

## Coronavirus: Advice for ministers – pastoral visiting

Version	Changes
25 February 2021	Changes to Introduction to outline extra permission in England from 8 March for meeting one other person outdoors and for care home visiting indoors; Changes to Introduction to care home visit arrangements in Wales.
6 January 2021	Changes to Introduction to reflect national lockdown in England from 5 January.
20 December 2020	Inclusion of reference to tier 4 in England and 'alert level 4' in Wales.
01 December 2020	Removal of national lockdown restrictions in England and firebreaker references in Wales. Inclusion in Introduction of information on England's local restriction tiers.
5 November 2020	Addition at the document's beginning of lockdown restrictions in England.
22 October 2020	Inclusion in Introduction of information on 'firebreaker' restrictions in Wales
19 October 2020	Inclusion of impact of three tiers of Covid-alert areas.
6 July 2020	Changes throughout in light of eased restrictions for people seeing each other in their homes.
24 March 2020	Guidance published

### 1. Introduction

#### In England:

- **Home pastoral visiting is possible during the national lockdown from 5 January 2021.** However, Government [guidance for those who provide unpaid care to friends and family](#) stipulates that visits should only be made to support those unable to cope, physically or mentally, without support. We recommend therefore that home visits take place only in the most concerning of circumstances whilst lockdown remains in place.

We recommend your visiting policy for church staff members and volunteers should take into account the Government's guidance on [working safely in other people's homes](#). Some ways of doing this are noted in Section 2 below.

From 8 March 2021, please note that it is possible to meet one person 'recreationally' outdoors without the previous stipulation of this having to be for exercise. This may provide a further opportunity for pastoral encounters – say in a public park. The guidance does not specify whether private gardens are counted in the definition of outdoors and it is best to assume that it does not unless we hear otherwise.

From 29 March, two households or up to six people from different households will be able to meet and this does include private gardens. This may open up further options for pastoral visiting.

- **Care home visits are theoretically possible** unless there is an active outbreak. Please see Government guidance on [visiting care homes](#). During lockdown, close contact visits indoors are not allowed. Outdoors visits, or where arrangements have been made for meeting residents screens, in visiting pods or through windows, are allowed. However, each home's manager is responsible for setting the policy for visitors, and usually, they will restrict visiting to two named, consistent visitors. This is likely to mean that family only can visit. In all cases, visitors will have to wear PPE and observe social distancing.

From 8 March, visits will once again be able to take place indoors. Each care home resident will be able to nominate a single named visitor who can come in for a regular visit. The visitor will have to take a rapid lateral flow test every time they visit, wear PPE and keep physical contact to a minimum. As noted above, this named visitor is likely to be a family member so pastoral visiting from church ministers or members is still unlikely to be possible.

- **Hospital visiting** is not subject to any national guidance, so please check with each hospital as to what their visiting rules are.

## In Wales:

- **Home pastoral visiting is possible even now Wales is under 'alert level 4'**. The Welsh Government [guidance on Places of Worship](#) states that if possible, home visiting should be avoided and that alternative methods of support should be sought. However, visits may happen when there is a legitimate 'compassionate reason', defined as "where that person is struggling with restrictions on meeting others generally or they may be suffering from a physical or mental illness, have suffered a bereavement or you may be concerned about their general wellbeing or welfare." You should of course bear in mind the responsibility to avoid risk to the person visited and only visit when it is important to do so.

If a visit is necessary, please see the general advice on home visiting in Section 2 below.

- **Care home visits are possible.** Welsh Government guidance on [care home visiting](#) asks that each resident has up to two designated visitors and one deputy designated visitor as a back-up. The deputy should not be routinely swapped in, but used only where necessary. How many designated visitors are permitted to visit and under what circumstances depends on the alert level. Under alert level 4, only one designated visitor is permitted, and only for an outdoors visit or a visit in a visiting pod. Definitions of 'outdoors' and 'visiting pod' can be found in the guidance, but outdoors visits do not require visitors to be tested. In all cases, if there is an outbreak in the home, only window visits are permitted where the visitor may speak to the resident through a window, at a distance of at least 2m from the window. The restriction of visiting to so few designated visitors, who will usually be family, makes pastoral visiting by a church minister or member unlikely, though possible.

- **Hospital visiting** is not subject to any national guidance, so please check with each hospital as to what their visiting rules are.

In all cases, your pastoral visiting practices should seek to reduce the risk of transmission to the lowest reasonably practicable level. Above all, we have a duty of care towards those who are vulnerable because of sickness or frailty. Those we pastor invest their trust in us. In the current situation we ought to be proving ourselves worthy of that trust by taking full responsibility for our own actions so that we minimise the risk we present to those we are caring for. We must not presume that we are above the risks associated with being in contact with others.

## 2. Visiting people in their homes

While recognising that we cannot completely eliminate the risk of Covid-19 the UK Government has produced [guidance on working in people's homes](#). The Welsh government has produced [equivalent guidance](#) for employers whose staff are working in people's homes. There is no specific guidance from the Government about pastoral visiting, beyond the fact that the Government are recommending that home communion does not take place. However, there is an expectation that you work through the guidance for employers as well as the more general guidance on social distancing, seeking to understand how this applies to your role.

In assessing the risk of carrying out visits it would be wise to talk this through with at least one of your church trustees or another minister. You'll need to think about this to develop a general policy guiding your approach, and then apply it for particular individuals. For small employers with less than 5 employees there is no requirement to write anything down. However, if pastoral visiting might be undertaken by anyone else in addition to yourself, we recommend that you write down and communicate fully the expectations for the whole team.

Please always bear in mind that you could be carrying Covid-19 but not have any symptoms and that you should be aiming to reduce the risk to all parties to the lowest possible reasonably practicable level.

The following points are offered as issues that you should consider as you assess the risk.

1. **Your own circumstances and health.** If you have any symptoms or you are shielding, or someone in your home is self-isolating due to having symptoms, or shielding, you should not engage in pastoral visits.
2. **The circumstances and health of the person you will visit.** You will need to consider the circumstances of the individual you are visiting. Do not visit if they are self-isolating because they or someone else in the household has symptoms, or they have been told by the NHS to self-isolate. Do not visit if they or someone else are shielding.
3. **Is it necessary to visit them in their home?** If there are appropriate alternative ways of enabling a pastoral conversation to take place such as phone or video calls, or meeting in their garden or another outdoor space, then these options should be considered first.

For those who are clinically extremely vulnerable it will only be appropriate to visit in doors if they are dying (in last days or hours) of a non-covid related condition.

4. **Contacting them before you visit.** Make sure that the person (or their supporter) is actually wanting you to come into their home, and aware of the potential risks.
  - a) Explain that you will need to social distance, which means they or another person, will need to open the door and then move away from it before you come in and that you will follow them.
  - b) Explore whether you will be able to sit more than 2 meters apart. (You can now sit at 1m with risk mitigation where 2m is not viable.)
  - c) Let them know that you will not be accepting any hospitality. You may of course take your own drink in a flask.
  - d) Tell them that you will only be able to stay for a short period of time.
  - e) Check on their health and their household (2 above).
  - f) Ask them to have windows open in room you will meet in if possible.
5. **Hygiene.** You should make sure that you have hand gel which you use before and after entering the house. While it's good practice to also wash your hands, on arrival and departure, this may not be possible. Make sure you have tissues with you in case you cough or sneeze. Cough into you elbow if you have no tissue. Your used tissues should be taken with you when you leave and then safely binned.
6. **Avoid Transmission.** Do not touch anything you don't have to such as door handles and handrails. Don't borrow items such as a pen or share other objects such as a bible. Try not to put anything of yours down on a surface, e.g. keep a bible in your hand or lap.
7. **Maintaining Social Distancing.** It may prove extremely difficult to maintain the 2m distance due to the size and layout of a house. It may also be difficult to maintain the distance as the person you are visiting may struggle to accept the need to do so. Avoid face to face contact (less than 2m) with those who are clinically vulnerable, which includes over 70s If you cannot maintain a 2m distance at all times then 1m plus should be observed with risk mitigation including the use of a face covering. It is better to sit to the side of person as far apart as possible.
8. **Length of visit.** Visits should be kept to a minimum length. The track and trace threshold of 15 mins at 2m distance indicates that the longer the visit the greater the risk of transmission.
9. **After the visit.** Clean the outside of anything you've taken into the house and which has been placed on a surface, e.g. bible, mobile phone.

10. **Traveling to visit.** If someone else who is not a member of your household is accompanying you on the visit, meet them there rather than travelling together. While the normal advice is that no more than 2 households can meet up in doors, a working context allows for more people to be present as long as this is kept as low in number as possible.
11. **Frequency of visits.** You will need to think carefully about who you visit and how many different people you visit. The last thing you want to do is become a super spreader around your congregation. If there are others who can safely share in the pastoral visits, this will reduce the risk of one person spreading Covid-19. Don't go from house to house but space out any visits you have to make over a number of days, so that you reduce the number of people you could infect before symptoms develop.

### 3. Pastoral contact

In light of the extreme restrictions on visiting, many churches and ministers are developing new ways of remaining in pastoral contact with people.

- Most pastoral contact will now have to be by phone or video call.
- Where even this is difficult, for example with the hard of hearing, do remember low-tech solutions such as letters and cards.
- Do explain to those contacted why you are phoning or writing rather than visiting.
- Don't shy away from praying for the person over the phone. Some are wary of praying for others in this way as if the medium devalues the intimacy of pastoral prayer. Yet this offer of prayer might be vital to their spiritual well-being at that moment.
- Do if possible set up a phone-buddy system in your church for the more isolated members especially. A phone-buddy check in with the isolated regularly and is able to arrange practical help on their behalf. We have the opportunity here to increase our level of contact with those who are often isolated. May this season be for them a time when they receive more care rather than reduced care.
- If your church has the ability to connect via Zoom, Skype, or another online conference programme, consider 'meeting' more often than on Sunday morning only.
- If we wish to be in contact with a person who is in a hospital or hospice, as well as the suggestions above on phone calls and cards, we can use chaplaincy services. However, be aware that chaplaincy teams will be under enormous pressure. All volunteer chaplains are no longer allowed to work, so chaplaincy teams are reduced in number. Contacting a chaplain is therefore best reserved for those patients with the greatest need. You can leave a message for the chaplains asking for one of them to visit the patient and to tell the patient that you asked them to go. If leaving a message for a chaplain, please take care to give the patient's full name and, if you know it, the ward they are on.

- The same goes for contacting those in prison. Each prison also has a chaplaincy team, but, like hospitals, they are working with reduced staffing.

## 4. Self-care

It is clear that the unusual circumstances of the pandemic will continue for a sustained season. Taking care of ourselves will be important too.

- Firstly, and most importantly, if you yourself feel unwell, please follow all the recommended procedures for self-isolation and reporting. We all have permission to be unwell! Though we hope the permission is in every way unnecessary. Please do not 'battle on' even if only you suspect you may be unwell.
- Develop a plan with your church, mission setting or workplace leadership for how the pastoral essentials will be covered if you yourself are unable to minister for a while.
- Let your regional minister or local ministerial colleagues know if you are worried about how your church or mission setting will cope if you get ill. They may be able to draw on wider support.
- The BACP have two online articles on [anxiety about coronavirus](#) and [mental health and well-being during self-isolation](#). Do look at these if you have concerns yourself or for those you pastor.

Finally, as we seek to care for each other as ministers, may we ask for your particular prayers for healthcare chaplains as they minister on the very frontline of this national crisis.

Ministries Team  
25 February 2021

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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Registered Charity Number: 1181392, operating as a CIO

Date of First Issue: 24 March 2020