# Risk Assessment for Opening Church Buildings to the Public: individual prayer and funerals

**Version Control**

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| Issue Date | Version Number | Issued by |
| 22nd May 2020 | 1 | The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group |
| 8th June 2020 | 2 | The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group |
| 12th June 2020 | 3 | The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group |

Churches and cathedrals are legally permitted to open for purposes of individual private prayer from 13th June.

House of Bishops guidance provides for churches to open for funerals from 15th June.

The [government 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/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic) requires a COVID-19 risk assessment to be carried out for every building and site open to the public. This document provides a template risk assessment, with links to the relevant advice notes. It relates to opening up church and cathedral buildings to clergy and members of the public entering for individual private prayer. As well as offering guidance on best-practice, it is also intended to help parishes make a decision on whether to open for individual private prayer or not, based on their local circumstances, resources and context.

Future versions of this document will be produced when different forms of public worship and access are allowed.

A risk assessment relating to contractors and construction workers forms part of an updated document giving advice on access for these groups. This can be found on the [Church of England Coronavirus pages](https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches).

**Risk assessment template**

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| **Church:**  **St Mary’s, Boston Spa** | **Assessor’s name:**  **Nick Morgan/Andrew Smith** | **Date completed:**  **17th June 2020** | **Review date:**  **Not later than 6th July 2020** |

| **Area of Focus** | **Controls required** | **Additional information and Actions** | **Action by whom?** | **Completed – date and name** |
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| **Access to church buildings for clergy for purposes of private prayer and/or livestreaming**  [General advice on accessing church buildings can be found here.](https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches)  Hazards:  Possible exposure to coronavirus from surfaces within the Church | One point of entry to the church building clearly identified and separate from public entry if possible | Office door used for clergy access. |  |  |
| A suitable lone working policy has been consulted if relevant. | An example can be [found here](https://www.ecclesiastical.com/documents/lone-working.pdf). Already in place. |  |  |
| Buildings have been aired before use. | Done, 30 May 2020 | NJM and AS | May 31st 2020 |
| Check for animal waste and general cleanliness. | Visual check – no animal waste.  Visual check - Need for cleaning of surfaces due to build up of dust. Additional cleaning by church cleaner over aperiod of weeks | NJM  Church cleaner | 13th June 2020, 10am |
| Ensure water systems are flushed through before use. | See [Government Guidance for organisations on supplying safe water supplies](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-organisations-on-supplying-safe-water-supplies?utm_source=a85cd421-5f76-4767-95f7-da69aa76fe3d&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)  No stored hot water  All water outlets flushed through for a period of 5 minutes | AS and NJM | May 31st 2020 |
| Switch on and check electrical and heating systems if needed. | All electrical systems were on during lockdown.  Heating system off until Autumn period.  Boilers working for hot water | Regular maintenance checks during lockdown  NJM |  |
| Holy water stoups and the font are empty. | n/a |  |  |
| **Preparation of the Church for individual prayer and funerals**  Hazards:  Possible exposure to coronavirus from surfaces within the Church    Possible exposure to coronavirus from person to person contact within the Church | Confirm that all steps (above) for access by clergy have been carried out before anyone else accesses the building. | All completed  Set of protocols circulated to all welcomers who will be supervising the building during opening | Completed  NJM | 13th June 2020 |
| Review CofE guide on cleaning church buildings. Complete the ‘cleaning’ section of this risk assessment (below). | Advice on[**cleaning church buildings can be found here**](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Keeping%20church%20buildings%20clean%20v1.pdf)**.** | Completed  NJM and AS | 17th June 2020 |
| Choose one point of entry into the church to manage flow of people and indicate this with notices, keeping emergency exits available at all times. Where possible use a different exit. | Main entrance. Unlock fire exit but leave bolted. | Completed  NJM and AS | 17th June 2020 |
| Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation. | Main doors will be open at all times to allow for easy access and will provide ventilation | Welcomers,  NJM and EH | All occasions of opening |
| Remove from use all books (inc. hymn books and Bibles) plus leaflets except single use material that will be removed by user. | All books removed  Newsletters to be laid out to take away on leaving church | NJM and AS  Welcomers | 18th June 2020  All occasions of opening |
| Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items | Accessible area barriered off.  One way system in operation | NJM and AS  Welcomers | 17th June 2020 |
| Consider if pew cushions/kneelers need to be removed as per government guidance | All kneelers and pew mats removed from pews that are in use | NJM and AS | 17th June 2020 |
| Remove or isolate children’s resources and play areas | Children’s corner barriered off  Soft toys and cusions removed to locked room | Completed  NJM and AS | 17th June 2020 |
| Walk through the church to plan for physical distancing in seats, aisles, at the altar rail, including safe flow of visitors. Remember 2m in all directions from each person. | Pews to be used identified and others barriered off  2m distance markings at front new candle area to ensure physical distancing | Completed  NJM and AS | 17th June 2020 |
| Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing. | Pews to be used identified and others barriered off | Completed  NJM and AS | 17th June 2020 |
| Clearly mark out flow of movement for people entering and leaving the building to maintain physical distancing requirements. | Clear clockwise route within church building  Information board. This has details of the one-way system and other information reassuring vistitors that we take their wellbeing seriously. | Completed  NJM and AS | 17th June 2020 |
| Limit access to places were the public does not need go, maybe with a temporary cordon in needed. | Barriered off areas  St Mary’s room locked | Completed  NJM and AS  Welcomers | 17th June 2020 |
| Determine placement of hand sanitisers available for visitors to use. | Foot operated sanitiser on entry and exit  Paper towels with lined bin | Completed  NJM and AS  Welcomers | 17th June 2020 |
| Determine if temporary changes are needed to the building to facilitate social distancing | n/a |  |  |
| Put up notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact, practice hand washing etc. | 2m distancing, hygiene and general information on entry and on information board inside church  2m distancing tape used near candle area | Completed  NJM and AS  Welcomers | 17th June 2020 |
| If the church has been used in the last 72 hours ensure high-risk surfaces and touch points have been wiped with appropriate sanitiser spray or disposable wipes. | Clean all door handles with spray/antiseptic wipes and discard these in lined bin  Wipe down the pew after visitors have left, taking particular care over surfaces likely to have had skin contact. | Completed  NJM and AS  Welcomers | 17th June 2020 |
| Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels. | Toilets and other handwashing areas closed.  Sanitiser to be used by all | Completed  NJM and AS  Welcomers | 17th June 2020 |
| Where there are toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available. | Toilets closed. | Completed  NJM and AS  Welcomers | 17th June 2020 |
| Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them. | All bins to be lined | Completed  NJM and AS  Welcomers | 17th June 2020 |
| **Additional arrangements for funerals**  Based on national CofE guidance | Limited number of guests up to a maximum of 20 | Members of the person’s household and close family members attend  If the above are unable to attend, very close friends may attend instead.  The Next of Kin decides who may attend up to the maximum agreed number. | Undertaker and NJM | 21st June 2020 |
| Social distancing of guests – one household can use the same pew; others will be distanced | 6 lines of pews available (three on each side of the church).  The front row of pews (both sides) may have one household per side (up to 5 people per side)  Four additional pews may be used by other guests (2 pews either side) up to a maximum of 20 attendees in total.  Briefing sheet to be prepared for use by undertaker and clergy to share all arrangements with the family – to include way to enter and exit, sanitising, donations, flowers, etc | Undertaker and NJM | 21st June 2020 |
| Usual operation as per individual prayer above | Toilet facilities not to be made available.  Cleaning will take place after funeral service in the same way as for individual prayer. | Undertaker and NJM | 21st June 2020 |
| Limited Service arrangement and persons present | Orders of service may be placed on the pews to be taken away afterwards.  No hymns or hymn books. | Undertaker and NJM | 21st June 2020 |
| **Cleaning the church before and after general use (no known exposure to anyone with Coronavirus symptoms)**  Advice on[**cleaning church buildings can be found here**](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Keeping%20church%20buildings%20clean%20v1.pdf)**.**  Hazards:  Possible exposure to coronavirus from surfaces within the Church    Possible exposure to coronavirus from person to person contact within the Church | If the church building has been closed for 72 hours between periods of being open then there is no need for extra cleaning to remove the virus from surfaces. | n/a |  |  |
| If 72-hour closure is not possible then check all cleaners are not in a vulnerable group or self-isolating. | Regular checks with church cleaner and welcomers to ensure all are well  Any displaying symptoms will not attend and self isolate in line with govt guidance | EH and NJM |  |
| Set up a cleaning rota to cover your opening arrangements. | Regular cleaning hours  Cleaning by welcomers each time church is open of pews taking particular care over surfaces likely to have had skin contact. | Church cleaner  Welcomers | All occasions of opening |
| All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable). | Gloves provided | Church cleaner  Welcomers | All occasions of opening |
| Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned. | Spray and wipes provided | Church cleaner  Welcomers | All occasions of opening |
| Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site. | Church cleaner or welcomer on duty | Church cleaner  Welcomers | All occasions of opening |
| Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal. | Church cleaner or welcomer on duty | Church cleaner  Welcomers | All occasions of opening |
| **Cleaning the church after known exposure to someone with Coronavirus symptoms**  Hazards:  Possible exposure to coronavirus from surfaces within the Church    Possible exposure to coronavirus from person to person contact within the Church | If possible close the church building for 72 hours with no access permitted. | **Church will be closed for 72 hours** | NJM | As required |
| If 72-hour closure is not possible then follow Public Health England guidance on cleaning in non-healthcare settings. | Church would be closed  [**Public Health England guidance** available here.](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings) | n/a | n/a |
| If the building has been quarantined for 72 hours, then carry out cleaning as per the normal advice on cleaning. | Advice on[**cleaning church buildings can be found here**](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Keeping%20church%20buildings%20clean%20v1.pdf)**.** | Church cleaner and welcomers | As required |

As time goes on, and lockdown is further eased, it is hoped that St Mary’s Church will revert to their custom of being open throughout the week.

This Risk Assessment and initial arrangements for opening will be reviewed after a couple of weeks to see how it is working.

Opening our church buildings is a symbol of hope for our villages. They are special places for our wider community, and a tangible reminder that God is with us wherever we are: in our homes, our work and our daily lives. They are places where we bring our personal faith into a communal place and remember that God has been at work in our village communities over many generations. Our church buildings are witnesses to this.

In opening St Mary’s Church, it is our hope that it will remind us that God is not confined to the building, nor can we only encounter God there, but in fellowship with our neighbours and those who have lived here before us, God's love is at large among us. By coming into our shared sacred space, we affirm the sacredness of our homes and daily lives.