

Covid-19: Faith Settings Webinar

Intro

Welcome to our COVID support webinar for the safe use of places of worship. We hope that you are all safe and well. During this webinar, we will be looking at the regulations and guidance specific to Faith settings. We will offer you support and guidance on how to operate safely during the pandemic, whilst allowing you to protect yourself and others around you.

Our newly launched Covid Business Support team is made up of professional officers and our responsibilities are to offer you support, guidance and to regulate against the requirements.

We have a panel of experts here today, including myself, Charlotte Rose, I'm an EHO by profession, and our public health expert, Ravi Seehra.

The role of the City Council in response to the pandemic is to investigate workplace outbreaks and to work with other partners, such as West Midlands Police and Public Health, engaging and advising both yourselves and the public. This includes regulating where needed.

During this webinar, Ravi and I will be talking you through the different stages set out within the road map and we will also be providing you with useful information regarding risk assessments, cleaning, testing and vaccinations.

We will also be providing you with an FAQ document, a link to this presentation and our email address to make contact should you need it. Please get in contact with us should you have any other questions or concerns and we will do our best to help assist you.

Covid Compliance Recognition Scheme

You may have seen our COVID Compliance Stickers located within businesses across the City. The City Council introduced our Covid Compliance Recognition Scheme to acknowledge the good work of these businesses and to provide the public with reassurance that these businesses are safe to visit.

We've carried out nearly 3000 visits since the scheme was introduced, with our efforts initially being focused on the retail sector. The success of the scheme means we are now looking to open this up to other sectors, including yourselves.

To receive your recognition sticker, you will be required to have adequate infection prevention and control measures in place, including a COVID 19 risk assessment, and a site visit will be undertaken by a professional officer within the service. You are also required to maintain and adapt these standards as we move through the stages of the road map set by government.

Should you comply, these details will be listed on the Council website as a 'COVID Secure' premise. We would also encourage you to display your sticker in a prominent position so it can be easily identified by the public.

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Open for the following

Under current guidance, places of worship are permitted to open for the following reasons:

- Individual prayer
- Communal worship
- Funerals
- Commemorative events
- Weddings and civil partnership ceremonies
- Broadcasting / filming an act of worship
- Childcare and education
- Essential voluntary and public services
- Support groups

Risk Assessment

What is a risk assessment?

Broadly speaking, a risk assessment is a careful examination of what, in your work, could cause harm to people, and the ways that you can successfully manage these risks to avoid this harm from occurring.

As the responsible person, you must conduct a risk assessment to understand how the virus could be transmitted in your premises. You should think about the way that you conduct your service, how your premises is used, and ways that you can protect yourself and members of the congregation, by identifying factors that could result in transmission of the virus. By identifying these hazards, you can then identify sensible measures to control these risks.

An example of a hazard would be touch points such as door handles, or religious text. These touchpoints create a risk as the virus could be present on these surfaces. To avoid this risk, touch points should be wiped down frequently, be propped open where possible, and religious text that is un-wipeable should be quarantined.

Test & Trace

To assist with the NHS Test and Trace Service, we are urging venues to keep a temporary record of visitors for 21 days, in a way that is manageable for your place of worship. We would also encourage you to assist NHS Test and Trace with requests for data if needed, for contact tracing and the investigation of local outbreaks. You should also consider displaying an official NHS QR code poster so that those with the app can check in. The use of the QR Code poster is a much more convenient alternative to a physical register, so long as you encourage the congregation to use it.

Keeping your premises clean

COVID is carried in the air through tiny droplets. Larger droplets can land on surfaces that they touch, while smaller droplets, called aerosols, can stay in the air for at least 5 minutes if there is no ventilation. Therefore, cleaning your premises is a crucial part to achieving compliance and controlling the spread of the virus.

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You should implement a strict cleaning regime, focusing on touch points such as door handles and taps on all hand wash basins. We recommend that you have a designated member of the team who takes sole responsibility for these tasks, and that frequency is high, especially during busier periods. You should remember to keep doors and windows open as a key control measure, including for a short while after the congregation have left.

Social distancing

Social distancing is where you keep a safe physical distance from others outside of your household or support bubble.

To allow for this, you should look at reducing your capacity levels, staggering arrival and exit times and placing floor markings and signage throughout the premises. You should also look to introduce one-way traffic routes, with people entering and exiting through separate doors, to avoid mixing.

People attending individual prayer should only do so with their household or support bubble, and they must not mix with others. You should ensure that this is managed effectively. You may look to remove seats, use back to back configuration, and one household per pew as an example.

Face Coverings

What is a face covering? A face covering can be very simple, and should cover both your nose, mouth, and fall below the chin. (I have a few examples for you here)

It is important to note that a face visor or shield, often seen to be worn by many, may be worn in addition to a face covering but not instead of one. This is because face visors or shields do not adequately cover the nose and mouth.

It is a legal requirement to wear a face covering within a place of worship. You are expected to wear one before entering the premises and must keep it on until you leave, unless there is a reasonable excuse for removing it.

We would encourage you to place signage at the entrance to the building, as well as in and around the building, to remind people of the requirements.

A full list of exemptions can be found online at the gov.uk website.

Things to consider

Use of shared items –

Individuals should be prevented from touching or kissing objects that are handled communally. Barriers and/or clear signage should be put in place where necessary to avoid this from taking place.

Individuals should also avoid touching property belonging to others, such as shoes, which, if removed, should be placed and collected by their owner while adhering to social distancing principles.

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Reusable and communal resources such as prayer mats, service sheets, religious texts or devotional material should be removed from use. Single use alternatives should be provided as long as they are removed and disposed of by the worshipper.

Items owned by the individual to aid worship such as a prayer mat or religious text, can be brought in but should be removed again by the worshipper.

In circumstances where worshippers cannot bring their own books, places of worship should keep a selection of clean books for individuals to use. Clean books should be quarantined for 48 hours since their previous use and should be quarantined for 48 hours again after use. Items which cannot be easily cleaned should also be subject to the 48-hour quarantine period prior to their usage.

Use of water :

Any pre-requisite washing/ablution rituals should not be done at the place of worship but carried out prior to arrival. People should not wash the body parts of others, and where rituals or ceremonies require water to be applied to the body, others present should move out of range of any potential splashing.

Full immersion:

Where full immersion in water is necessary as part of a ritual or ceremony, this should be very carefully planned. Those being immersed should always be at least 2 meters away from the congregation and officiants at all times, except while they are being immersed. Only one person should be immersed at any time and they should only be attended by a single officiant/clergy member. During the immersion, clergy/the officiant can place their hands on the head of the person being immersed, but they should not 'cradle' the person or touch them in any other way

Singing, chanting and musical instruments:

Singing, playing some musical instruments, shouting and physical activity all increase the risk of transmitting the virus through small droplets and aerosols. As a result, safeguards should be put in place to minimize opportunities for the virus to spread.

Where singing or chanting is essential to an act of worship, this should be limited to one person wherever possible. Exceptionally, where it is essential to the service, up to three individuals should be permitted to do so. Strict social distancing should be observed, and the use of screens should be considered to protect worshippers, and each other.

Communal singing should not take place. This applies even if social distancing is being observed or face coverings are used. Chanting, shouting and/or playing of instruments that are blown into should also be avoided in communal worship and in rehearsals.

Where communal singing plays a big part in worship, we suggest you use recordings if possible, as opposed to live singing. If a place of worship hosts a professional group for rehearsing, you should follow the [performing arts guidance](#), which we will provide you a link for.

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Outdoor Worship

In the grounds of a place of worship, the law allows for multiple groups to pray however, people **must** adhere to social distancing between households.

This should be incorporated into your risk assessment and COVID-19 Secure measures should be implemented. The number of people who are able to gather will therefore be dependent on the size of the space available.

Acts of worship should not take place away from the place of worship or its surrounding grounds.

Hands

Hand washing is a key control measure to help to prevent the spread of the virus.

You should ensure that you have designated hand wash basins located in convenient locations, with a supply of hot and cold running water, liquid soap and paper towels for hand drying.

Hand sanitizing stations should be placed at the entrance, toilets, and other areas throughout the premises. You should request that the congregation use this as they enter for prayers.

Toilets

You should continue to provide toilet facilities as you re-open, and make sure that these are carefully managed and kept clean.

You should ensure that you have a strict, as well as frequent, cleaning regime in place and ensure that you always have liquid hand soap and paper towels topped up. Hand sanitizer should also be kept to the entrance and on hand wash basins.

Waste bins should be emptied frequently, and these areas should be kept well ventilated.

Food & Drink

If it is necessary to handle such consumables as a part of a faith practice, those giving and receiving food items should wash their hands thoroughly before and after consumption, or wear gloves. 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.

Voluntary feeding and food banks are services offered by many of you within our City. Where food or drink are essential to the act of worship, they can be used, however the sharing of food should be avoided, as should the use of communal vessels.

Hospitality spaces within a place of worship, such as cafes, are permitted to open but should be limited to service for consumption off the premises.

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Weddings and funerals

At the moment, funerals are limited to 30 persons attending. This applies to any before or after ceremonies that may take place to mourn, such as attending a temple to pray before the funeral commences.

For the scattering of ashes and stone settings - there should be no more than 6 individuals in attendance.

For weddings and civil partnerships – there should be no more than 6 people, and it is advised that these should only take place under exceptional circumstances.

It is important to note that those working are not included

Musical instruments, choirs and singing can take place during these ceremonies, however those that are there to mourn, and who wish to take part in such activity, for example; playing an instrument, still will fall part of the permitted 30 persons.

Support Groups

Many of you offer your premises for the provision of support groups. Support groups can take place, with a maximum of 15 person, and for mutual aid.

Examples include:

- Victims of crime
- Those with, or recovering from addictions
- New parents
- Those with, or caring for persons with any long-term illness or terminal condition
- Those facing issues related to sexuality, identity
- Bereavement
- Vulnerable young people

Communication

One of the key roles here is communication, and how you communicate what we have discussed here today.

A good idea is to place a copy of your risk assessment online, place signs in and around the building and have online briefings / letters / newsletters, especially as you plan to re-open and as we progress through the road map.

You also want to ensure that these messages are communicated effectively to the vulnerable.

Think about COVID Marshall/stewards, have them working/volunteering during busier periods, directing the congregation, and encouraging people to remain safe.