

Coronavirus: Guidance on church worship

| Version (most recent first) | Changes |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 27 January 2022 | Guidance re-written reflecting the gradual lifting of restrictions and the expectation that we learn to manage COVID-19 sensibly and indefinitely. |

Contents

1. Sources
2. Government headlines/news
3. Guidance

1. Sources

UK Government

[Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread](#)

[COVID-19 Guidance for the safe use of places of worship](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Wedding and civil partnership ceremonies, receptions and celebrations](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance for funerals and commemorative events during the coronavirus pandemic](#)

[Working safely during coronavirus \(COVID-19\) – events and attractions](#)

[Working safely during coronavirus \(Covid 19\) – restaurants, pubs, bars, nightclubs and takeaway services](#)

[Face coverings: when to wear one, exemptions, and how to make your own](#)

[Interactive map](#)

Welsh Government

[Alert level 2: guidance for the public](#)

[Alert level 2: frequently asked questions](#)

[Alert level 2: guidance for employers, businesses and organisations](#)

[Places of worship and funerals: potential reasonable measure action card](#)

[Safe use of multi-purpose community centres \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Face coverings: guidance for public](#)

[Interactive map](#)

You may also find the following BUGB guidance helpful:

[Coronavirus: Children's, youth and families' ministry](#)

[Coronavirus: Guidance on re-opening Baptist church buildings](#)

[Coronavirus: Risk assessment prior to re-opening Baptist church buildings](#)

Please note that both Governments' guidance is still often updated. If you feel there are discrepancies between their guidance and ours, please email ministries@baptist.org.uk and we will do our best to respond.

2. Government headlines/news

England

As of 27 January 2022:

- The UK Government says, "COVID-19 will be a feature of our lives for the foreseeable future, so we need to learn to live with it and manage the risk to ourselves and others."
- Though legal requirements remain in place regarding self-isolation, all legal requirements regarding the size and type of gatherings have been removed. Notably, face coverings are no longer mandatory in public spaces, including churches.
- The UK Government continues to recommend taking voluntary measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, such as encouraging vaccination; ventilating spaces or meeting outdoors; wearing face coverings in crowded and enclosed spaces when with people you do not normally meet; regular lateral flow testing; limiting close contact with people you do not usually live with; careful hygiene; and being mindful of those who are vulnerable.

Wales

As of 28 January 2022:

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

3. Guidance

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

Through 2020 and 2021, our guidance was concerned with minimising risk, partly to protect those in our worshipping communities and partly as an act of care for the wider communities in which our churches sit. In the light of being asked to think how we live with COVID indefinitely, we now encourage you to focus especially on how to sustain the mission to which God is calling your church. It might be helpful to recall or review whom you feel God has laid on the heart of your church to support, serve and evangelise. How might this mission be fostered, whilst still acting in ways that sensibly offer protection to those who gather and whom you encounter?

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

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

Detailed considerations

As you write your risk assessment and seek to fulfil God’s vision for your church, you will need to think through your particular context, for example: the size and ventilation of your buildings; the number of people who gather for worship; the risk profile of your congregation with respect to age, vulnerability and vaccination status; the level of interaction in your worship; the expectations of those who visit your church.

Here are some measures you might consider in the light of your context:

- Reminding all worshippers that anyone with Covid-19 symptoms or who is self-isolating should not attend. This remains a legal requirement in both England and Wales. This includes anyone who receives a positive test, develops symptoms, or has been a close contact of someone with COVID-19 when they themselves are unvaccinated.
 - a) In both England and Wales, those who are fully vaccinated or under-18 do not have to self-isolate after close contact with someone who has tested positive. Instead, they are expected to test regularly for a number of days. Please see each Government’s self-isolation guidance for more information.
 - b) In both England and Wales, even those who are self-isolating because they have tested positive may attend the funeral of a close family member (England) or a close family member or friend (Wales), as long as they are showing no symptoms. Please note however that both governments make this allowance on compassionate grounds and they recommend remote attendance where possible. This exception does not apply to funeral wakes.

If anyone who would otherwise be self-isolating does attend a funeral service, they should inform the person managing the funeral; wear a surgical-grade fluid repellent (Type IIR) face mask; maintain their distance from other mourners; and avoid singing.

- Wearing face coverings.
 - a) In Wales, it is mandatory for attenders to use face coverings unless they are exempt. Exceptions apply for those leading or participating in the service from the front; when eating or drinking in a hospitality space; and when attending a wedding.
 - b) In England, face coverings are optional. You may choose if and when you ask the congregation to wear them. Bear in mind the Government’s recommendation to wear them in crowded and enclosed spaces, and that projecting the voice in loud talking or in singing can increase the risk of COVID transmission.
- Maintaining a careful hygiene routine for your buildings, especially for those areas commonly touched such as handles and switches.
- Asking those entering the building to wash or sanitise their hands.
- Maintaining some distance between seated people from different households if your building has space for this.
- Ventilating the building if possible, or moving activities outside if practical.
- Minimising the use of shared objects such as hymnbooks or offering plates and using stewards to serve communion rather than passing round a common loaf or cup.
- Minimising physical contact such as handshakes, hugs, laying on of hands.
- Encouraging people to utilise free self-testing before attending, especially if they are likely to engage with many others present – for example those welcoming others.
- Encouraging those who stay after the service for conversation and refreshments to engage with just a few people rather than everyone.
- Serving refreshments from behind a counter rather than offering a self-service area.
- Nominating a coordinator to receive news of anyone who tests positive and to tell those who have been in close contact with them.

We further encourage you to:

- Communicate all measures clearly to the congregation, thinking especially of those who might be visiting.
- Think whether anyone will be especially disadvantaged by any of these measures and make plans to support them.
- Ensure what you propose is sustainable and does not place an excessive burden on a few people.

Ministries Team
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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.

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