# 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-during-the-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic) 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:**  **St James's, Parkham** | **Assessor’s name:**  **Jane Dennis** | **Date completed:**  **27-7-20** | **Review date:**  **xxxxx** |

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| **Area of Focus** | **Controls required** | **Additional information** | **Action by whom?** | **Completed – date and name** |
| **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 | Not applicable in our case | N/A |  |
| A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant. | An example can be [found here](https://www.ecclesiastical.com/documents/lone-working.pdf). | N/A |  |
| Buildings have been aired before use. |  | N/A |  |
| Check for animal waste and general cleanliness. |  | N/A |  |
| 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) | N/A |  |
| Switch on and check electrical and heating systems if needed. Commission system checks as necessary. |  | N/A |  |
| Holy water stoups and the font are empty. |  | N/A |  |
| Ensure safe use of equipment needed for livestreaming: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets, cables/tripod causing trip hazard |  | 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. | Discussions at last PCC confirmed decision not to open for private prayer |  |  |
| Update your website, A Church Near You, and any relevant social media. |  | Parish Administrator for ACNY |  |
| Consider if a booking system is needed, whether for general access or for specific events/services |  | N/A |  |
| If opening to tourists consider applying for the Visit Britain ‘Good to Go’ standard mark | [Apply here](https://goodtogo.visitbritain.com/). | N/A |  |
| **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. | Before the church is reopened, the above steps will be carried out where applicable, whenever that is. | Warden, cleaners, H & S advisor |  |
| 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)**.** | Noted |  |
| Choose one point of entry into the church to manage flow of people and indicate this with notices, keeping emergency exits available at all times. Where possible use a different exit. | Entry and exit by main door as no safe alternative door available to use as a separate exit. One way system to be put in place with a "give way" at the end of the south aisle by persons leaving the church, to persons entering the church. To be overseen by a steward during services. | Warden,  H & S Advisor |  |
| Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside). | Only likely to be necessary if a large congregation is expected, i.e. a funeral or wedding. Notices re social distancing purchased and to be placed outside the church. | Warden,  H & S Advisor |  |
| Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation. |  | Warden |  |
| Remove Bibles/literature/hymn books/leaflets | People to have their own order of service which will kept in their seat. Everything else to be removed.  A few spare to be available for visitors. | Warden,  Sidespersons |  |
| Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on) | Only likely to be necessary if a large congregation is expected, i.e. a funeral or wedding. | Warden,  H & S Advisor |  |
| Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance | All removed from use | H & S Advisor |  |
| Remove or isolate children’s resources and play area | All removed from use | H&S officer |  |
| 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). |  | H&S officer |  |
| Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing. | Every other pew to be cordoned off. The seat nearest the aisle for pews to be used to be marked not for use. | H & S Advisor |  |
| Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements. | Signs to be made and put up | H&S officer |  |
| Limit access to places were the public does not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon in needed. | Public to be denied access to belfry and kitchen. Screen door between church and kitchen to be closed, access to kitchen by vestry door to be cordoned off. Belfry door to be kept closed, "no entry" sign to be attached to door | H&S officer |  |
| Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use. | Register with [Parish Buying](https://www.parishbuying.org.uk/) for procurement options.  Hand sanitisers to be placed inside porch with signage asking that hands be sanitised prior to entry to church.  Further sanitiser to be placed at end of main aisle | H&S officer |  |
| Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing | Consult [advice on gaining temporary permissions](https://www.churchofengland.org/media/20647). | N/A |  |
| Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc. | Signs purchased to be put up in appropriate places. | H&S officer |  |
| 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)**.**  To be done before and after each service. | Designated person |  |
| Check that handwashing 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 option  No public access to kitchen | H&S officer |  |
| 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.  Hand towels and waste bin to be installed in toilet | H&S officer |  |
| Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them. | Bin liners in use | Cleaners and Warden |  |
| If possible, provide safe means for worshippers and visitors to record their name and contact details; retain each day’s record for 21 days |  | Warden or designated person with own writing equipment |  |
| 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. |  | Warden  Vicar |  |
| **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 will generally be the case; the exception being for funerals. |  |  |
| If 72-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating. | Rota to be reviewed and vulnerable people excluded from it | Jane Dennis |  |
| Set up a cleaning rota to cover your opening arrangements. | Normal Rota | Jane Dennis |  |
| All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable). | Register with [Parish Buying](https://www.parishbuying.org.uk/) for procurement options.  Disposable gloves to be purchased and put in cupboard with cleaning materials. | Jane Dennis |  |
| 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. | Warden and H & S Advisor |  |
| Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site. |  | Jane Dennis |  |
| Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal. | Weekly will be sufficient for our situation, ie after each service. | Jane Dennis |  |
| **Cleaning the church after known exposure to someone with Coronavirus symptoms** | If possible close the church building for 72 hours with no access permitted. | Only exception would be in case of funeral or wedding |  |  |
| 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) | Warden |  |
| 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)**.** |  |  |