**ALERT LEVEL ZERO: COVID 19 CORONAVIRUS**

**GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL CHURCH MANAGERS**

***Introduction***

This guidance is intended to help local trustee bodies consider the ongoing management of Covid-19 transmission in the light of the removal of specific legal restrictions by Welsh Government.

The guidance is set out as a number of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ’s) supported by other specific documents and links.

Q: What legal restrictions are in place regarding the control of Coronavirus?

A: There are now (as at 7th May 2022) virtually no specific legal restrictions or controls relating to Coronavirus. It remains a legal requirement to wear a face covering in a health or care setting (unless exempt) but this does not apply in our context.

Q: Why do we need to even consider Coronavirus in planning our work?

A: You need to consider Coronavirus because it is a highly transmissible disease spread when people come into contact with others who are infected. It is a reasonably foreseeable hazard when people gather for activities such as worship, community activity or socializing.

Under Health and Safety Regulations, the organisers of activities are under a legal duty to take reasonable measures to prevent staff, volunteers or customers coming to harm. Coronavirus is a clear hazard in society today and, therefore, you are under a duty to take reasonable measures to protect people visiting your church or hall from coming to harm by contracting the disease.

Furthermore, Coronavirus disproportionately affects the most vulnerable in our society such as the elderly or those with underlying health conditions. We have a clear moral and Christian duty to look out for them.

Q: Is Coronavirus still a hazard and how is it spread?

Definitely. Coronavirus has not gone away. It is still spreading through society but the success of the vaccination programme means that its impact on most people is relatively benign.

The key thing to remember is that Coronavirus is primarily spread by people breathing on each other. Breathed air is moist and contains water vapour and droplets. These can hang in the air so well ventilated or outdoor spaces reduce transmission risks as droplets are blown away.

Vapour and droplets will land on surfaces and people can therefore contract the disease by touching such surfaces and then touching their mouths or other parts of their body. For this reason, regular hand sanitizing and surface cleaning will help reduce the risk of transmission.

Q: What buildings can we open?

A: All buildings can be opened including churches, cathedrals church halls or other community buildings. Coronavirus itself is not a reason to keep buildings closed.

Q: What activities can we undertake?

A: All church and community activities can take place including opening buildings to visitors.

Q: Do we need to record people attending?

A: No. It is no longer a legal duty to record people attending services and other activities but organisations can consider doing so to aid contact tracing (which continues until June)

Q: Can we sing?

A: Yes. Congregational and choral singing can take place. It is an activity where the breath is expelled more forcibly so may increase risk of transmission. Other mitigation measures such as good ventilation, discouraging attendance by symptomatic people, hand sanitizing etc will help reduce risks of transmission. You might consider limiting the number of hymns sung too.

Q: Can we hold Eucharist services and can communion be in both kinds?

A: Yes. Specific guidance on how to undertake these in a way that sensibly manages disease transmission risk is available on the Church in Wales’Wales website.

There are three options to consider – communion in one kind only, a form of simultaneous administration or in both kinds. The guidance sets out some suggested precautions for each option.

Q: Do we still have to prepare a Coronavirus Risk Assessment?

A: Whilst there is no longer specific legislation that requires a Coronavirus Risk Assessment, general Health and Safety legislation requires the organisers of activities to take reasonable measures to prevent staff, volunteers or customers from coming to harm.

Reasonable measures are determined through undertaking a risk assessment that assesses the likelihood of a hazard occurring and the consequences if it does occur. The risk assessment then identifies measures that would be put in place to lessen the impact. So, you should undertake a risk assessment for Coronavirus and this should be developed as part of your Health and Safety Policy and normal risk assessment procedures. This is a good opportunity to review your Health and Safety Policy and Procedures and there is useful advice available from:

<https://ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/managing-safety-at-your-church/>

Q: Does the Coronavirus Risk Assessment have to be approved by anyone?

A: The Risk Assessment must be approved by the trustee body responsible for the building and activities usually the Ministry/Mission Area Council or the PCC. The same applies to all risk assessments for other hazards.

You do not need to submit the Risk Assessment to the Archdeacon or other nominated person in the Diocese.

Q: What should our Coronavirus Risk Assessment contain?

A template risk assessment specifically for Coronavirus is available on the Church in Wales’ website.

Q: Do we have to retain Social Distancing?

A: No. Social distancing is no longer a legal requirement but remains a very useful way of limiting the likelihood of transmission of Coronavirus (or any other transmissible disease). It is a mitigation measure that should still be considered but, clearly, certain activities will make this measure impractical.

Q: Do we have to wear face coverings?

A: No. People may still wish to do so and no one should feel awkward or embarrassed by choosing to wear one. People remain nervous about contracting Coronavirus so wearing a face covering for closer contact activities can be reassuring.

A face covering may be a useful precaution where an individual is in close contact with large numbers of people such as the priest during the distribution of communion.

Q: Should we still provide hand sanitizer or hand washing facilities?

A: We would advise that this simple measure is retained. Whilst it is not a legal requirement, it is clearly a reasonable measure to adopt and reminds people that Coronavirus is still among us.

Q: What about ventilation?

It is a really effective mitigation measure to ensure there is good air flow through a building. Open doors and windows before and after activities and, ideally, during them too. Think about holding activities outdoors too.

Mechanical ventilation systems will usually move air from the inside out and replace it with fresh outside air. Systems should be checked as some may simply circulate internal air which may not help in controlling potential airborne transmission.

Q: Are there special arrangements for funerals or weddings?

A: Funerals and weddings are occasions when churches will be more heavily visited and by more and a wider range of people. Equally, they will often be attended by groups of people who are known to one another and may be socialising outside of the wedding or funeral.

As they are organized events, a reminder to people not to attend if they are symptomatic is a simple mitigation measure.

You should consider your arrangements for these events within your risk assessment and in careful consultation with the organisers.

Q: Are there special arrangements for baptisms?

A: Baptisms are also occasions when the church will be more heavily visited. Consider this in your risk assessment.

Q: Is there any Government advice available?

Welsh Government has provided a checklist to help you consider appropriate measures for controlling the transmission of Covid 19. It is available from:

[Public health control measures checklist for businesses, employers and event organisers: coronavirus | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/public-health-control-measures-checklist-businesses-employers-and-event-organisers-coronavirus?utm_source=rss-topics-Coronavirus+%28COVID-19%29&utm_medium=rss-feed&utm_campaign=rss-Public+health+control+measures+checklist+for+businesses%2C+employers+and+event+organisers%3A+coronavirus)

Q: How so we keep track of any changes to regulations or guidance that may come?

We will post updates to the Church in Wales website.

Q: What other guidance is available?

There is useful guidance from the Health and Safety Executive and Ecclesiastical Insurance.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/index.htm>

[COVID-19 Secure - for employers and others | Risk Management (ecclesiastical.com)](https://ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/returning-to-work-after-lockdown/)

[COVID-19 Secure - places of worship (ecclesiastical.com)](https://ecclesiastical.com/latest-news/opening-places-of-worship-after-lockdown/)

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