of office premises](#). You should ensure you conduct a specific risk assessment for the use of the office.

In general, you should consider:

- Reviewing layouts and processes to allow people to work further apart from each other.
- Using floor tape or markings to help workers maintain social distancing.
- Arranging for people to work side-by-side or facing away from each other rather than face-to-face or use screens to separate people from each other.
- Managing occupancy levels to enable social distancing is achievable.
- Avoiding the use of hot desks and spaces, where this is not possible cleaning and sanitising workstations between different occupants, including shared equipment (phones, keyboards, mouse).
- Using remote working tools to avoid in-person meetings.
- Restricting attendance at meetings to those who absolutely need to attend and maintaining social distancing throughout.
- Avoiding transmission during office activities, such as sharing pens, mugs, kettles, cutlery and other objects.

Use of the church for other activities

We recommend you take the following steps when considering activities that do not fall within the broad definition of an act of worship (which we interpret to include church meetings, bible studies and Baptist church meetings).

Step 1: Agree the activity may take place

Churches must set their own policies as to the activities they wish to subject to any government restrictions that might be in place. In particular churches in Wales should consider the move to Alert Level 2 from 26 December 2021 and review the [summary of the rules at Alert level 2](#) to ensure any activity will be permitted. In particular organised activities are limited to 30 people indoors although there is no longer a limit on numbers outdoors. You should consider each activity on its own merits with respect to any risks it might introduce to the church congregation or community.

Step 2: Ensuring the activity can be conducted safely

We recommend Church Trustees satisfy themselves that any activities running on their premises are safe (whether they are part of the church or not). Even if an activity is run by an outside group who are hiring the premises it is unlikely the church would wish to have their name associated with a disease outbreak. We recommend that you ensure any activity is following the relevant government guidance for the activity, as well as any relevant guidance from other regulatory, industry or national governing bodies.

Church Trustees should ensure that:

- a specific and appropriate Risk Assessment for the activity is in place to evaluate risks and document the risk control measures to be taken to control the spread of COVID-19.
- All volunteers and staff have been briefed so they fully understand the controls that are implemented and their role in them.
- the Risk Assessment is reviewed and updated to incorporate any changes to government guidance.

We recommend adding special terms to your hiring agreement that commit hirers to following government guidance for their activity, conducting a suitable risk assessment, sharing it with you for your review and approval and implementing the control measures identified.

In relation to activities for young people (e.g. youth groups or toddler groups) the government has provided [guidance for "out of school settings" for children](#) and we have published [guidance for children's, youth and families ministry](#).

For food related activities, such as running a café or a lunch club, there is [guidance from the Food Standards Agency](#) (which cover England and Wales) and [guidance for operating restaurants, pubs, bars and takeaway services in England](#).

For other activities in churches in England should refer to the [Working safely during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) guidance and churches in Wales should refer to the [Alert level 0: guidance for employers, businesses and organisations](#)

Step 3: Implement appropriate precautions prior to the next activity

It is important to remember that any activity in the building gives rise to the risk that the virus is introduced into the building. You should therefore consider how subsequent users are protected from this risk. This could be by leaving some time between activities or by carrying out thorough cleaning to reduce the risk of the virus still being present for the next activity. We recommend you manage the cleaning yourself and do not rely on hirers to clean your premises as you would need to check such cleaning in any case to ensure you were providing a safe environment for subsequent users.

Where you are considering allowing external organisations to use your premises, you should refer to [Guidance Leaflet L18: Covid-19 Coronavirus Legal Issues](#)

Should you become aware that any visitor to your church building (including visitors to activities organised by others) subsequently develops symptoms or tests positive for the virus, follow the advice above in Section 4.

Section 8: Risk assessment for staff and volunteers returning to work in church offices and buildings

To open your building for worship, you will likely need employed staff, appointed ministers and volunteers to operate the building and services. You have a duty of care to these individuals so you will need to look at planning for their safe return to working in the church building.

Ministers

Please remember that any work a minister does on behalf of your church, including prayer, teaching, pastoral visiting, Sunday services, is considered to be 'work' for health and safety purposes so needs to be reviewed as part of your risk assessment process.

Volunteers

Any volunteers returning to work in the church should be risk assessed in the same way as staff as the church has a duty of care to them even if they receive no remuneration.

Thinking about risk

Before you invite anyone to return to work in your church office or building you will need to carry out a specific risk assessment, looking at the issues affect all staff, and consider any points specific to each individual. This risk assessment should be done in writing and will need to consider a wide range of factors. We have produced an [Employer Risk Assessment in relation to the health and safety of staff as they return](#).

Who should go to work?

Generally, all staff may now return to work. However, some staff will be unable or potentially unwilling to return due to their specific risk factors. They may also be isolating because they have tested positive for Covid-19. For more information on how to respond to these specific situations, please see the [Health and Safety Executive guidance](#).

Government guidance on risk assessment

The government has produced an updated guidance leaflet for employers that works through each section of potential risks in terms of allowing staff to return work in offices or indoor buildings. Risks in each potential area of concern are listed so those with responsibility for the safe return of staff can work their way through this in a systematic way. If you employ more than 5 people you are required to document the results of your risk assessment. If you have less than 5 staff, documenting your risk assessment is not a legal requirement, but we strongly recommend you keep a written record to show you have considered all relevant risks.

The government guidance can be found [here](#) and you may choose to read this alongside this document.

Section 9: Safeguarding considerations for churches planning to re-open their buildings.

It goes without saying that your church's safeguarding policies and procedures need to stay in place during lockdown and as you start to re-open your church buildings. However, before you re-open, we would encourage church leaders, including the church's Designated Person for Safeguarding, to take time to review your current safeguarding procedures and to consider whether any adaptations or additions are needed to reflect the way in which you plan to provide activities and services in the coming months.

For example, you may want to consider, decide and record your decision on the following questions:

- *If we intend to work in different ways in the coming months, have we carried out a safeguarding risk assessment for any new or altered activities?*
- *Can we provide adequate staffing for each activity or event? Have we checked this against our agreed ratios, particularly for work with children?*
- *Have there been any safeguarding concerns or allegations during the lockdown period that need to be dealt with before staff or volunteers recommence work?*
- *Have we considered whether any of our church members or attendees are now more vulnerable than they were before lockdown? How might we provide support and care?*
- *Many of our elderly church members and attendees will have been shielding since March 2020, increasing their feelings of isolation and loneliness. How might we adapt our pastoral care to reflect this and what extra safeguarding steps might we take to ensure they are not taken advantage of?*
- *Bearing in mind the increased reporting of domestic abuse, the sharp rise in offences involving viewing or distributing indecent images of children, and the high volume of calls to organisations like ChildLine and The Samaritans, are we ready for a higher number of concerns and support needs over the coming months? If not, how might we prepare for this?*
- *Suicide rates have continued to rise during lockdown. Have we equipped ourselves to respond to and care for those who are considering or who have attempted suicide?*
- *Have we updated our social media guidelines to reflect the increased use of social media as a key channel to contact and engage with children and young people, as well as adults, in our church?*
- *How might we best support our pastoral carers, including our minister(s), who are likely to be tired and possibly overly stressed after the demands of caring for our church during lockdown?*

You can find guidance on the safeguarding impact of Covid-19, on the main coronavirus pages of our website, including:

- guidance on use of social media with young people
- the need to review existing safeguarding contracts
- resources for young people

If you have questions on how to apply your safeguarding policy and procedures to new activities, or how to adapt to fit in with limitations on staff or volunteer numbers, please contact your Association Safeguarding Lead in the first instance.

Appendix 1: Legal Issues Relating to Re-opening

Legal Duties

The main piece of health and safety legislation is the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 ("the Act"). It sets out the general duties which employers have towards employees (including appointed ministers for the purposes of the act), volunteers and members of the public. This legislation applies when a church is an 'employer' because it has at least one paid employee. In many churches the only 'employee' will be the Minister. Where a church has no employees, it is still good practice for them to provide volunteers and members of the public with the same level of health and safety protection as they would in an employer/employee relationship. The Act says that you must do what is 'reasonably practicable' to ensure the health and safety of all who come, or are likely to come, onto church land or premises, even if they are trespassing; it is clearly appropriate to try to do all that we reasonably can to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of other people and would be reckless to do otherwise.

As well as employers, the Act can also apply to any church which has control of premises used as a workplace; this can include, for example, a landlord who retains control of the common parts of a building.

Churches have a legal duty to assess the risks which exist on their premises and to reduce them as far as reasonably practicable. This is the responsibility of the charity trustees. Any risk which cannot be entirely removed should be mitigated until it can be described as a small risk.

During the pandemic there are additional regulations which govern the purposes for which places of worship are able to open. Whilst these have been revoked for England the [Health Protection \(Coronavirus Restrictions\) \(No. 5\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#) remain in force. Our guidance is designed to assist your church in preparing to open for activities that are permitted under the regulations.

More general guidance on health and safety can be found in guideline leaflet [L10 Health and Safety and Fire Precautions](#) and our [L18 Coronavirus Legal Issues](#) leaflet contains more information about churches acting as landlords.

Your Liability as a church

Health and safety law is mostly enforced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or the Local Authority and carries criminal sanctions. If you meet your responsibilities under health and safety law, you will also considerably reduce the risk of being found negligent under civil law. Under civil law, if someone has been harmed, injured or made ill through your negligence, they may be able to bring a claim for damages or compensation against you.

More detailed information about issues of liability can be found in guideline leaflet [L16 Legal Liability of Church Members in a Baptist Church](#)

Insurance for legal liability

It is impossible to eliminate all risk in a church context and health and safety incidents can be reduced by undertaking comprehensive risk assessments and putting appropriate safeguards in place. However, in most cases, insurance will be available to a church to provide cover in the eventuality of a claim arising against the church.

Churches which are employers must have employers' liability insurance. This will enable you to meet the cost of compensation for your employees' injuries or illness. It is a criminal offence if you do not have it. Some specialist insurers will treat volunteers as employees for the purpose of insurance.

It is also very important that churches have adequate public liability insurance, which covers your church if it is held legally liable for injury to a member of the public who is harmed or injured whilst on church premises. Public liability claims may take a number of years to emerge, so it is wise to consider an appropriate level of cover with your insurer and to keep all records of your insurance

cover indefinitely. Trustee indemnity insurance is often included as an extension to public liability cover and protects the charity trustees for wrongful acts whilst acting in their capacity as trustees which results in a legal liability to pay damages and costs. This will not cover acts of a reckless, dishonest or criminal nature.

We have had confirmation from Baptist Insurance that they do not anticipate adding special terms to their policies relating to Coronavirus. If you have another insurer, then you should confirm their position with them directly.

(Please note that the types of insurance cover described above are distinct from buildings insurance).

Appendix 2: Reoccupation Checklist

Use this template to record important checks of your premises before returning after a period of closure.

	Yes	No	N/A	Action Required
Statutory Checks				
Is the five-yearly fixed wiring (electrical installation condition report) within date and rated as satisfactory?				
Is the gas safety certificate(s) in date for annual review?				
Plant rooms: Has all plant and equipment been suitably serviced?				
Has PAT testing been completed where relevant?				
Have all pressure vessels been examined as per the scheme of examination?				
Fire Safety				
Have you reviewed your Fire Risk Assessment (FRA)?				
Are boiler rooms and electrical cupboards free from combustible storage?				
Are skips and bins a safe distance away from your building(s)?				
Have you informed your Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) of your re-occupation (where necessary)?				
Has the fire alarm system been serviced within the timescale outlined by the contractor?				
Has the fire alarm been tested weekly during the lockdown period?				
Is the fire alarm functioning correctly?				
Have all fire doors, maglocks, acoustic closing mechanisms and other associated equipment been checked for functionality?				
Are all fire extinguishers in place and free from defects?				
Have all fire suppression / sprinkler systems been suitably maintained and checked for sufficient pressure (where appropriate)?				
Have fire dampers been maintained (within the last 12 months)?				
Have the automatic smoke vents been maintained (within the last 12 months)?				

	Yes	No	N/A	Action Required
Has the lightning protection been tested and maintained (within the last twelve months)?				
Emergency Lighting				
Has the emergency lighting system been serviced (within the last 12 months)?				
Has the emergency lighting been tested monthly during the lockdown period?				
Is the emergency lighting system fully functional?				
Building Security				
Is there any damage to the structure, roof, windows or fixtures?				
Is the CCTV system functioning correctly?				
Is the intruder alarm functioning correctly?				
Contractors				
Have contractors been re-engaged (where possible)?				
Can contractors be controlled on site?				
Have measures been put in place to ensure contractors (and other visitors) with identified symptoms are not permitted entry to your premises?				
Water Safety				
Has your Legionella Risk Assessment been reviewed?				
Is there a re-commissioning plan (where necessary)?				
Has weekly flushing of all unused/little-used outlets (including external taps) been completed during lockdown?				
Have temperatures been checked against acceptable ranges?				
	Recorded temperature			
Cold water storage tank (maximum 20°C)				
Hot water storage tank (minimum 60°C)				
Sentinel tap (furthest tap from the boiler – minimum 50°C)				
Have all spray fittings been removed, descaled and replaced?				

	Yes	No	N/A	Action Required
Is Thermostatic Mixing Valve (TMV) maintenance up to date?				
Has the system been disinfected/chlorinated (including water tanks) where necessary?				
Utilities				
If any utilities have been temporarily shut off, have these been turned back on?				
Equipment				
Are all first aid kits in place, in date and fully stocked?				
Has the defibrillator(s) been checked for safe operation?				
Has all equipment been switched on and checked for correct function?				
Are all necessary guards in place / undamaged?				
Has equipment been serviced or maintained as necessary by a competent person?				
Have the annual services been completed on all oil / electric boilers?				
Have all six-monthly LOLER checks been completed by a competent person?				
Have all window restrictors been checked to ensure they are in place and safe?				
Staffing				
Have risk assessments and plans been reviewed and agreed with vulnerable persons?				
Has your Lone Working Risk Assessment been reviewed?				
Are there sufficient staff on site to undertake safety-critical roles e.g., first aiders, maintenance, fire wardens?				
Is there sufficient supervision and support of staff?				
Does re-occupation need to be staged to maintain social distancing?				
General				
Has the building been checked for signs of pest infestation? Where appropriate, has a pest control contractor visited the premises recently and are suitable controls in place?				
Is any asbestos likely to have been disturbed during lockdown?				

	Yes	No	N/A	Action Required
Has the insurance company been informed of the recommencing of activities within the premises?				
Has re-occupation been considered within the Business Continuity Plan?				
Can social distancing measures be observed, where reasonable, at all times?				
Has a COVID-19 Re-occupation Risk Assessment been completed to ensure controls are implemented to protect staff?				
Has the risk assessment been communicated to all staff to ensure their awareness of requirements?				
Have all areas to be occupied been deep cleaned?				
Do you have sufficient cleaning staff, stock and processes in place to ensure that your premises remain safe?				
Are there sufficient hand-cleaning facilities made available, such as soap and hot water or hand sanitiser?				
Do trees and boundary walls within your grounds appear visually safe?				
Have you reviewed your last General Risk Assessment (GRA)?				

Summary of actions identified

Action required	By	Priority	Time scale	Completed

Appendix 3: Pre-event checklist

This checklist is to be used in conjunction with the most up-to-date government guidance during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It should be completed prior to the event day starting and should be fully communicated to all team members. It is the responsibility of the Church Trustees to ensure that the site is safe to open and that controls are put in place.

Leader name: Date:/...../.....

Item	Y or N	Comments	Reported to
Has the latest government guidance been checked and followed?			
Have any members of team reported any symptoms of COVID-19?			
Has the usual church cleaning checklist been completed and cleaning materials put in place?			
Is there adequate hand soap, paper towels and running water in place?			
Has hand washing facility or sanitiser been provided in all locations needed			
Are bins available for disposal of any rubbish?			
Is the plan for managing traffic flow for social distancing in place and floor/wall signage in place			
Are stewards briefed on agreed procedures for arrivals, departures and emergencies?			
Have chairs/pews been laid out and marked in line with social distancing requirements?			
Procedures in place to record names and contact details of attendees			
Building ventilation set in line with recommendations to maximise air flow			
Is there any other information to consider?			

After carrying out the above checks, please sign below.

I have carried out the above checks and found the site to be following the current government guidelines in line with COVID-19.

Leader signature:

Date:

Appendix 4: Cleaning checklist for suspected Coronavirus contamination

Premises:	Date:	Completed by:
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This checklist is intended to assist in carrying out cleaning when Coronavirus contamination is suspected. Where there is no specific suspicion of Coronavirus contamination, the government guidance recommends that normal cleaning practices are followed. The infection risk from coronavirus (COVID-19) following contamination of the environment decreases over time. It is not yet clear at what point there is no risk. However, studies of other viruses in the same family suggest that, in most circumstances, the risk is likely to be reduced significantly after 48 hours.

Action	Guidance	Completed (tick)	Comments
Confirm PPE worn before cleaning commences	Where possible, wear disposable or washing up gloves and aprons.		
Hard surfaces have been cleaned prior to disinfecting?	Clean hard surfaces with warm soapy water using a disposable cloth.		
Disinfect all surfaces with usual disinfectant	Pay attention to any frequently touched areas and surfaces, e.g., doors, toilets, stair rails and phones.		
Clean any areas of heavy contamination (bodily fluids, or sleeping areas) as above using additional PPE where possible	Additional PPE would include protection for the eyes, mouth and nose, as well as gloves and apron.		
Any PPE used is double bagged and to be stored securely for 72 hours before being thrown away in general waste	Use plastic bin bags where possible.		
Hands washed with soap and water for 20 seconds, after removing PPE	Hand wash using warm water after cleaning and regularly throughout the day.		

Additional guidance, information and instruction when cleaning:

- Use disposable cloths or paper roll and disposable mop heads to clean all hard surfaces, floors, chairs, door handles and sanitary fittings, with one of the following options below:
- A combined detergent disinfectant solution at a dilution of 1,000 parts per million available chlorine (ppm av.cl.); or
- A household detergent followed by disinfection (1,000 ppm av.cl.). Follow the manufacturer's instructions for dilution, application and contact times for all detergents and disinfectants.
- NB: If an alternative disinfectant is used within the organisation, this should be checked and ensure that it is effective against enveloped viruses.
- Avoid creating splashes and spray when cleaning.
- Any cloths and mop heads used must be disposed of and should be put into waste bags as outlined below.
- When items cannot be cleaned using detergents or laundered (for example, upholstered furniture and mattresses), steam cleaning should be used.
- Any items that are heavily contaminated with body fluids and cannot be cleaned by washing should be disposed of.
- If possible, keep an area closed off and secure for 48 hours. After this time, the amount of virus contamination will have decreased substantially, and you can clean as normal with your usual products.

Laundry

- Wash items in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Use the warmest water setting and dry items completely. Dirty laundry that has been in contact with an unwell person can be washed with other people's items.
- Do not shake dirty laundry – this minimises the possibility of dispersing virus through the air.
- Clean and disinfect anything used for transporting laundry with your usual products, in line with the cleaning guidance above.

Waste

- Waste from cleaning areas should be put in a plastic rubbish bag and tied when full.
- The plastic bag should then be placed in a second bin bag and tied.
- It should be put in a suitable and secure place away from children. You should not put your waste in communal waste areas until the waste has been stored for at least 72 hours.

Appendix 5: Example privacy statement

.....Baptist Church Privacy Notice for collecting contact information from church attendees.

This privacy notice is an addendum toBaptist Church's main privacy statement and notices. The Charity Trustees ofBaptist Church (as Data Controller)* can be contacted by ringingor emailing

We are collecting your name and contact details in order to fulfil our responsibility to provide a safe environment in which those attendingBaptist Church can pray and worship during this COVID-19 recovery phase. We will only use this information to contact you in the event that we believe you may have come into contact with a suspected case of COVID-19 atBaptist Church and it may be necessary to share your details with NHS Test and Trace if they are requested for contact tracing and the investigation of local outbreaks. Your name and contact details will temporarily be securely stored [please provide detail of how details will be stored and kept secure]. They will be retained for a period of 21 days in line with government guidance and then disposed of within the following 7 days.

Please informBaptist Church as soon as possible if you test positive for coronavirus or develop any of the following COVID-19 symptoms:

- A high temperature
- A new, continuous cough
- A loss or change to your sense of smell or taste

Data that is collected in a place of worship and might subsequently be shared is considered to be special category data, and therefore we need your consent to record, store and to share your contact details with NHS Test and Trace if necessary. By providing your data you are consenting to it being used in line with this privacy statement. You are free to refuse or withdraw your consent at any time. In the event you do not wish to provide your contact details you will still be able accessBaptist Church.

*please note – if your church is a CIO or CLG, the data controller will be the church, acting through its Trustees.

This is one of a series of Guidelines that are offered as a resource for Baptist ministers and churches. They have been prepared by the Baptist Union of Great Britain and are, of necessity, intended only to give very general advice in relation to the topics covered. These guidelines should not be relied upon as a substitute for obtaining specific and more detailed advice in relation to a particular matter.

The staff at the Baptist Union of Great Britain at Baptist House will be very pleased to answer your queries and help in any way possible.

Contact Address and Registered Office:

Baptist Union of Great Britain, Baptist House, PO Box 44, 129 Broadway, Didcot, OX11 8RT
Telephone 01235 517700 email supportservices@baptist.org.uk website
www.baptist.org.uk

Registered Charity Number: 1181392, operating as a CIO.

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