

Latest guidance on the reopening of places of worship

On Tuesday 30 June, the National Church published further guidance on public worship in relation to the recent government decision that places of worship will be able to reopen from Saturday 4 July. Over the last few days there has been further updated guidance on holy communion, baptisms, weddings, funerals and confirmations. Also, further Government advice is expected about the use of churches and church halls for non-religious activity.

Key Points from the Guidance of 2nd July 2020

- A limit of 30 has been set for weddings and other 'stand-alone' services such as baptisms and confirmations.
- There is no numerical limit on other services, but social distancing and Public Health requirements must be met, and:
- The two-metre 'rule' applies for public worship except in situations where closer contact cannot be avoided; extra Public Health precautions must then be taken. This means the number who attend an act of public worship will be limited by the number that will fit in your church with a 2m distance all around an individual or family group.
- Ministers and members of the congregation must sanitise their hands on entry and exit. The entrance and exit must be arranged so that social distancing is maintained, and where possible the entry and exit should be by different doors.
- Wearing of face-coverings for the congregation is voluntary, but we will make recommendations for clergy particularly when presiding at the Eucharist when we send out the updated advice on holy communion. Clergy must lead worship so that there is a good distance between them and anyone in front of them.
- 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. Further details from the government are expected to help parishes and cathedrals to do this in ways that comply with GDPR. In most of our congregations, clergy or wardens have a pretty good idea who attended a service, and I think it would be sufficient for them to make a note.
- There should be no congregational singing, nor playing of brass or woodwind instruments at the moment, but we are waiting further guidance that will indicate in what circumstances more can be done musically. A single singer or cantor appropriately socially distanced – meaning not singing "at" anyone within 5 metres, may sing. Remember the airborne droplets projected from singing or coughing – and shouting – go a lot further than those from quietly speaking.
- Public worship guidance includes surrounding grounds (including churchyards, car parks and courtyards); meetings in other places should follow other guidance for people meeting in public spaces.
- There should be no refreshments served after the service.
- Services should be kept shorter than you are used to, to minimise the time that people are congregated in the church building.