

Coronavirus: Guidance on re-opening Baptist church buildings

The government has announced that from 4 July 2020, Places of Worship in England will be permitted to open again for services, in addition to being open for private prayer which has been permitted since 13 June 2020. This guidance leaflet is intended to help churches work through the practicalities of re-opening. Please note that whilst much of this leaflet is generally applicable it has been written primarily with a view to re-opening churches for worship services.

Churches in **England** should refer to [the Government Guidelines for Places of Worship](#) and ensure that they operate within these as a minimum. These should be regularly reviewed as they are updated frequently. Please note that reference to "Venue Managers" in the Government guidance should be interpreted by Baptist churches as being the church charity trustees, who carry the legal responsibility for the general control and management of the administration of the church.

Churches in **Wales** should refer to [the Guidance for Places of Worship](#) which are different in some material aspects.

This document is based on the general national guidance. Some areas of the country are subject to special regulations to control outbreaks of Coronavirus in a local area, which take precedence. You should check [local restrictions in England](#) or [local restrictions in Wales](#) and follow any restrictions that apply.

These guidance notes are intended to help Baptist Church trustees/leaders/deacons to work through the issues involved in practicalities of re-opening their buildings and interpreting the guidance in a Baptist context. These notes are not a replacement for the Government guidance and should be read in conjunction with that guidance. If you identify any conflict between this document and the government guidance, the government guidance prevails.

A separate leaflet [Coronavirus: Guidance on Church Worship](#) has been written to help churches consider the choice on whether and when to re-open and the conduct of those services.

This guidance has been put together with the support of Ellis Whittam as Health & Safety Consultants. They have a specific Coronavirus Advice Hub available at <https://elliswhittam.com/covid-19/>

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

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Date	Version	Updates Made
30/06/2020	1.0	Initial Publication
30/06/2020	1.1	Link added to Risk Assessment template
30/06/2020	1.2	Link added to Government Guidance on Multi-Use Community facilities
01/07/2020	1.3	Link added to Risk Assessment templates
02/07/2020	1.4	Added Appendix 6 – Contractor Checklist and paragraph about management of contractors into section 2. Added reference to collection of posters. Made clear that face coverings are not required under government guidance where 2m distancing is possible, but still recommended
09/07/2020	1.5	Clarified wording on waste in Section 2. Added paragraph on transport in section 4 Added comment on queuing systems at entrances in section 4 Added paragraphs on Church Members’ Meetings and Prayer Meetings and Bible Studies in section 5. Updated paragraph on children’s’ activities in section 5 to refer to new government and Baptists Together guidance. Updated paragraph on social interactions in section 5 Added additional detail to section on use of church for other activities Reworded of reoccupation checklist item about pest control.
16/07/2020	1.6	Note on local regulations on first page Added text around interpreting scoring of risks in Introduction section. Added text around how this fits with the mission of the church in the Introduction section. Clarification in section 2 paragraph on building controls and ventilation that guidance is referring to fresh air ventilation. Updated text on PPE in section 3 relating to young children and face coverings and face coverings being mandatory in shops from 24 July. New paragraph on use of outside spaces in section 3. Updated text on recording details of attendees to incorporate ICO guidance in section 4 Updated wording on limiting social interactions in section 5. New paragraphs on use of the premises for filming services for broadcast and streaming of services in section 5. Updated wording on other uses of the premises, including external organisations hiring premises in section 6.
20/07/20	1.7	Updated paragraph on use of outdoor spaces in section 3 to reflect clarified guidance on gatherings off church premises.
23/07/20	1.8	New paragraph in section 4, on recording where people sit to mitigate against the entire congregation being asked to self-isolate by NHS Track and Trace
27/07/20	1.9	Updated to reflect the guidance issued by the Welsh Government on 20/07/20.
27/07/20	1.9	Updated Section 3 to reflect that face coverings should be worn in a place of worship even if 2m social distancing can be maintained.
31/07/20	1.10	Updated Section 3 to reflect that in England wearing face coverings in a place of worship will be mandatory from 8 August.
03/08/20	1.11	Update in Section 3 with new paragraph regarding face coverings and leading services in England. Additional sentence clarifying that face shields / visors do not meet the requirement to wear a face covering.
03/08/20	1.12	Update to section 3 to reflect clarified guidance on use of face coverings in weddings.

04/08/20	1.13	Update section 3 adding paragraph clarifying that church trustees should determine the appropriate face covering for church staff to wear when church service is taking place in the building.
06/08/20	1.14	Temporary note added that we are anticipating clarification of the requirements for use of face coverings by those leading a service and the bride and groom in a marriage ceremony.
11/08/20	1.15	Update Section 3 to reflect updated guidance regarding the use of face coverings. Updates to Sections 5 and 6 regarding the process to follow should a member of your congregation or visitor to your church test positive for the virus. Addition of Appendix 7: Template Press Release regarding Track and Trace.
13/08/20	1.16	Minor wording updates throughout for clarification and elimination of typographical errors. Integration of Welsh guidance into section 3, 4 and 5 in the document Updated section 3 to reflect Shielding being paused in England. Updated section 5 to give more detail on what to do in the event of a visitor to the church premises subsequently testing positive or developing symptoms.
20/08/20	1.17	Updated section 5 and other areas that referred to this section to reflect new rules on music groups leading worship. Revised formatting of hyperlinks to be consistent throughout the document.
27/08/20	1.18	Updated paragraphs on cleaning in section 2 to reflect the latest government guidance. Updated paragraph on Weddings, Funerals and Baptisms in section 5 to reflect that these are all now permitted within the restrictions. Updated paragraph on "Ensuring the activity can be conducted safely" in Section 6 to make clear the duties of Church Trustees as venue managers. Also Added links to guidance on food-related activities and community centres in this section.
03/09/20	1.19	Minor updates to cleaning guidance in section 2 and Appendix 3 to make clear that Appendix 3 only applies to cases where coronavirus contamination is suspected.
10/09/20	1.20	Updated Section 3 to reflect the new guidance on social distancing that applies from 14 September and updates on use of outdoor spaces. Updated Section 4 to reflect the new legal force around collection of data for Track and Trace from 18 September.
17/09/20	1.21	Updated links on cover page to local lockdown restrictions in England and Wales. Updated section 3 to reflect the lack of clarity over larger gatherings in public outdoor spaces. Updated section 4 to reflect updated requirements for collecting data and displaying a QR code for checking on the NHS Test and Trace app. Updated text in Section 6 relating to reflect revised guidance for community buildings.
18/09/20	1.22	Updated section 3 text on use of outside spaces to reflect clarifications received from government. Updated section 5 to reflect explicit limitation to 6 singers and change to guidance on blown instruments.

Introduction: Critical First Steps

Conducting a risk assessment

It is an essential requirement that prior to re-opening your building you carry out a risk assessment of the risks in relation to transmission of Coronavirus. [A template for this risk assessment](#) is provided alongside this guidance. Once completed this must be reviewed by the Church Trustees collectively to ensure that they believe as a group that appropriate measures have been taken to manage the risk prior to re-opening. 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.

It is likely that your evaluation of risks in your risk assessment will give a high score to many Coronavirus risks, and indeed may come out with the top risk score, even with control measures in place. This is almost certainly appropriate because in this time of pandemic there is a meaningful chance that your church activities could result in the death of one of your attendees through contracting coronavirus. It is unlikely that any risks you will have identified in a more general risk assessment would carry this level of risk. This serves to emphasise the seriousness with which you should take your planning around re-opening. Indeed, having conducted your risk assessment you may conclude that the risk remains too high and should simply be avoided by not re-opening at this time

The remainder of this document goes through a set of practical guidance that you might should 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 that you will take.

Implementing 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.

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

How does this fit with the mission of the church?

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 that we take appropriate precautions to reduce 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.

Section 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 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. These are the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020. Our guidance is designed to assist your church in preparing to open for these permitted activities.

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.

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

Section 2: Management of Church Buildings

Preparing for re-opening for the first time

After an 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 1). 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 that you check that 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 that you develop a pre-event checklist. A template for such a checklist is provided in Appendix 2 to this document

Building controls and ventilation

In some church buildings careful use of the controls on heating, air conditioning and ventilation, where such controls are available, can help to reduce the risk of disease transmission. We recognise that there are a huge range of different church buildings within the Baptist family, ranging from modern premises with sophisticated controls to historic listed buildings with very limited controls.

Generally, fresh air ventilation is helpful to disperse any particles carrying infection, so any ventilation systems should be used to maximise the fresh air ventilation available. The church should open windows and doors frequently 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.

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. As an example, it is likely to be appropriate to set ventilation systems so that they do not automatically reduce ventilation levels due to lower than normal occupancy levels.

Cleaning practices

It is well understood that good cleaning practices are very important in reducing the transmission of disease and this is the same for Coronavirus. The infection risk from COVID-19 following contamination of a surface decreases over time, and it is not yet clear at what point there is no risk. However, it has been demonstrated that the virus can survive on some surfaces for up to 72 hours. Cleaning is aiming to ensure that where a surface has been contaminated with Coronavirus that such virus is killed so that nobody can be infected from that surface. Fortunately, Coronavirus can be killed using ordinary cleaning products when used in the appropriate cleaning regime.

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 that are formally listed should also refer to the [Historic England guidance on cleaning historic surfaces](#).

The cleaning guidance was updated by the Government in July 2020 to say that with reduced levels of community transmission 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 that have been 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. The guidance referenced above specifically says "As a minimum, frequently touched surfaces should be wiped down twice a day, and one of these should be at the beginning or the end of the working day." This appears to have been written with premises like offices in mind that are open for a period of the day. We suggest that all high touch surfaces are cleaned before any service (which is essential if there are multiple in one day), and if you have significant numbers of people touching a surface you may want to clean it even more often. You will need to ensure that someone is designated to do this and has the appropriate materials and PPE to undertake this cleaning.

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 3) to record the cleaning carried out and for additional detailed guidance.

Dealing with Contractors

To safely operate a church building, you will almost certainly need to use contractors to maintain systems (e.g. boilers, fire alarms) or to do work on the premises. These contractors are potentially at risk of bringing Coronavirus into the building or contracting Coronavirus on site. We recommend using the *Contractor Checklist* (Appendix 6) to ensure that they are taking appropriate precautions to prevent these.

Section 3: General practices for attendees

Social Distancing

From 4 July, the English requirement for social distancing between people from different households changed from 2 metres to "1 metre plus", which means one metre plus "mitigations" (which are additional measures put in place to reduce the risk of transmission, such as face coverings). 2m social distancing remains the ideal situation and should be observed wherever possible and is required in Wales. We particularly recommend that it is observed in seating arrangements because this is where attendees at the church will spend the majority of their time.

In England, where 2m social distancing is not practical, one metre or more may be used as the social distancing policy but with suitable measures such as face coverings, installing fixed barriers or asking people to face away from each other must be put in place. Churches must consider whether the measures they are able to put in place are sufficient to allow the distancing within their building to be reduced below 2m, and decide what distance is suitable in your circumstances given the mitigations that you are able to put in place. **This distance must be no less than one metre.**

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 other should pay attention to sanitation measures immediately afterwards, including washing/sanitisation of hands.

Hygiene practices

Good hygiene practices can prevent transmission from an infected person to a non-infected person, either directly or via a surface. You should 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 PPE in services

To minimise transmission risk, the government encourage attendees to wear a face covering which covers their nose and mouth while in the church building to reduce transmission risk. This is one factor which can help to reduce risk where you cannot operate with social distancing of 2m (see section on Social Distancing). From **8 August the wearing of a face covering is mandatory** in a place of worship by law in England. In Wales, the guidance emphasises maintaining 2m social distancing and does not require the use of face coverings.

You may wish to make disposable face coverings available at the building entrances, however it is important to provide instructions on how to use these correctly to ensure that they do not become a mechanism for disease transmission themselves. Attendees should be encouraged to:

- Wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds or use hand sanitiser before putting a face covering on, and after removing it.
- When wearing a face covering, avoid touching their face or face covering, as it could contaminate them with germs from their hands.
- Change their face covering if it becomes damp or if they have touched it.
- Continue to wash their hands regularly.
- Continue to practice social distancing wherever possible.

Bins should be provided to allow for disposable face coverings to be disposed of safely.

The Government has published [guidance on the use of face coverings in England](#), confirming the places where face coverings are required, and those circumstances where people are permitted to remove a face covering. This includes, but is not limited to, those delivering a sermon or prayer in a place of worship, persons getting married in a relevant place, those who are speaking to or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expressions to communicate. The Welsh government has published its own [guidance on the use of face coverings in Wales](#).

The requirement to wear a face covering does not apply to church staff but is a matter for the trustees to determine through a workplace health and safety assessment. Where staff are meeting people, they would not normally meet such as the congregation at a service the trustees should consider staff using screens, visors or face coverings to protect others, which is the primary purpose of the mandatory face coverings. The indoor workers guidance specifically says that 'there will also be times when screens or visors are in use, or when the staff member is not in close proximity to people they do not normally meet, and so it will not be necessary for staff to wear a face covering.' The implication is that when in close proximity it would be better if a face covering were worn. To date no clarity has been given around how far droplets will travel when someone speaks loudly

indoors. We would strongly encourage that a consistent approach is followed by all involved in leading a service so that ministers use a visor or stand behind a screen when leading and that they wear a face covering when they are not leading in the same way as everyone else.

Face coverings should not be used by children under 3 owing to the difficulty they may find in using them correctly. You may also exempt other children under 11 who are unable to use them properly. The list of those exempt from wearing face coverings can be found in section 3 of the [guidance on the use of face coverings in England](#)

Face shields that provide an impermeable shield for the eyes, nose and mouth, and other PPE are not needed for the general users of the premises, but you may find some attendees wish to use them. However, face shields are not an alternative to face coverings, which should be worn underneath unless the person is exempt for health reasons. (See section 5 of Government Face Covering advice which details the requirements for a face covering)

Gloves are generally only needed for cleaners and can be counter-productive if not changed regularly as gloves can transmit diseases in a similar manner to the skin. Regular hand washing is likely to be more effective than use of gloves.

Fixed screens may be useful in some circumstances to separate attendees from church volunteers. For example, if you have a church office or a "welcome desk" or stewards in fixed locations. However, this will not be suitable in many circumstances.

Use of toilet facilities

You should try to discourage use of the shared toilet facilities in a church building by asking your attendees to use private facilities at home before and after the service if possible. However, this is unlikely to be completely workable, so it will be necessary to have toilet facilities available in order to open your church.

Toilets are likely to present an elevated transmission risk and so need some careful management. We recommend the following practices

- Toilets should certainly be thoroughly cleaned before and after every service.
- Hand sanitiser should be made available before entering the toilets.
- Shared cloth towels should certainly not be used as these present a high risk of virus transmission.
- Single use paper towels should be provided in dispenser that means person only touches their own paper towel.
- Electric hand dryers can be used as an alternative to paper towels
- Provide foot operated lidded bins for disposal of paper towels
- Even where a toilet facility has multiple cubicles, we recommend that only one person at a time should enter to ensure social distancing around hand-wash areas etc.
- If possible, provide cleaning wipes or suitable cleaning products to allow the toilet seat to be cleaned between users (noting that these should be suitable for non-professional use and suitable instructions on use and disposal should be provided)
- Signage should be provided to explain the rules for toilet use, promote good hygiene practices (such as 20-second hand washing) and promote social distancing.
- Suitable temperature hot water should be provided to allow for hands to be cleaned properly.
- We suggest that children under 11 are accompanied to the toilet by an adult from their household to ensure compliance with good hygiene practice and social distancing. Seating arrangements and seating capacity

Seating arrangements and seating capacity

A group from a single household should sit together but must be separated from all other household groups in line with social distancing requirements (see section on Social Distancing above). One of

the challenges is that you are unlikely to know the size of household groups for your service and this can have quite an impact on seating capacity.

The following is a suggestion of how you might manage social distancing with seating using conventional rows of chairs or pews, but you may find something that works better for you. Alternative arrangements of chairs other than in rows may be more suitable for smaller groups such as prayer groups or bible studies.

If your church has moveable chairs, we suggest you measure distance between rows and ensure occupied rows are sufficiently separated to make sure that people one behind another are socially distanced. Remember that individuals are likely to move somewhat in their location, so you will need to make allowance for this in separation. You can then measure the seat width and ensure that appropriate number of seats are left empty between household groups. E.g. if seats are 60cm wide, you need to leave gap of 4 seats to achieve 2m distancing.

If you have a choice of chairs to use for your service, we recommend that you select the chairs that are easiest to clean (e.g. hard surface or a plastic surface that can be cleaned with a cloth).

If your church has fixed pews, you may wish to mark sufficient rows out of use between rows in use to ensure distancing. We then suggest you make a temporary mark (e.g. with masking tape) at 50cm spaces and then tell people to leave a certain number of marks between household groups (similar to the chevrons seen on some motorways).

Once you have decided on the appropriate arrangements for your church you should ensure that your stewards are fully briefed, and you provide signage to explain how you wish them to ensure social distancing.

Use of Outside Spaces

Where your church building has outside space, you may consider holding some activities outside. Where an outside space is part of the grounds of the church, it falls within the definition of a Place of Worship and so the guidance for Places of Worship still applies, so gatherings can be of any size that can be accommodated with suitable social distancing.

Using outside space has advantages as it is generally understood that the coronavirus is less likely to be transmitted outside. 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.

Away from church premises, gatherings of up to 6 people are possible in any outdoor space.

Larger gatherings for worship organised by churches in public outdoor spaces are in principle allowed from 14 September as an exception to the limit to 6 people. However, the church needs to work alongside the owner and manager of the space (which in many cases will be the local authority) and obtain their consent for the event. You also need to consider of how the general public might view such a gathering which might be perceived as breaching the law, including the possibility of it being reported to the police.

Any church activities in private outdoor spaces (e.g. private gardens) are subject to the legal limit of six individuals.

Special measures for the clinically vulnerable and those who are shielding

Shielding guidance has currently been paused in England by the government due to the reduced level of community transmission. Shielding guidance is currently due to pause in Wales on 16 August

Those who are clinically vulnerable (such as those over 70 or with certain medical conditions) should be encouraged to consider if it is appropriate for them to attend, as they are advised to stay at home as much as possible. Anyone concerned should consult their GP for advice. 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.

Section 4: Managing Arrivals at the Building

Travel Arrangements

You need to consider how people attending your service are likely to travel to the building and the risks that this might involve. The government guidance makes specific reference to this topic and avoiding crowding. You should consider this guidance, although it is likely to only be an issue for the largest Baptist churches. However, transport is still an issue that must be considered. For example, providing lifts for those without a car is unlikely to be appropriate currently.

Checks for Symptoms on Entry to the Church

We recommend that churches ask anyone attending the building to confirm that they do not currently have any of the key symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, persistent dry cough and loss of taste or smell) and have not had such symptoms for 14-days, or have been asked to self-isolate by NHS Track and Trace or NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect. This may be best managed by a steward at the main entrance.

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 that 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

You should record the name and contact details of anyone who enters the building, with details of the time of their visit. This will allow NHS Track and Trace or NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect to follow up with attendees should a COVID-19 case be identified as having attended the church at a later date. In Wales, recording is not required if 2m social distancing can be maintained. In England, organisations will be obliged by law to gather this data from 18 September 2020 the government has published [guidance on collecting data for NHS Test and Trace](#).

This guidance asks churches 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](#). Once the NHS Test and Trace App is launched (expected to be on 24 September) this QR code will allow people to check in at your building and log their visit into the app. We have been briefed by the government that churches will still need to collect contact details from those using the NHS QR code to check in, but this is in conflict with the guidance on the link above so we are seeking clarification.

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 that 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 4.

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.

The NHS Track and Trace or NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect may ask the entire congregation to self-isolate unless they can determine with whom an individual who has tested positive has been in close proximity. This means you should keep a record of the seating layout and where people were sitting during a service. The other crucial time is when people are entering and leaving the building. If seats are filled from the front as people arrive and they exit the building in reverse order it will help identify the appropriate individuals at a later date.

You should ask people attending to notify the church if they show symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 so that you can take appropriate action (See paragraph on this topic in section 5).

A sample privacy statement that could be given to attendees is provided in Appendix 4

Managing arrivals, departures and traffic flow through the building

Management of traffic flow can assist in reducing the risk of people inadvertently breaching social distancing guidelines. One-way systems are often helpful in reducing risk of people coming into close proximity. You should consider how any changes will affect disability access and make arrangements to ensure equal access can still be achieved.

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. You should consider how you will reduce this risk. It might involve signage, how your 1-way system is directed, stewarding or staggering arrivals. You may need to implement a queuing system with distance markers if the entrance is likely to be a pinch point.

We recommend that you actively manage people departing too at the end of any event to minimise the risk of social distancing issues. This might involve asking people to leave one row at a time, starting with the rows nearest the exit and working back.

We recommend using floor signage to assist in social distancing. This should include marking pathways through the building with arrows showing the expected direction of flow and markers showing fixed spacing to assist people in judging distance. Please make sure that these markings are securely affixed to the floor and not a trip hazard or they could cause more harm than good.

You should also consider how you might be able to minimise the need for attendees to touch surfaces. That could include leaving doors open. However, please consider how this works particularly in relation to fire doors that should be kept shut in general. If you have a suitable alarm system, systems are available to prop open fire doors that release automatically if the alarm sounds (e.g. Dorguard). If you use these, they should be regularly tested before live use. Alternatively, you may be able to develop operational practices that sufficiently mitigate the risk, such as having stewards briefed on shutting fire doors in emergencies.

Leaving some doors open will clearly not be appropriate (e.g. toilets), so consider what provision may be made for regularly cleaning any high-touch surfaces during any period of opening.

Managing Seating Capacity

How to manage your seating capacity is a complex practical issue that you need to consider in the context of your church congregation, building and circumstances. If you have a large enough building to accommodate all who will attend with social distancing in place it may not be an issue, but churches with capacity constraints will need to think through this issue. This may include streaming the service to another room.

In determining the capacity of the building for services you should not only consider how many people can safely be seated but how they can safely flow through the building.

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. This 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.

Section 5: Operating Church Services and Church gatherings

Drinks & catering

Food and drink should not be served or made available on a self-service basis.

We recommend that food generally should not be consumed in the church although for health reasons some persons may need to eat or drink during time on the premises. If this is the case, they should be asked to bring what they need and take away any rubbish, containers or leftovers.

Singing, instrumentalists and music

In both England and Wales, congregational singing is still specifically not permitted as it is considered that this enhances risk of virus spread. The volume of any music should not result in people having to raise their voices or shout to be heard. This is particularly important before and after a service.

In England, worship may now be led by a small group of no more than 6 singers and the previous limitation to professional groups has been removed. Our understanding is that brass or woodwind or other instruments that are blown into are can be used by music groups, with suitable precautions (although specifically to be avoided by the congregation) and other instruments may be played but instruments must not be shared between instrumentalists. Music groups should observe social distancing between households.

The government guidance asks churches in England to follow the [Guidance for Performing Arts](#) in relation to music groups. Unfortunately, the Guidance for Performing Arts is not written to be relevant to a church context, but the key point is that it does not currently include any recommendations or additional requirement for enhanced social distancing around singers or wind instruments. We the recommend that you ensure there is strict distancing of 2m (and ideally more) between singers and wind instrumentalists and any members of the congregation and consider the use of additional measures such as a plexi-glass screen to protect others from their exhaled breath. Where used, such a screen should be cleaned after the service.

In Wales, only a solo singer is permitted to lead worship and the use of wind instruments is still prohibited. After initially being prohibited in Wales, the use of organs is now permitted, but subject to a risk assessment and adherence with physical distancing. The Welsh guidance continues to recommend additional measures such as a plexi-glass screen to protect others from their exhaled breath. Where used, such a screen should be cleaned after the service.

Use of hymn books, bibles and other similar materials

The ideal situation is to use a projector to display of any content needed for the service, such as bible verses, order of service etc. If this is not possible single use printed service sheets should be used and households should take their own home to dispose of. We recommend these are put out on chairs in advance of the service by someone who has washed their hands thoroughly prior to putting them out in order to prevent transmission via this mechanism.

Reusable materials, such as bibles or hymn books should not generally be used, and indeed are prohibited in Wales. In England, where they are used in, they should be quarantined for 48 hours before they can be used again. Attendees should be encouraged to bring their own bible if they

wish to have one. Ideally these should be removed from public spaces, but if this is not possible, they should be clearly marked as not in use unless a quarantine system is in place.

Speaking from the front

Raised voices are considered a transmission risk so a PA system should be used for amplification if more than a normal speaking voice is required to make voices heard. Handheld microphones and other equipment that is touched should not be shared between participants. This may give rise to some practical challenges that churches need to consider if they have more speakers than microphones available.

A lectern microphone may be shared provided that it is not touched by users. If a lectern or music stand or similar is used by more than one individual, it would be good practice to clean it between uses to ensure that it is not a transmission risk. If this is not possible, users should be strongly discouraged from touching it.

If you have multiple people coming up to the front (e.g. to share a word or lead prayers or give a reading), please consider how they can maintain social distancing moving from their seat to the front. For example, you may need to make sure they are sat on the end of a row, so they don't have to move past other household groups.

Length of Services

As a general rule, services should be concluded in the shortest reasonable time as the longer they are the greater the risk of disease transmission occurring. The lack of congregational singing at this stage is likely to mean that services are naturally shorter in any case. Also, with children likely to be in the service, it would be wise to keep services shorter.

Offerings and collections

We recommend that you encourage giving by direct bank transfer or online giving mechanisms as this removes any risk of virus transmission. However, if this is not appropriate for your circumstances then you can consider have a collection box or plate but ask people to take care not to touch it if possible. There should be no passing of an offering plate or bag in services.

We recommend you leave any cash offerings isolated for 72 hours before handling. Alternatively, use disposable gloves to handle cash and dispose securely after use.

A contactless card terminal may be a suitable way to take payments, although you should supply with antibacterial wipes to clean the terminal after each use.

Social Interaction before, during and after services

The government guidance for both England and Wales advises that social interaction in churches beyond household groups should be limited wherever possible, including discouraging engagement in conversation beyond your household. We therefore must advise against holding times of fellowship before or after church services to minimise virus transmission risk. We suggest you encourage attendees to leave promptly after any event.

Similarly, we would advise against encouraging any moving around during a service (e.g. breaking into small groups for prayer). We suggest that it is best for people to remain in their seats or standing by their seats throughout any service, in so far as practical.

We understand that if there is a subsequent positive test that NHS Test and Trace are only likely to ask those who had direct social interaction to self-isolate. Therefore, keeping social interaction limited may reduce the impact of a positive test on your attendees, which may be important to some of your congregation who are concerned about the potential impact of having to self-isolate.

Handling multiple services (including tenant congregations)

Ideally you should leave the building empty for 72 hours between each use, which would significantly reduce the risk of any virus remaining on surfaces. However, this may not be practical if you have multiple services, guest congregations or mid-week activities you wish to run. If this is

the case, a thorough cleaning of all surfaces should be completed between uses in line with the guidance provided above.

If you have surfaces that you feel you are unable to clean appropriately (e.g. fabric covered chairs) then we recommend that these surfaces are taken out of use for 72 hours.

Children and children's activities

The government has provided [guidance for "out of school settings" for children](#) and we have published [guidance for children's, youth and families ministry](#), which should be read if you wish to carry out any children's activities.

Depending upon the space you have available, it may be possible to run groups for children 5 years of age or older in line with the guidance.

Parents or guardians should be asked to care for their own children under 5. If you can, you may wish to provide a room where the service is relayed where they can sit with their own children. Social distancing arrangements will need to be observed, so you should ensure the space is large enough to distancing between households.

We recommend that you do not provide toys for children that would be shared between household groups as they may be a transmission risk. It is likely to be easier if parents are asked to bring their own toys. If toys are provided, they should be thoroughly cleaned after use with a suitable disinfectant (e.g. Milton Sterilising Fluid). No soft toys or soft furnishings for children should be provided as these cannot be easily cleaned.

Taking Communion

We realise that Communion is an important, biblical practice that many churches wish to resume. However, this presents particular risks and challenges that need to be considered. You may find it easier not to restart communion at first. Specific guidance is available in our leaflet [Coronavirus: Guidance on church worship](#)

Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms

Weddings, Funerals and Baptisms are all now possible but with various restrictions. Separate guidance is available on the conduct of Weddings, Funerals and Baptisms in our leaflet [Coronavirus: Guidance on church worship](#)

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 "religious purpose" described in the government guidance on the re-opening of places of worship. It is therefore subject to the same guidance as described above for church services in general.

One particular issue you need to consider is that the government has said that speaking loudly presents a virus transmission risk, so if your church meeting is large enough that participants need to significantly raise their voice in order to be heard, it may be that this cannot be done safely.

However, churches need to consider the wisdom of holding a church meeting in the current circumstances when some members may not be willing to attend due to the risks involved and your premises may not be able to accommodate everyone who wishes to attend due to social distancing requirements. This could prove divisive if some members feel excluded, particularly if some contentious issues are to be addressed.

It is possible that you might attempt a "hybrid" meeting with some present in person and some joining remotely. However, this is very difficult as it is essential to the functioning of a Church Members' Meeting that all participants can hear each other and participate effectively in the meeting. This requires careful management of microphones so that those present in person can be heard by those joining remotely without creating an infection risk. Further, a hybrid meeting

will have additional legal complexity with regard to making decisions and voting in line with our Approved Governing Documents.

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.

Prayer Meetings and Bible Studies

Given the restrictions on singing, the challenges in holding larger meetings and the likely numbers willing to attend, some churches may conclude it is best to have their main service(s) online for some time to come. However, the guidance does permit churches to be used for other "religious purposes", such as bible studies and prayer meetings, subject to following the same guidelines as for worship services. These meetings are likely to be smaller and therefore easier to accommodate within social distancing constraints.

Using the church to film a service for broadcast

Some churches are considering whether to open their church building solely to hold a service without a live congregation so that it can be broadcast online. This might be for live broadcast or for recording for later broadcast. The limited number of people involved in such a service clearly significantly reduces the risks involved. However, all the government guidance still applies, including requirements for a risk assessment to be carried out, social distancing to be observed and the limitations on music groups.

Streaming of services (including data protection issues)

Many of our churches have been live streaming services throughout lockdown and are continuing to do so until they can safely 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 issues involved in filming services. A church should seek consent from any individuals appearing on screen for their involvement and the processing of their personal data through video footage or podcasts. Records of these consents should be kept. This should be relatively straightforward where a service has been created solely for broadcast due to the limited numbers of people involved and the fact that those involved should be clear on the purpose for which they are contributing to the service.

However, where a church is planning to hold a service in the church with a congregation and broadcast the same the service to a wider audience (either live or later) then this will involve processing images of the persons attending the service who might be filmed and identifiable. It will likely be challenging to obtain consent from all of these individuals for their personal data to be used in this way. The church may need to rely on legitimate interest as the lawful basis for the filming and live streaming. If so, we suggest that information about the filming should be provided to members and attendees in advance, which will enable those attending to decide to opt out if they wish or to sit in a designated area in the church where they will not be filmed. Notices should be placed in a prominent place at the entrances, as well as in the newsletter/notice sheet to explain that the service will be filmed. A reminder can also be given from the front at the start of the service. Particular care should be taken in relation to children or adults at risk, unless prior consent from them or their parents/guardians has been obtained.

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.

What to do if someone develops symptoms whilst in the Church

You should have a written Emergency Action Plan in place as to what to do in these circumstances. This should be shared with those leading and stewarding any service or gathering. A template for this is provided in Appendix 5.

We recommend that anyone coughing or showing other clear COVID-19 symptoms should be asked to leave the church immediately, along with their household and contact NHS 111 for advice on isolation and testing. We recommend that cleaning carried out of any surfaces that may have been contaminated as soon as possible, in line with the cleaning guidance (see above), and those who have had any contact with the individual should wash their hands. If you feel it is appropriate you may wish to bring the service to an end.

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, you should consider whether you wish to inform those who you are holding contact details for. The level of risk will depend upon the timings involved (e.g. if the person displayed symptoms soon after attendance the risk will be much higher than if they only developed symptoms some weeks later).

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 that you need to take proactive action, 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.

In these circumstances we advise you to have ready a press statement should any enquiries be received. A church should appoint two appropriate people who would be the holders of the press statement and inform the membership who those people are, so that any enquires can be sent to them. Ahead of any public statement the trustees of any associated organisations who use the church would need to be informed. A press statement needs to be short, concise and not go into unnecessary detail. An example which could be used can be found in Appendix 7.

Section 6: Other Uses of the Church Building

Use of the church office

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

In general, you should:

- Review layouts and processes to allow people to work further apart from each other.
- Use floor tape or markings to help workers maintain social distancing.
- Only where it is not possible to move workstations further apart, arrange 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.
- Manage occupancy levels to enable social distancing is achievable.
- Avoid 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).
- Use remote working tools to avoid in-person meetings.
- Restrict attendance at meetings to those who absolutely need to attend and maintaining social distancing throughout.
- Avoid 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: Confirm the activity is permitted

You are permitted to use your building host some non-church activities, but you must first check to ensure that a particular use is permitted. Some activities are explicitly permitted, including registered pre-schools, work with the homeless, blood donation and food banks.

Churches in England should refer to [the full guidance as to what is permitted and not in England](#) and [specific guidance for multi-use community facilities](#), which will be relevant to many Baptist churches that are normally used for non-worship activities during the week. Churches should note that the restrictions have changed significantly after 14 September, including saying that most clubs or activity groups should not meet unless groups are limited to six people or less.

Churches in Wales should refer to the equivalent [guidance for multi-use community facilities in Wales](#).

Step 2: Ensuring the activity can be conducted safely

The government guidance places a duty on "venue managers" (i.e. Church Trustees in Baptist churches) to ensure their premises are used safely. Therefore, Church Trustees must 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 that the church would wish to have their name associated with a disease outbreak, and unsafe use might pose a risk to subsequent users of the building if it introduces coronavirus into the building. You should ensure that the 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](#) and [guidance for tourism and hospitality businesses in Wales](#).

For other activities in churches in England should refer to the [specific guidance for multi-use community facilities](#) and Churches in Wales should refer to the equivalent [guidance for multi-use community facilities in Wales](#).

Unfortunately, there are some areas where the guidance for other activities can be interpreted as conflicting with the guidance for places of worship. As a general rule, for activities that are not acts of worship that use the church as a community facility, our understanding from interaction with government is that you can follow the guidance for multi-use community facilities.

Step 3: Implement appropriate precautions prior to the next activity

It is also 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 72 hours between activities or by carrying out thorough cleaning to reduce the risk of the virus still being present for the next activity. We recommend that 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 our leaflet L18 on legal issues during the Coronavirus pandemic: www.baptist.org.uk/resources/L18. We recommend that you review the Risk Assessment of any external organisation using your premises to ensure that you are comfortable with the measures they are taking to avoid introducing the virus into your premises.

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 please follow the advice above in section 5 in the paragraph titled "What to do if someone who has been in your building tests positive for coronavirus or develops coronavirus symptoms."

Section 7: Risk assessment for staff and volunteers returning to work in church offices and buildings

As you re-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 that 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. [Specific guidance for ministers for pastoral visiting](#) is available on our website.

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 that affect all staff, and consider any points that are 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](#).

You should also read the [Coronavirus: A Guide for Churches as Employers](#) which covers these and other issues.

Who should go to work?

Currently, the government are still encouraging employers to allow workers to work from home wherever possible. If you have been able to manage well during lockdown, think carefully before you start to invite staff to return to work.

Some staff will be unable to return immediately because of shielding requirements or because they or someone in their household, or someone they have recently been in contact with, has had Covid-19. For more information on how to respond to these specific situations, please follow the government guidance at

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 that 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 that you keep a written record to show that you have considered all relevant risks.

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

Section 8: 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, 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 that 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: Reoccupation Checklist

Use this template to record important checks of your premises before returning to work after lockdown. Stay alert to government announcements on return to work and complete **before** reoccupation.

	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 combustibile 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)?				
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?				

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?				

Appendix 2: 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 Trustee 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 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?			
<p>After carrying out the above checks, please sign below.</p> <p>I have carried out the above checks and found the site to be following the current government guidelines in line with COVID-19.</p>			
Leader signature:		Date:	

Appendix 3: 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 72 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 72 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 4: 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 at Anytown Baptist 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 inform Baptist 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 Protection legislation allows us to process this information as we regard it as being in the church’s legitimate interest. The Information Commissioner’s Office has published guidance on data handling during the pandemic. Please see www.ico.org.uk/coronavirus.

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

Appendix 5: Example Emergency Action Plan

Church Building:

Coronavirus Emergency Action Plan

Should someone attending the church display symptoms of Coronavirus the following steps will be taken:

- 1) The person will be asked to leave as soon as possible, return home and seek guidance from NHS111 as to self-isolation and testing.
- 2) Anyone known to have been in close contact with the case advised to wash their hands as soon as possible
- 3) Any surfaces likely to have been contaminated cleaned in line with cleaning guidance.
- 4) Consider whether to bring the service to an early conclusion.
- 5) Consult Health & Safety Executive website as to whether the event should be reported.
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/riddor/>.

Appendix 6: Contractor Checklist

COVID-19 Contractor Checklist – Site Safety			
Church Site Name		Name of Church representative	
Contractor Name		Date	

A – Specific Hazards
Hazards specific to the task:
Hazards specific to the premises:
Who may be harmed?

Assessment Checklist	Yes	No	N/A
Information			
Have employees been advised on the latest government guidance on COVID-19, including what to do if they become ill?			
Have employees received appropriate training in minimising the transfer of COVID-19 at work?			
Has a call to site been undertaken to establish their COVID-19 policy?			
Personal protective equipment (PPE)			
Has a risk assessment been undertaken to determine what level of PPE is required for the task to protect from COVID-19? (e.g. single-use gloves, disposable overalls, face coverings, eye protection, etc.)			
Is the PPE identified in the risk assessment available?			
Have employees received training in the appropriate use of the PPE?			
Welfare			
Are there suitable handwashing facilities on site?			
Are employees provided with hand sanitiser where handwashing facilities are unavailable?			
Is there a suitable area to take rest breaks?			

Have employees been instructed not to eat/drink/smoke/touch face without first washing their hands?			
Site arrangements			
Can any of the work be done off site to minimise exposure?			
Can the work be moved outside or to a location where there are minimal persons?			
Can barriers be used around the work area to maintain a safe distance between employees and others in the vicinity?			
Do any tools/equipment used on site need to be decontaminated due to potential COVID-19 exposure?			

B Assessment Rating		
The current risk assessment rating is considered to be:		Tick
High risk	Fatal or major injuries or irreversible health effects to one or more people are highly probable.	
Medium risk	Serious injury or ill-health effects are possible.	
Low risk	Minor injury or reversible minor health effects may occur.	
Insignificant	The activity presents no greater risk than those associated with life in general.	

Action required	By	Priority	Timescale	Completed

Church representative signature		Print name		Date	
Contractor representative signature		Print name		Date	

Appendix 7: Example Press Release following a case of COVID in church premises

The safeguarding and wellbeing of everyone associated with XXXX Baptist Church is extremely important to us. During this time of COVID pandemic we have been meticulous in following the guidelines and legal requirements given to us by the Government and the Baptist Union of Great Britain. We are aware that a recent attendee of our church has tested positive for the virus. We are following all the required procedures and protocols in response to this. We pray for those affected by the situation and our community as a whole at this time.

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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