



10th December 2021

Dear Friends,

Following the government's recent publication of the new Covid rules I would like to share with you new Church of England guidelines based on the government's guidelines. This is a long letter but I do urge you to read it all. Thank you.

According to the C of E guidelines who makes the decision on what happens in church settings and at events held in church buildings?

The responsibility for making decisions about how to proceed lies with the incumbent. This applies to acts of worship, to events run by the PCC or church community, and to decisions on whether to hire out spaces or allow other events to proceed. Incumbents should feel empowered to make locally appropriate decisions, including taking different approaches to different types of services and events where the risks may vary.

Do churches still need to do a risk assessment? Yes, it is important that the person acting as the 'venue manager' (incumbent/PCC) carry out a risk assessment. This is part of keeping congregations, volunteers, staff and visitors safe.

In those cases where additional covid measures are requested a pastoral and collaborative approach would be strongly advised clearly stating the reasons why these are being asked for. Additional measures may include:

- Restricting numbers
- Limiting or avoiding singing by the congregation
- Asking people to stay at home if they are unwell
- Considering individual risks for all those likely to attend, such as clinical vulnerabilities, illness and vaccination status These measures should complement existing good practice for making our buildings safe above.

1. ***Face coverings are currently mandatory*** on public transport and in a range of indoor venues ***including places of worship***. While there are exemptions this is a legal requirement. (Please see the attached document for full details of exemptions.)

*Masks will be required to be worn throughout the service and not just whilst entering or exiting the church and walking around.*

*Please could our church wardens ensure that all the face coverings, that we obtained and had available for previous occasions when masks have been mandatory, be available at the church doors for those who either haven't brought one or would prefer to wear the ones we have.*

2. Can we sing and perform music in church?

Yes, singing and musical performances of all kinds are allowed in churches, including congregational singing, and choirs and worship groups can perform without legal limitations. However, churches may want to consider face coverings are used by congregations while singing depending upon their local circumstance.

***We will require face coverings to be worn whilst singing.***

3. Can we use service booklets and hymn books?

*Yes. We will return to the previously used practice of having the books and service sheets individually placed on a table available for people to pick up on entering the church and return as they exit. Please could the church wardens make this available.*

4. *Hand sanitiser will be available at the church door for people to use on entering and leaving church. Please could the church wardens make this available.*

5. Do we still need to ask people to register for Test and Trace?

Places of worship are not legally required to display or ask people to register for NHS Test and Trace. However, the government is asking that public venues do continue to ask people to register for venue check in (the QR code) as it will continue to form one of the main ways of them identifying people who may have been exposed to coronavirus. Testing, contact tracing and self-isolation will remain in place as key protections against the virus – including the need to self-isolate if you are a contact of someone who tests positive. That requirement will be lifted for double-vaccinated people and under 18s on 16 August.

Continuing to ask people to register for NHS Test and Trace is one way of being able to know if those who come into our building have been exposed to the virus. Although it has never been possible to insist on registering, it is recommended by the C of E that we continue to ask people to provide details, either through the app or another means, to aid management of future infections.

*For the continued safety of our congregations and to prevent them unintentionally passing on the virus to another person our churches:*

*- we will ask people to contact the church warden or the Vicar if they test positive to COVID following a church service.*

*- the church will return to asking people for their contact details to allow us to inform them if they have come into contact with someone at church who subsequently is found to be COVID positive.*

*Please could the church wardens make this available.*

6. Is the church restricted on how many can attend services.

*No. The numbers at church services are not mandated by law but potentially by the pre-pandemic capacity of the building. However, there is an expectation by Government that people act responsibly in indoor spaces, particularly where large numbers of people are involved.*

7. Church we provide tea/coffee refreshments after services?

Yes, there are no longer any restrictions on serving food and drink, and people no longer have to be seated in their households or bubbles to eat and drink. You should still consider ways to protect those doing the serving and washing up, such as providing gloves and appropriate cleaning materials. Government guidance on face coverings in these settings should be taken into account.

These safety measures are intended to safeguard our neighbour and fellow Christian as well as ourselves.

I'd like to finish with the words of the Bishop of London, Sarah Mullally, who leads the Church of England's Covid Recovery Group,

"As we look forward to celebrating again the coming of Jesus into our world, we can do so with hope. Few of us imagined when we first heard of the coronavirus at the beginning of last year that we would now be approaching our second Christmas of a global pandemic. The recent emergence of the new Omicron variant and the evidence we've seen already of its rapid spread is a cause of real concern. And while we are hugely thankful for the rapid development and mass rollout of the vaccines - and the current booster programme - there are important steps we should take now to protect ourselves and each other. As Christians we have a duty to care for one another, especially those who are most vulnerable, and the latest measures announced by the Government should offer some extra protection and reassurance for people. Caring for one another, sharing, hope, faith and most of all the knowledge that God is with us are at the heart of Christmas. This Christmas we will be coming together – whether in person or online – to worship God and celebrate his coming into the world as a human being like us. Amid all that we have been through together in the last two years that hope is as strong as ever."

I look forward to seeing you in church this Christmas. Merry Christmas.  
Keep well and God bless you.

*Rev'd Nicki*