

GUIDE TO USING YOUR WORSHIP SPACE

Version 1	10/07/2020	Simplification of previous guidance; changes to singing guide; definition of place of worship added
Version 2	28/7/2020	Additional information for professional singers/audiences inside
Version 3	3/8/2020	Updated guidance regarding face masks
Version 4	18/8/2020	Updates regarding singing and wind instruments (in England only), added information about mechanical ventilation and added links for Wales and Scotland
Version 5	22/9/2020	Updates regarding the rule of 6, addition of 7 Priority actions, updates to choirs and singing, harvest celebrations, link for extremely vulnerable people, FAQ's and checklist for religious services
Version 6	20/10/2020	Added in Covid-19 Alert tier levels

Introduction

This Guide is part of STEP 5: Safety First in the process for reopening and managing your church building. It provides broad considerations for reopening and using chapels and worship spaces generally for **all** activities taking place in your worship space. It also provides the framework for using a chapel or worship space for prayer and public worship. Subsequent specific guidance for services or certain user groups assumes reference to these general points.

Definition

The overall Government guidance for Places of Worship is found at –

- In England - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>
- In Scotland - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/>
- In Wales - <https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus-html>

It defines A Place of Worship as –

A place of worship refers to a building used for regular religious ceremonies, communal worship or similar gatherings by religious organisations. It includes the use of surrounding grounds, for example, adjoining car parks, courtyards or gardens for which the venue managers are also responsible.

The guidance also covers premises when being used for religious gatherings, even when their primary purpose is not for religious gatherings, such as a community centre. These premises will only be able to be used where they are permitted to be open and additional guidance may be applicable.

This guidance does not cover public parks, private homes, cultural sites or other open spaces, such as woodlands which may be used for religious purposes. If people do want to engage in worship in these spaces, then the guidance relevant to that place should be adhered to.¹

¹ See In England - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>

In Scotland - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/>

The following guidance is therefore for any of the above areas.

Important Update from 12 October 2020

The government has introduced a new system of local Covid-19 Alert Levels in England. Check the alert level for your area on the [List of Areas with Local Restrictions](#). Then read the guidelines for the relevant alert level:

- [Local Covid Alert Level: Medium](#)
- [Local Covid Alert Level: High](#)
- [Local Covid Alert Level: Very High](#)

The government have also produced printable A4 [Local Alert Level posters](#) for each level.

In Wales, please refer to the [Local Lockdown Information](#) and the information on the [FireBreak](#).

In Scotland, please refer to the [Local Lockdown Information](#)

Important Update from 14 September 2020

- All spaces that are to be used for worship space should be [COVID-19 secure](#)², which means they meet the [7 Steps for Working Safely Together](#) for opening and running as outlined in the government guidance.
- Those in attendance should gather in groups of no more than 6 people. This relates to the maximum group size before attendees enter the church and therefore can sit together in church. It is not a directive to sit people together in groups of 6 as part of worship.
 - a. You can continue to space chairs and people as before with 2m distancing between household groups, which could be individuals, couples, larger families, etc.
 - b. Within each group of 6, those who are not in the same household should continue to practise social distancing.
 - c. Each group of 6 should **not** mingle with any other groups (see FAQ's below for more information).

General Considerations

- Limits on numbers attending for prayer and public worship should be decided locally on the basis of the capacity of the place of worship following a risk assessment³ and adhering strictly to current social distancing recommendations (2 meters in Wales⁴). In Scotland, no more than 50 people are allowed.⁵

In Wales - <https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus-html>

² England -

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/903464/staying-covid-19-secure-2020-230720.pdf

Wales - <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-08/keep-wales-safe-at-work-five-key-steps.pdf>

Scotland - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-general-guidance-for-safer-workplaces/>

³ See *Restrictions on Capacity* in the [Safe Use of Places of Worship](#)

⁴ See *Taking all Reasonable Steps to Maintain Social Distancing* on [Reopening Places of Worship](#)

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/pages/capacity/>

- To limit the length of time people are sat together, it is advisable that services are adapted to be undertaken in the shortest reasonable time – a suggested **maximum** of 30 – 45 minutes should be considered.
- At the end of a service it is advised that those attending leave the building as soon as practical. Formal or informal fellowship, including refreshments, after the service is discouraged. Please refer to the [Guide on Food and Drink](#)⁶.
- It might also be considered having different services either during Sunday or other days of the week to suit particular groups such as those who are [extremely vulnerable](#)⁷.
- (A) Steward(s) at the entrance should manage how people enter and exit the building; this may include monitoring spaces, to avoid reducing social distancing. Methodist branded signs and posters can be downloaded [here](#).
- Read through the key principles of the government’s [Checklist for Religious Services](#).
- Before and after use, the worship area should be thoroughly cleaned.
- Before and after use of the worship area, leave doors open.
- If practical it should also be considered leaving doors opening during a service as part of a wider ventilation strategy while the building is occupied. This could include open doors, but also open windows to give as much **natural** ventilation as possible.
- If there are ceiling fans, air conditioning systems or heating systems which blow air, the current advice states that the need for an adequate supply of fresh air through natural or mechanical ventilation has not changed and that improving ventilation may help reduce the risk. Please refer to please refer to HSE’s [Guidance on Ventilation](#) or the [CIBSE Covid-19 Ventilation Guidance](#).
- Use suitable temporary markings⁸ on pew seating, or arrange loose seating to maintain the advised social distance limits between worshippers (note: this should include adjacent, in front and behind). This could be adaptable for those from the same household.
- In main entrances and exits, the advised social distances limits must be clearly marked on the floor, as these areas may be more susceptible to people congregating.
- Hand sanitisers should be available at entrances/exits.
- For seasonal services (such as Harvest), please refer to separate guidance found under [Guide to Using Your Worship Space](#).
- Face coverings are mandatory (in England and Scotland) and they should be used during worship or larger gatherings in order to help reduce the spread of the virus. However, face coverings should not be seen as a substitute to other measures such as social distancing and good hygiene. As this decision is to be enforced by law, managing trustees have to insist upon the wearing of face coverings in their risk assessments and action plans. Please refer to the [Guide for Face Coverings](#) for more information and exceptions.
- A small number of face masks should be available for members of the congregation if required.
- Communal books of any sort are not to be used preferably (or should be stored away after use for a minimum of 48 hours). However it is preferable that any words or texts should be displayed using a projector or through individual printed material, which can be removed or destroyed, though it is best not to be handing anything to those who are attending.

⁶ In the ‘Guide to Using Your Worship Space’ tab found on <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/property/coronavirus-guidance-for-property/>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

⁸ For delicate fabrics or furniture of historic value please ensure maker material is suitable and will not cause damage.

- Please consult *Copyright guidance* on the Methodist Church website, for both online (including projection) and printed materials: www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/copyright-guidance
 - We have put together *Copyright guidance* to support you through the issues that we are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this guidance remains important as churches begin to reopen. The key point to remember about copyright is that anything that you have not created entirely from scratch is ‘third-party material.’ Third-party material will have, unless it has been made available freely, a copyright holder. Use of the material without the copyright holder’s permission, correct licence, or other concession infringes their copyright.
 - As you return to worshipping in church buildings you need to remain aware, especially if you are using a projector or are producing pew sheets (including any that may be emailed to those who are not attending in person) rather than using books, that you are not necessarily automatically covered by the licences and concessions (e.g. from CCLI and ONE LICENSE) that you may use for standard church services.
 - You can find information about these licences on the *Copyright matters* page for *Singing the Faith* www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/about-singing-the-faith-plus/copyright-matters
 - Some of the usual restrictions around needing permission have been relaxed to take account of the changes to worship in response to COVID-19, however as Government restrictions on meeting together relax, these temporary copyright concessions are likely to be removed and the permissions tightened up again. Therefore, *Copyright guidance* explains the options available both for the current situation and for any remote worship in the future. It includes materials that are available under licences and concessions, but we also advise where materials may need permissions.
 - The Methodist Church has issued a copyright waiver to cover the period while we are experiencing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes any of our own original materials in the Methodist Worship Book (there is further information about the Methodist Worship Book in *Copyright guidance*).

***COVID-19 copyright waiver:** The Methodist Church in Britain has made some copyright concessions during the pandemic, which allow any use of content that is our exclusive copyright in any worship context by any medium or method, providing it is non-commercial, to the end of this Connexional year (31/08/2020), and providing it is acknowledged as ‘Used with permission. [Details of content] from [details of publication/source] © Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes. The Methodist Church in Britain’.*

- *Copyright guidance* covers liturgy, scripture, hymns and songs, music, poetry, images and videos. Copyright information specifically for *Singing the Faith* is here <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/about-singing-the-faith-plus/copyright-matters/>
- Individual worshipers can bring their own books and take them away afterwards.
- If a congregation cannot be accommodated safely, then Managing Trustees should very seriously consider alternatives arrangements, bearing in mind that there is no obligation to re-open the church at this point. Alternatives include:
 1. Continued use of online live-streaming services (see www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/copyright-guidance);

2. Using other rooms with links for sound and/or vision;
3. Having multiple services.
- The use of music (live or recorded) is allowed and musical instruments (see below) can be used. Use of music, which may be copyrighted, is also covered in the copyright guidance: www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/copyright-guidance
- Music and Singing:
 1. England

Allowed (inside and outside):

 - Professional and non-professional individual singing;
 - Professional and non-professional singing groups of no more than 6 people;
 - The playing of musical instruments (including wind instruments)⁹, as part of a worship group or similar. They must be accommodated safely, ensuring that others are protected from potential virus transfer through increased social distancing, screens or other solutions. This must be assessed for risk;
 - Playback of recordings of singing and music at a reasonable level to avoid the need for raised voices.
 - Places of Worship can be used for rehearsals and performances for both professional and non-professional choirs, musicians and other performing arts. This is guided by the Government's Performing Arts guidance (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts>).

Not Allowed (inside or outside):

 - Congregational singing, shouting or raising voices;
 - Congregational playing of musical instruments that are blown into;
 2. Scotland
 - Inside and outside - Singing as a congregation is **not** allowed.
 - Inside - the use of music is allowed and musical instruments (except wind instruments) can be used.
 - Outside – the use of music is allowed and all musical instruments¹⁰, including wind instruments can be used if safety precautions are followed.
 - Inside and outside – A individual is allowed to sing, as long as it can be accommodated safely, ensuring that others are protected from potential virus transfer through increased social distancing, screens or other solutions. This must be assessed for risk.
 - Outside – Groups of professional and non-professional singers can perform to worshippers, but this should be assessed for safety and the number of singers limited to a number suitable for the space available, while achieving safe social distances.
 3. Wales
 - The use of music is allowed and all musical instruments, except wind instruments, can be played¹¹.
 - Inside and outside - singing as a congregation is **not** allowed.

⁹ Please refer to <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts>

¹⁰ Please refer to <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-the-performing-arts-and-venues-sector/pages/overview/>

¹¹ <https://gov.wales/rehearsing-performing-and-taking-part-performing-arts-guidance-phased-return-html>

- Inside and outside – An individual is allowed to sing, as long as it can be accommodated safely, ensuring that others are protected from potential virus transfer through increased social distancing, screens or other solutions. This must be assessed for risk.

FAQ's with answers from the Ministry for Housing, Community & Local Government

Q. Do I need to arrange my seating into groups of six rather than in households?

- No. The total number of people attending worship is limited by how many people can socially distance within the venue. Seating should enable everyone to practise social distancing from those they don't live with.
- The maximum number of people that you should socially interact with in a place of worship is six, particularly when leaving or arriving.

Q. Can you stop social distancing within a group of six?

- No. Everyone should continue to practise social distancing when mixing with people they don't live with or are not in a support bubble with, even within a group of six.

Q. How does the rule of six work for prayers, etc. where the activity is communal, and not in groups?

- The number of people able to attend a place of worship is determined by the number of people the space can safely contain while all attendees adhere to social distancing of 2m between households, or 1m with additional safeguards.
- You should only enter and leave the venue together, and socially interact, within a group of up to six, whether this six consists of one household or multiple households.
- Where group members are from different households, they should maintain social distancing of 2meters, or 1meter with additional safeguards

Q: Can groups socialise with one another after worship/ study?

- No, groups of six should not mix within the venue and should leave in the group they arrived in.
- Everyone, at all times, needs to limit social contact as much as possible.

Q. Does the exemption for Places of Worship cover faith groups hiring other venues (or outside spaces) for communal worship?

- Yes, it is the activity of communal worship that is exempt from the law against groups of more than six people from gathering.
- A faith group can host a prayer service or communal worship at a hired venue that is Covid-19 secure, with the same restrictions as a place of worship.

Q. Does the exemption cover faith groups gathering in outdoor public spaces for communal worship?

- Yes, it is the activity of communal worship that is exempt from the law against groups of more than 6 people from gathering, rather than the place of worship.

- This means that a faith group can host a prayer service or communal worship in an outdoor public space, with the same restrictions as a fixed place of worship.
- In order to do so, they must undertake a rigorous risk assessment for the event alongside the private owner or relevant local authority, and ensure that safeguards are in place to allow for strict social distancing between attendees.
- All attendees should provide contact details for the purposes of NHS Test and Trace.
- This exemption does not apply to private spaces such as gardens.

Q. Does the exemption cover faith groups gathering in outdoor private spaces, such as gardens, for communal worship?

- No. The “rule of six” applies to all private dwelling spaces, including gardens.
- Only six people are permitted by law to gather in a private garden.
- We do understand that this may cause challenges for communities planning to host religious services in private, however the regulations have been changed given the public health risks associated with private houses and gardens.