



## NEC Risk Assessment Guidance

To be read in conjunction with NEC Risk Assessment Template for the Safe Reopening of NEC Church Buildings (May 2021)

### INTRODUCTION

The UK is currently experiencing a public health emergency as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. As a church, we must therefore protect individuals from harm. This includes taking reasonable steps to protect our members and others from coronavirus. This is called a COVID-19 Risk Assessment and it will help you manage risk, protect individuals, and permit activities in a manner that is safe and in line with social distancing guidelines. You must:

1. identify what activity or services might cause transmission of the virus.
2. think about who could be at risk.
3. decide how likely it is that someone could be exposed.
4. act to remove the activity or service/situation, or if this isn't possible, control the risk.
5. make necessary changes to the services and activities to minimise transmission of the virus, and ensure plans are clearly communicated to anyone who attends the church.

When completing your risk assessment make sure you talk to your members to explain the measures you are taking. They may also provide valuable information on how you could control the risk. The risk assessment will need to be implemented by the local Health and Safety officer with the support of the Pastor and local church administration to be approved and signed off by the church board. Once this has taken place send the risk assessment to the North England Conference (NEC) Executive Secretary. Do not start meeting until authorised to do so by email from the North England Conference.

Churches must use this Risk Assessment document to help you make sure you have covered what you need to keep members and others safe. Failure to complete a risk assessment that accounts for COVID-19 could constitute a breach of [Health & Safety legislation](#), as could having a risk assessment with insufficient measures set out. Churches are encouraged to make their risk assessments available online where possible.

Once you have completed your risk assessment you will also have to monitor to make sure that what you have recorded and assessed is put in place and working as expected. Review your risk assessment on a weekly basis in line with changes to Government guidelines or if the Conference changes its guidelines. If there are major changes you have to make to your risk assessment you will need to contact your church board and the North England Conference for approval to continue to worship.

Decide how you will communicate new ways of worship to the wider membership. A clear and timely communication strategy will benefit everyone.

## SOCIAL DISTANCING

### Key Considerations

1. Where in the building will social distancing be more difficult?
2. What areas or tasks are more likely to increase the risk?
3. What changes to services or activities need to be made to ensure individuals keep at least 2 metres or 1 metre with actions taken to reduce the risk of transmission (where 2 metres is not viable) apart?
4. How will the changes be implemented?
5. Can the building be rearranged to reduce the likelihood that coronavirus will spread?
6. What changes and/or additions may need to be made to items within the building to reduce the likelihood of spreading coronavirus?
7. If the building is listed, has consideration been made to ensure any changes are sensitive and reversible as well as reasonable and practicable?

You should think about how you can organise the building so that you can keep members and others at least 1m plus apart where possible.

1. Physically arrange all communal areas to keep at least 2 metres or 1 metre with actions taken to reduce the risk of transmission (where 2 metres is not viable) apart.
2. Mark areas using tape, floor paint, or tape barriers to help individuals keep 1m plus apart.
3. Provide signage to remind individuals to keep 1m plus distance apart.
4. Using screens to create a physical barrier between individuals.
5. Arrange the use of more than one exit or entry. Introducing a one-way flow in and out of the premises with appropriate floor markings or signage, with restrictions on accessing non-essential areas.
6. Set up a register to track who and how many individuals enter and exit the building.
7. Display notices / posters throughout the church to remind individuals of the social distancing rules.
8. Permit only essential trips within the building to maintain social distancing as much as possible.
9. Where social distancing cannot be maintained, extra attention needs to be paid to cleaning and hygiene to reduce the risk of transmission.

### Guidance

[Staying alert and safe \(social distancing\)](#) - The most important thing we can do is to stay alert, control the virus, and in doing so, save lives.

## CLEANING

You need to think about how to keep the areas being used in the building clean and prevent transmission by touching contaminated surfaces. Government guidance on cleaning can be found [here](#). If the building is listed, you should review Historic England's [How to Clean Historic Surfaces](#) and speak to the Conservation Officer before cleaning historic items such as stained glass.

You should consider the following:

1. What areas or items of the building are regularly touched and would need cleaning and sanitising?

### Making cleaning easier and reducing the need to clean

1. Keeping surfaces clear of objects makes it easier to clean and reduces the number of things that can become contaminated.
2. Put in place 'clean as you use systems' for areas such as meeting rooms, printers etc., to keep up with cleaning requirements.
3. If customers or others need to come to your work, put in place measures to clean after the visit.

2. What can we do to reduce the need to clean or to make cleaning easier and more effective?
3. Who will do the cleaning?

**What needs cleaning and sanitising?**

1. Common areas of the building that are likely to have areas that need cleaning such as door handles, light switches and reception areas.
2. Identify objects and surfaces that are touched regularly and decide how frequently you clean them.
3. When receiving or handling goods, you will need to decide what cleaning is needed and talk about how to make sure it's done.

**Who will do the cleaning and when?**

1. Decide if the current cleaning arrangements are enough to ensure adequate cleaning. You may choose different levels of cleaning for different areas. Deep cleaning once a day and then supplementary cleaning, e.g. wiping high contact surfaces throughout the day.
2. Providing information and instruction to those doing the cleaning to ensure they know what to clean and how to make it effective.
3. 'Clean and sanitise as you go' may need to be put in place for areas such as meeting rooms, printers etc.
4. Signs around the workplace can be a good way of letting individuals know what they need to do to keep it clean and sanitised.
5. If individuals cannot clean straight after touching surfaces, then provide hand sanitiser.
6. For higher-risk cleaning areas (toilets, etc.), you will need to ensure individuals know what to do to protect themselves.

**Guidance**

[COVID-19: Cleaning historic surfaces](#) - Public Health England (PHE) provides guidance on cleaning.

**GOOD HYGIENE**

**Key Considerations**

You need to think about:

1. Ensuring that you have handwashing facilities that provide running water, soap and paper towels and reminding to wash regularly for 20 seconds.
2. Replace hand dryers with paper towels and bins that are emptied frequently to safely dispose of waste.
3. Providing handwashing facilities (running water, soap and paper towels) at entry and exit points. Individuals should be able to wash their hands when they arrive and leave. If this is not possible, provide hand sanitiser.
4. Providing hand sanitiser in multiple areas in addition to washing facilities.
5. Providing tissues throughout the building.
6. Using signs and posters to increase awareness of good handwashing technique – reminding those in the building to catch coughs and sneezes in tissues and to

**Toilets**

Toilets inside or linked to places of worship should be kept open and carefully managed to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Steps that will usually be needed to make the use of toilets as safe as possible:

1. Using signs and posters.
2. Using social distancing marking in areas where queues normally form, and the adoption of a limited entry approach, with one in, one out (whilst avoiding the creation of additional bottlenecks).
3. To enable good hand hygiene, make hand sanitiser available on entry to toilets where safe and practical, and ensure suitable handwashing facilities. Communal towels should be removed and replaced with single use paper towels.
4. Set clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets, with increased frequency of cleaning in line with usage. Use normal cleaning products, paying attention to frequently hand touched surfaces, and consider the use of disposable cloths or paper roll to clean all hard surfaces.

avoid touching face, eyes, nose or mouth with unclean hands.

Recommendations include:

- a. [Public England's Covid-19 Employer's and Business Guide](#)
  - b. [NHS Hand-Washing Technique](#)
  - c. [Follow Catch it, Bin it, Kill it](#)
7. Setting clear guidance for the cleaning of toilets, showers and changing facilities to make sure they are kept clean.

### Personal Protective Equipment

#### Face Masks and Gloves

1. Face coverings and gloves are not a replacement for social distancing and regular handwashing, which remain the most important actions.
2. The government has advised individuals to consider wearing face coverings in enclosed public spaces, which would include churches, to help reduce the spread.
3. Public urged not to buy medical grade masks so they can be saved for frontline health and care workers, and instead make their own face coverings at home.

5. Keep the facilities well ventilated, for example by fixing doors open where appropriate and safe to do so.
6. Providing more waste facilities and more frequent refuse collection.

### Food and Drink

1. Where food or drink ('consumables') are essential to the act of worship (e.g. communion), they can be used, however the sharing of food should be avoided.
2. If it is necessary to handle consumables as a part of a community service, those giving and receiving food items should wash their hands thoroughly, or wear gloves.
3. The person distributing the consumable should release it, into the hand only, in such a way to avoid any contact between them and those receiving it, or wear gloves. If accidental contact does occur, both people should cleanse their hands immediately.
4. Other actions taken to reduce the risk of transmission should also be considered, for example, foodstuffs should be prewrapped, and a system should be in place to prevent individuals from coming into contact with consumables and any dishes and/ or cutlery other than their own (for example the use of shared bowls).
5. Services such as food distribution are permitted to open but should be limited to table-service, social distancing should be observed, and with minimal staff and 'customer' contact in line with the [hospitality guidance](#).

## PEOPLE SAFETY (MEMBERS, VISITORS & VOLUNTEERS)

Churches need to give significant consideration regarding the practical support that will be provided to members and visitors who are mature in age, vulnerable (underlying health conditions), or have disabilities should they choose to attend your church. In preparation of and to effectively manage this in the following ways:

1. Anyone showing symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g. a new continuous cough, a high temperature) should not attend (and/or politely asked to leave) due to the risk that they pose to others. They should self-isolate at home immediately with other members of their household.
2. Those leading the worship should make regular reminders of the importance of social distancing and hygiene.
3. Create a list of all vulnerable individuals, and assess what their needs would be (in advance). Actively discourage their non-attendance.
4. Continue to stream services to avoid large gatherings and to continue to reach those individuals who are self-isolating or particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

### The Use of Shared Items

1. Individuals should be prevented from touching objects that are handled communally. Barriers and/or clear signage should be put in place where necessary to avoid this taking place.
2. Individuals should also avoid touching property belonging to others which, should be placed and collected by their owner while adhering to social distancing principles.
3. Reusable and communal resources such as collection plates/baskets, hymnals or devotional material should be removed from use, and safe alternatives should be provided.
4. Any communal items that are used during the course of a service should be quarantined for 48 hours before their re-use. since their previous use and should be immediately cleaned after use. Items which are difficult to clean should be cleaned and quarantined for a minimum of 48 hours before being used.

5. Staggering arrival and departure times will reduce the flow at exits and entrances as well as reduce any impacts on public transport.
6. Using screens, barriers or alternative rooms and spaces to separate worshippers.
7. Any changes to entrances, exits and queues should take into account reasonable adjustments to accommodate those who need them, such as those with physical disabilities.
8. Consider how prioritisation could be given to people who may have a specific need or requirement and preparing for such occasions in advance.
9. Consider how well ventilated the church is and improve this where possible, for example by fixing doors open when and where appropriate.
10. Once services have completed, encouraging individuals to move on promptly, to minimise the risk of contact and spread of infection.

#### **Face coverings**

1. Evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does not protect individuals, however, if individuals are infected but have not yet developed symptoms, it may provide some protection for others they come into close contact with.
2. Face coverings are not a replacement for the other ways of managing risk, including social distancing, minimising time spent in contact, and increasing hand and surface washing. These other measures remain the best ways of managing risk in a place of worship.

#### **Singing, and the use of musical instruments**

1. Indoors: single small group of singers will be allowed to perform, or rehearse for performance, only where essential to an act of communal worship. This should be limited to as few singers as possible, with social distancing being maintained at all times. Communal singing should not take place.

### **PEOPLE SAFETY (WORKERS)**

Workers, in particular Pastors, Elders and church leaders, need to give sufficient consideration to their own wellbeing during the provision of services. In that respect, and arrangements made by the church must ensure the absolute safeguarding of all workers, and at all times. The following should be considered by workers:

1. If in contact with anyone showing symptoms of COVID-19 (a new continuous cough, a high temperature etc.), the worker should assume an immediate safe distance, and refrain from contact due to the risk that they pose. The worker should inform the individual to self-isolate at home immediately with other members of their household.
2. Workers must be aware of the created list of all vulnerable individuals, and what their needs have been assessed as.
3. Essentially, all workers should be notified of individuals who are self-isolating due to contracting COVID-19 to avoid any unnecessary contact with them.
4. Workers should be familiar with and use electronic communication to safely hold board, business and leadership meetings and to deliver weekly church services.
5. Attention should be given to target those who are isolated and vulnerable to minimise social isolation and loneliness (i.e. to reduce the need for them to venture out).

7. Workers, leaders and other lay people all have different health needs that impact church plans. The availability of individuals in the wider church who might help out, for example with cleaning the church, should be considered.
8. Workers who may themselves be in an 'at-risk' group should discuss their situation with their employer with regard to the type of work or activities they are able to perform.

#### **Evangelistic Activities**

Churches must review the focus of their evangelistic programmes in light of COVID-19, and whether activities can be safely conducted. Workers should review the arrangements with their church board and consider:

1. What different approaches might now need to be in place to evangelise safely within the local community?
2. What particular groups in the community is the church intending to reach? What are their 'needs'?
3. What partnership opportunities might exist that make evangelistic programmes more viable?

6. When conducting funeral services, PPE must be strictly worn at all times. Workers should refrain from involvement in any funeral services without the use of PPE.

**Additional Considerations**

Where appropriate, churches may consider networking and partnering with local service providers, as well as sister churches within the district or area to provide a more holistic range of services. This should, however, only be done with the necessary safeguards put in place.

**CHECKLIST**

**Key Considerations**

You should consider ALL of the following potential changes that need to be made to the physical structure of your church in order to operate safely:

1. Where in the building will social distancing be more difficult?
2. What areas or tasks are more likely to increase the risk?
3. What changes to services or activities need to be made to ensure individuals keep 1m plus apart? How will the changes be implemented?
4. Can the building be rearranged to reduce the likelihood that coronavirus will spread?
5. What changes and/or additions may need to be made to items within the building to reduce the likelihood of spreading coronavirus?
6. If the building is listed, has consideration been made to ensure any changes are sensitive and reversible as well as reasonable and practicable?
7. Are there individuals who have skills, knowledge and experience who can assist in the planning and safe delivery of any plans the church has? e.g. health professionals, administration, counselling, project management, risk assessment / management etc.
8. Do those appointed to roles have a full understanding of the expectations? Is there a need for additional training in any capacity?
9. Have the members of the church been involved in the risk assessment process and voted the plans?
10. How will the plans be effectively communicated to all who may attend the church?
11. Physically arrange all communal areas to keep at least 2 metres or 1 metre with actions taken to reduce the risk of transmission (where 2 metres is not viable) apart.
12. Mark areas using tape, floor paint, or tape barriers to help individuals keep 1m plus apart.
16. Set up a register to track who and how many individuals enter and exit the building.
17. Provide easily accessible hand sanitizer and paper towels and ask individuals to bring their own masks and writing devices.
18. Display notices / posters throughout the church to remind individuals of the general hygiene advice and social distancing rules.
19. Make arrangements for surfaces and objects likely to be frequently touched to be cleaned and disinfected as per government guidance.
20. Make necessary arrangements in regard to the collection and handling of physical money – who will be involved, is the task appropriate for them, and does the church need to provide PPE for this task to take place?
21. Ensure sufficient, well stocked First Aid Kits, and the availability at all church meetings of trained first aiders who are COVID-19 aware.
22. Permit only essential trips within the building to maintain social distancing as much as possible.
23. Leave doors open that can be left open to reduce the need for individuals to touch door handles.
24. Consider how well ventilated the church is and improve this where possible, for example by fixing doors open when and where appropriate.
25. Staggering entry times with other local venues and taking steps to avoid queues building up in surrounding areas.

**Primary Guidance**

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

13. Provide signage to remind individuals to keep at least 2 metres or 1 metre with actions taken to reduce the risk of transmission (where 2 metres is not viable) distance apart.
14. Using screens to create a physical barrier between individuals.
15. Arrange the use of more than one exit or entry.