

# COVID-19 Church Re-opening Guidelines

for

Church of God  
(Scotland)

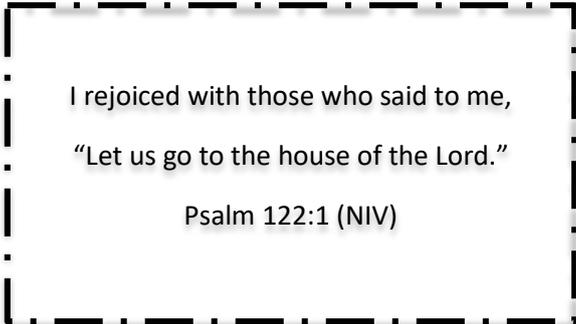
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## Foreword

As Scotland enters Phase 3 of COVID-19 Lockdown easing on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2020, this manual seeks to set out guidelines for a straightforward reinstatement to in-person church meetings. It is essential to note that re-opening is subject to effective social distancing and hygiene safeguarding and therefore, online services should continue for as long it is deemed necessary to prepare the church building for re-opening.

Re-opening our churches for public worship will certainly be a time of mixed emotions – joy at being able to come together in fellowship, along with the uncertainty of the ‘new normal’ and what the future may hold. This guidance is written to offer support in enabling church buildings to be opened safely for public worship and is adapted from published government and public health guidance.



I rejoiced with those who said to me,  
“Let us go to the house of the Lord.”  
Psalm 122:1 (NIV)

## Key Points

- Risk assessment must be carried out prior to re-opening
- The maximum capacity has been designated to be 50 by the Scottish government, however this could be significantly less for some churches for social distancing and Public Health requirements must be met.
- The two-metre rule applies for public worship except in situations where closer contact cannot be avoided; extra Public Health precautions, such as face covering, must then be taken
- While those at extra risk and the 'clinically extremely vulnerable' should be advised of the risks of attending public worship, a decision to do so is theirs alone.
- Government guidance includes a request for names of attendees to be recorded and kept for 21 days to assist 'track and trace' if required.
- Singing, chanting and playing of brass or woodwind instruments are not recommended.
- Cleaning should be rigorous and carried out before, during and after services.
- High risk groups should be encouraged to partake via online where possible.
- Church services should be considerably shorter to reduce time spent in a large gathering.

## Before Re-Opening

Prior to re-opening to the church to congregant worship there are several necessary steps which must be strictly adhered.

### COVID-19 Risk Assessment

A COVID-19 risk assessment should be carried out prior to any move to re-opening, as it will assist in informing which actions need to be taken to make safe the church building.

You can find guidance on carrying out a COVID-19 risk assessment on the Scottish Government: Health and Safety Executive website:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/risk-assessment.htm>

An example risk assessment form, adapted from those for workplaces, can be found in this Appendix of this document.

### Deep Clean

Principally the church building should undergo a deep clean, with emphasis placed on high-risk surfaces such as door handles, seating and toilets. The process of the building being initially disinfected for the virus could include fogging or misting treatments of biocidal solutions for disinfection. However, be forewarned that the contents of these treatments could adversely react with fixtures and fittings in the church building.

### Hand Sanitising Stations

Anti-microbial hand sanitisers, with greater than 60% alcohol content must be positioned at easily accessible points throughout the building and must be used by all before coming into the building at the front of the church.

### Notices and Cordons

Choose one point of entry into the church to manage flow of people and indicate this with notices, always keeping emergency exits clear and available. Where possible use a different exit point than the one used for entrance.

Cordon off or remove from public access any spaces that are not required to be accessed to minimise foot traffic to these areas. This will for the time being include the kitchen and children's area from general access.

Walk through the church to plan for physical distancing in seats and aisles, including safe flow of visitors. Remember 2m in *all* directions from each extended household or individual and thus, clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing.

Signs and notices to remind visitors about important safe practices e.g. no physical contact (including handshakes and hugging), practice hand washing etc. should be displayed prominently throughout the building.

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## The Service

### Building Capacity

Although an official cap has been placed at a maximum of 50 for the number of congregants allowed to meet, church leadership (following a risk assessment) should have a clear idea of the church building capacity for their own individual buildings while in adherence to COVID-19 guidelines.

A cautious and carefully thought out approach is best in these unprecedented times. Therefore, online broadcasting or streaming of services should continue in order to minimise the number of people attending church in person.

The social and physical distancing guidelines will inevitably mean a very reduced capacity for many of our churches. It is therefore wise to innovate to allow for various congregation members to attend, for example through a 'Reservation/Booking' or 'Rota' system.

### Entering & Exiting the Building

Safe queuing management should be put in places for a controlled flow of congregants entering and exiting the building.

Designated ushers should be in attendance to guide people as necessary to their seats, and to make sure the flow of visitors is steady, maintaining a one-way system to the extent feasible.

This controlled system should be maintained for exiting of the building also, with households/individuals leaving in staggered stages.

## Social Distancing and Hygiene

Physical distancing is still essential for everyone except children under 12 and people in the same household or extended household, and so the rule of **2 meters (6 feet)** must be maintained throughout. There should **be no handshakes, no hugging** or any other form of physical contact with those outside your household.

Good hand and respiratory hygiene, through frequent handwashing (at least 20seconds) or hand sanitising and use of disposable tissues should be preserved. If a person needs to cough or sneeze, encourage them to cover their mouth and nose and cough or sneeze into a disposable tissue. Worshippers should be reminded to avoid touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

## Ventilation

Good ventilation is crucial in reducing viral transmission, and so keep windows and doors open throughout the service where possible. Extractor fans and other forms of ventilation are also encouraged when weather does not permit opening of windows/doors.

## Face Coverings/Masks

In enclosed spaces, where physical distancing is more difficult and where there is a risk of close contact with multiple people who are not members of your household, you should wear a face covering.

Physical distancing, hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene are the most important and effective things we can all do to prevent the spread of coronavirus. The wearing of face coverings must not be used as an alternative to any of these other precautions.

## Praise and Worship

Although a crucial part of a church service, due to current (as of 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2020) government guidelines **communal singing is not possible**. This should be made clear to congregation before service begins. Worship lyrics can be projected as usual, but although worship team may lead with singing, the congregation are asked to refrain or alternatively sing quietly while wearing a face covering.

## Length of Service

In order to minimise the amount of time spent in a large gathering and safeguard congregants, church services should be shorter than usual, in particular the portions which include singing and sermons should be brief.

## Fellowship Time and Refreshments

Hospitality spaces within a place of worship, such as cafés, are permitted to open but should be limited to table-service with strict observation of social distancing in line with government hospitality guidance.

Other mitigations should also be considered, for example, food items should be prewrapped, and for tea/coffee/drinks - **disposable cups** should be used exclusively to avoid cross-contamination.

Alternatively, when a cafés or other sizeable hospitality space is not available, the church kitchen should remain closed for the time being. In this case bottled water should be made available to congregants as needed.

Social distancing (2m) should be maintained when fellowshiping with other church members out with your household, and the congregation should be encouraged to keep this time to a minimum within the church building and face-to-face interaction is avoided.

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# Contact Tracing: Test and Protect

Church leadership should familiarise themselves with Test and Protect, which is designed to prevent spread of COVID-19 in the community.

A reception/check-in area should be set-up in a well ventilated and easily accessible area at the front of the church building to assist in taking record of congregants and visitors.

In line with guidance for other venues churches are asked to keep the temporary register of worshippers, visitors and staff/volunteer contact details for a period of 21 days for Test and Protect. This is to support contact tracing as part of NHS Scotland's Test and Protect system, in the event of an outbreak linked to a particular venue. Collecting contact details is **voluntary**, but cooperation with Test and Protect measures will be crucial to national efforts to suppress the virus.

Please see appendix for a "COVID-19 Collection of Name and Contact Details for NHS Test and Trace" consent form template.

It is important to clearly communicate to the membership the importance of following the government guidelines and the church COVID policy for the protection of all. Church leadership could also consider the option of using this reception/check-in area to additionally collect Disclaimer document for each person before entering the meeting, though this is at individual church and members' discretion.

## General Cleaning and Hygiene

- Cleaning should be rigorous and maintained with approved disinfectant before, during and after each meeting.
- Cleaning and sanitizing is particularly encouraged to all high traffic surfaces, such as toilets, throughout the service.
- Set up a cleaning rota.
- All cleaners should be provided with gloves (ideally disposable) as well as necessary cleaning equipment and products.
- Take particular care that high-risk surfaces and touch points (e.g. doors, seat backs, entry ways etc.) have been wiped with appropriate sanitiser spray or disposable wipes.
- Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels.
- For toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available.
- All waste receptacles should have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them.
- Frequently remove potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels).

If an individual who has attended the church has a suspected COVID-19 infection, a person is sick, have a fever, show any signs of cold, flu, or COVID-19 symptoms, or if they have been in contact with anyone who has had COVID-19 in the past 14 days, please encourage them to stay home. COVID-19 symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, difficulty breathing, chills, muscle pain and new loss or change in the sense of taste or smell.

The church should temporarily close so that it can be cleaned. Guidance on environmental decontamination (cleaning and disinfection) after a possible case has been in the church building can be found in the “Core COVID-19 Information and Guidance for General (Non-Healthcare) Settings” document on the Health Protection Scotland website [<https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/web-resources-container/covid-19-guidance-for-non-healthcare-settings/>].

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## High Risk Groups

Those who are considered to be extremely clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 will have been advised to shield and are currently advised not to meet more than one person from outside of their own household, and therefore not currently advised to attend places of worship. Though there has been a relaxing on these rules, as shielding individuals may choose to gather in groups of up to 6 people outdoors and form a support bubble with another household, they will therefore still be advised not to attend places of worship indoors. If you have members at high risk due to underlying medical conditions strongly encourage them to feel free to stay home and view the services online.

While those who are at moderate risk, such as those over 65 years of age and are not comfortable congregating, should also be urged to feel comfortable to remain home and take part via online; but they should also feel reassured of attendance through the church building being appropriately readied.

Church members of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background must also be made aware of their increased risk and vulnerability from COVID-19 and should be offered assistance where necessary to mitigate this risk as they say fit.

Find below the NHS definition of those at High and Moderate Risk:

People at high risk (clinically extremely vulnerable):

- have had an organ transplant
- are having chemotherapy or antibody treatment for cancer, including immunotherapy
- are having an intense course of radiotherapy (radical radiotherapy) for lung cancer
- are having targeted cancer treatments that can affect the immune system (such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors)
- have blood or bone marrow cancer (such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma)
- have had a bone marrow or stem cell transplant in the past 6 months, or are still taking immunosuppressant medicine
- have been told by a doctor they have a severe lung condition (such as cystic fibrosis, severe asthma or severe COPD)
- have a condition that means they have a very high risk of getting infections (such as SCID or sickle cell)
- are taking medicine that makes them much more likely to get infections (such as high doses of steroids or immunosuppressant medicine)

People at moderate risk (clinically vulnerable):

- are 70 or older
- have a lung condition that's not severe (such as asthma, COPD, emphysema or bronchitis)
- have heart disease (such as heart failure)
- have diabetes
- have chronic kidney disease
- have liver disease (such as hepatitis)
- have a condition affecting the brain or nerves (such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis or cerebral palsy)
- have a condition that means they have a high risk of getting infections
- are taking medicine that can affect the immune system (such as low doses of steroids)
- are very obese (a BMI of 40 or above)
- are pregnant – see advice about pregnancy and coronavirus

## Staff and Volunteers

Staff and volunteers should take additional precautions, striving to maintain the 2m physical distances but also additionally wearing face covering, gloves and practicing frequent hand washing/sanitising during their interactions with the congregations.

Church leadership could consider a requirement of all staff and volunteers to be scanned for temperature/fever, though this should be as individual discretion and wholly voluntary.

## Communion

When serving communion, individual elements should be distributed to each member by a person/usher/elder wearing a face mask and gloves. The congregation should remain in their seats, and communion elements should be brought to them.

## Children's Ministry

Young children should be supervised by the parent or guardian and appropriate hygiene precautions followed.

Separate children's activities being organised by the church alongside or within a service or at other times during the week should follow principles in the general guidance from the [Department for Education on Out of School Settings](#).

In outline, these recommend that, to reduce the risk of transmission, children and young people who attend should be kept in small, consistent groups, and **of no more than fifteen children** and at least **one staff member**. Children should be assigned to a class or group and should then stay in those consistent groups for future sessions and avoid mixing with other groups in your setting.

If possible, adult staff member should practise physical distancing in line with the government's current guidance, though children under 12 years of age may interact with each without this in place.

As the risk of transmission is considerably lower outdoors, please consider whether it is feasible to do so safely outside church premises.

Particular attention should be paid to cleaning frequently touched surfaces by children and those that are at child height.

Any shared facilities for children, such as play corners, soft furnishings, soft toys and toys that are hard to clean, should be removed and put out of use.

If you are collecting data for NHS Test and Trace the details of the parent or guardian of an accompanied young person or child need only be collected.

For unaccompanied children or young people aged 13 years old or over, they can be asked to provide their details and sign the consent form, or make an individual booking where consent is required. You may need to explain to them what the data is being collected for so they understand what Test and Trace is about, rather than relying on them reading and understanding the privacy notice on their own.

## Giving/Offering/Tithing

If you wish to receive tithes and offerings during the service, church leadership should consider having the offering collections set up at entrance or exit points of the main sanctuary for members to place their tithes or gifts in before or after service.

Encourage where possible online/contactless giving and tithing.

## Respect and Unity

We want to do our best to both comply with regulations and keep our members and those most vulnerable safe. It is important for each member's cooperation in keeping the guidelines in place. Please encourage each other to respect others.

We do not want to spread fear, but we must also use wisdom and remain cautious and courteous with others. Even though we are physically distancing ourselves, we are in this together. The purpose of assembling is to worship God in unity in Christ.

# Appendix

## Contact Tracing Consent Form Sample

### COVID-19

#### Collection of Name and Contact Details for NHS Test and Trace

##### Consent Form

*[Insert name of church and church building and address, or use headed paper]*

In order to support the NHS Test and Trace programme, we are taking contact details (name and telephone number) for all visitors, as well as recording times entering and leaving *[church/cathedral/relevant church building]*.

In line with guidance issued by the Department for Health and Social Care, we will keep your details safely and in compliance with GDPR legislation for 21 days before securely disposing of or deleting them. We will only share your details with NHS Test and Trace, if asked, in the event that it is needed to help stop the spread of coronavirus. We will not use your details for any other purposes or pass them on to anyone else.

Thank you for your understanding.

If you agree to providing your information for this reason, please complete the following form:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

## Example Risk Assessment Form

This is a draft copy of a **generic Risk Assessment** for dealing with the current Covid-19 situation in a church environment. It is not likely to cover all scenarios and each church should consider their own unique circumstances. Much more specific assessments may look quite different although many of the principles would still be relevant. To keep up to date with HSENI in this fast changing situation visit <https://www.hseni.gov.uk/news/coronavirus-covid-19-and-hseni-contact-details-update>

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed	Controls Required	Additional Controls	Action by who?	Action by when?	Done
Spread of Covid-19 Coronavirus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Staff &amp; Volunteers</b></li> <li>• <b>Church members and Visitors</b></li> <li>• <b>Vulnerable groups</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Hand Washing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hand washing/sanitising facilities with soap and water in place.</li> <li>• Stringent hand washing taking place.</li> <li>• See hand washing guidance.</li> <li>• <a href="https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/">https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/</a></li> <li>• Drying of hands with disposable paper towels.</li> <li>• <a href="https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/research-and-innovation/paper-towels-much-more-effective-at-removing-viruses-than-hand-dryers-17-04-2020/">https://www.nursingtimes.net/news/research-and-innovation/paper-towels-much-more-effective-at-removing-viruses-than-hand-dryers-17-04-2020/</a></li> </ul>	<p>Congregants to be reminded on a regular basis to wash their hands for 20 seconds with water and soap and the importance of proper drying with disposable towels. Or to use hand sanitising gel found at stations throughout the church building. Also reminded to catch coughs and sneezes in tissues – Follow Catch it, Bin it, Kill it and to avoid touching face, eyes, nose or mouth with unclean hands.</p> <p>To help reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) reminding everyone of the public health advice - <a href="https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus">https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus</a></p> <p>Posters, leaflets and other materials are available for display.</p>			

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff encouraged to protect the skin by applying emollient cream regularly</li> <li>• <a href="https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/emollients/">https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/emollients/</a></li> <li>• Gel sanitisers in any area where washing facilities not readily available</li> </ul> <p><b>Cleaning</b> Frequently cleaning and disinfecting objects and surfaces that are touched regularly particularly in areas of high use such as door handles, light switches, reception area using appropriate cleaning products and methods.</p>	<p><a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19</a></p> <p>Rigorous checks will be carried out by church leadership to ensure that the necessary procedures are being followed.</p> <p>Set up a cleaning rota.</p> <p>Buildings have been aired before use. Where possible, doors and windows should be opened temporarily to improve ventilation. Check for animal waste and general cleanliness. Ensure water systems are flushed through before use.</p> <p>Switch on and check electrical and heating systems if needed. Commission system checks as necessary. Ensure safe use of equipment needed for livestreaming: avoid exceeding safe load on sockets, cables/tripod causing trip hazard</p> <p>Check that handwashing facilities have adequate soap provision and paper towels, and a bin for the paper towels. Where there are toilet facilities, ensure an adequate supply of soap and disposable hand towels, and a bin for towels, are available.</p>			
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		<p><b>Social Distancing</b>  Social Distancing -Reducing the number of persons in any work area to comply with the 2-metre (6.5 foot) gap recommended by the Public Health Agency  <a href="https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus">https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus</a>  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people</a></p> <p>Redesigning processes to ensure social distancing in place.</p>	<p>Ensure all waste receptacles have disposable liners (e.g. polythene bin bags) to reduce the risk to those responsible for removing them.</p> <p>All cleaners provided with gloves (ideally disposable).  Suitable cleaning materials provided, depending on materials and if historic surfaces are to be cleaned.  Confirm person responsible for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site.  Confirm the frequency for removing potentially contaminated waste (e.g. hand towels) from the site – suggested daily removal.</p> <p>Church members to be reminded on a regularly of the importance of social distancing both in the workplace and outside of it.  Church Leadership should carry out checks to ensure this is adhered to.</p> <p>One point of entry to the church building clearly identified.</p> <p>Make any temporary arrangements for people to wait or queue outside the building (taking into account any consequential risks arising from people gathering outside).</p>			
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		<p><b><u>Wearing of Gloves</u></b> Where Risk Assessment identifies wearing of gloves as a requirement of the job, an adequate supply of these will be provided. Staff will be instructed on how to remove gloves carefully to reduce contamination and how to dispose of them safely.</p> <p><b><u>Symptoms of Covid-19</u></b> If anyone becomes unwell with a new continuous cough or a high temperature in the church, they will be sent home and advised to follow the stay at home guidance.</p> <p>If advised that a member of staff or public has developed Covid-19 and</p>	<p>Cordon off or remove from public access any devotional objects or items (if they are liable to be touched or closely breathed on) Remove or isolate children’s resources and play areas 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 household. Clearly mark out seating areas including exclusion zones to maintain distancing.</p> <p>Staff to be reminded that wearing of gloves is not a substitute for good hand washing.</p>			
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		<p>were recently on church premises, the church leadership will contact the Public Health Authority to discuss the case, identify people who have been in contact with them and will take advice on any actions or precautions that should be taken.  <a href="https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/">https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/</a></p> <p><b>Mental Health</b>  Church Leadership will promote mental health &amp; wellbeing awareness to church members during the Coronavirus outbreak and will offer whatever support they can to help  Reference -  <a href="https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/">https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/</a>  <a href="http://www.hseni.gov.uk/stress">www.hseni.gov.uk/stress</a></p>	<p>If possible, provide safe means for worshippers and visitors to record their name and contact details; retain each day's record for 21 days</p> <p>Internal communication channels and cascading of messages through staff and volunteers' channels will be carried out regularly to reassure and support church members in a fast-changing situation.</p> <p>Church Leadership will offer support to members who are affected by Coronavirus or has a family member affected.</p> <p>Regular communication of mental health information and open door policy for those who need additional support.</p>			
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## Additional Resources

Scottish Government Guidance for Places of Worship:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/pages/overview/>

Health Protection Scotland - Core COVID-19 Information and Guidance for General (Non-Healthcare) Settings:

<https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/web-resources-container/covid-19-guidance-for-non-healthcare-settings/>

NHS Inform Scotland:

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>

Department of Education - Protective measures for out-of-school settings during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/protective-measures-for-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>