



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Covid-19 Route Map: Step 3 Guidance

Introduction

This Guidance is offered to the Dioceses of England and Wales as the country moves into Step 3 (17 May) of the Government Covid-19 Response Roadmap published in February 2021. Following the data on the prevalence of the virus and its effects, especially the numbers of infections translating to serious hospitalisations and deaths resulting from covid-19 and incorporating the successful vaccination of persons against the virus, the Government has said that further cautious easements on restrictions will be made on these dates.

It is important that as the two marker dates for step 3 and step 4 are reached, the general principles of creating a safe environment in places of worship and their ancillary buildings are not abandoned. Recognition of the continuing circulating presence of the virus in the population means that certain preventative practices will still be required, and this is important to ensure that Diocesan trustees are seen to be discharging their duties under Health and Safety legislation. Indeed, the Government has stated that changes moving forward would be on a risk-based approach for all organisations with the responsibility to ensure appropriate measures to safeguard public health sitting with the management of the organisation.

General Principles

This guidance has been prepared following discussions with officials from Public Health England and HM Government Places of Worship Task Force. Key to implementation of this guidance is the Government's understanding of moving away from centralised detailed regulation to prudent local judgements. The Prime Minister stated on 10th May 2021 *"And today we are taking a step towards that moment when we learn to live responsibly with Covid – when we cease eventually to rely on detailed government edicts, and make our own decisions – based on the best scientific advice - about how to protect our families and those around us."*¹

The following general principles apply:

1. Prevailing Local Conditions

All places of worship should always consider the prevailing local conditions for the virus. Special consideration should be given to the R number, the prevalence of new variants of the virus, the local rates of hospital admissions and any local public health advice. These data can be obtained from the Director of Public Health at the local authority, and it is important to have knowledge of these figures.

2. Mitigations

It is important to mitigate against the risks of virus transmission. Although the vaccine rollout programme is very successful to date, over 68% of adults having had one dose and 35% two doses, the risk of transmission is still live. Therefore, it is recommended that two key measures to help reduce aerosol and droplet spread remain in place for now:

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-at-coronavirus-press-conference-10-may-2021>

1. hand sanitiser is kept available for those entering churches and people are encouraged to use it, and
2. that the wearing of face coverings, even if removed by law, remains at least for now (apart for those who are exempt.)

3. **Cleaning of Churches**

General cleaning to a good standard, using generally available cleaning fluids and detergents, with attention to frequent touchpoints is the standard to continue. This is consistent with the latest evidence. This guidance is produced to clarify these points given recent scientific evidence. While the virus can land on surfaces and can infect people if they touch those surfaces and then touch their mouth, nose or eyes, this risk is lower than the risk from aerosol or droplet spread. There are several key things which churches and parishes have been doing, and should continue to do, which significantly reduce this risk:

1. Sanitising hands on entry to churches and before liturgies as in current church guidance reduces risk.
2. Ensuring people wear face coverings properly will reduce aerosol or droplet spread.
3. Ventilating buildings well (especially during and between services) remains important.
4. Maintaining a good general standard of routine cleaning using usual cleaning detergents is sufficient for regular use:
 - a) Cleaning once a day for most surfaces people touch is acceptable
 - b) Cleaning more often (minimum twice a day) for very frequent touch points (eg door handles used multiple times in a day). In areas with very high numbers of cases in the locality or a recent outbreak in the congregation you may wish to increase this temporarily.
5. Clearing spillages of body fluids (faeces, blood, vomit etc) should always follow specific higher standards not just because of SARS-CoV-2 but because of other pathogens. This guidance is reproduced in an Appendix again for ease of reference. If your own cleaners have a specific protocol in existence for body fluid spillages, then follow that.
6. If someone has tested positive for covid-19 who has used your building in the last 24 hours, and you are aware of this, then you should clean thoroughly using ordinary detergents. That does **not** mean a “deep clean”, which is not necessary. See footnote for a link for more detailed guidance.²
7. The risk of surface contamination while generally low is higher where there is long exposure time in the building, ventilation is poor, there is a high throughput of people, and where there is greater aerosol generation (eg in gyms and during physical activity.) Mitigating against these reduces risk.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>

4. Social Distancing and Capacity of Churches

At the moment, the regulation on social distancing requires that a reduced capacity exists in all churches. However, the Roadmap states that new sectors which will reopen on 17 May are “Some large events, including conferences, theatre and concert performances and sports events. Controlled indoor events of up to 1,000 people or 50% of a venue’s capacity.”³ This applies to single one-off events, moderated by the Local Authority, and not to regular worship in churches.

However, it is possible and advisable now to make a reassessment of the covid-secure capacity of churches based on the principles of combination prevention, specifically:

- Continuing use of physical mitigations, especially face coverings continue to be worn and hand sanitiser used on entry
- Evaluation of the virus prevalence in the local area
- Good ventilation of the sacred space
- Local percentage of the population vaccinated
- Any covid-19 variants of concern in the local area
- Seating arrangements for family groups and bubbles.

Based on these considerations, some churches may conclude they can safely increase the covid-secure capacity of the building factoring into the calculations the mitigations of coverings, ventilation and vaccines listed above (eg by making spacing 1m where there is good ventilation and good mitigation measures). In some churches, this reassessment may bring the covid-secure capacity up to 50% of that of the building.

Risk Assessments should be dynamic, i.e., they should be refreshed and revised as circumstances change in the locality for the better (lower prevalence and risk of transmission) or worse (higher transmission risk.)

5. Congregational Singing

Indoor congregational singing is still prohibited at Step 3 and further guidance from Public Health England is expected before the 21 June Step 4 date is reached. The use of small cantor groups and other small choirs is now permitted, and the following guidance is still current following the principles of safer singing⁴.

1. Indoors: currently single small group of singers will be allowed to perform, or rehearse for performance, only where essential to an act of communal worship. This should be limited to groups of no more than 6, with social distancing being maintained at all times. Communal singing should not take place.
2. Outdoors, in the grounds or the outside space of a place of worship: when communal worship takes place outdoors, the congregation may join in with singing, and should follow the principles set out in the performing arts guidance⁵. This includes ensuring that congregation members follow social distancing rules. Social contact limits apply, meaning that participating groups of no more than 30 must not mingle. Communal singing in other public open spaces should not take place.

³ HM Government Covid-19 Spring Response February 2021, paragraph 120f

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-suggested-principles-of-safer-singing/covid-19-suggested-principles-of-safer-singing>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts>

Acts of Worship⁶

Celebration of Holy Mass	
Capacity	Reassessment of covid-secure capacity of the church as outlined above
Servers and Assistants	Those needed for the celebration of Mass
Holy Water Stoups	Unfilled
Votive Candles	Available
Veneration of Statues	Touch but don't kiss
Incense and Candles	Can be used
Readers	Limit touching of Lectionary, but no need to sanitise hands at lectern
Prayer of the Faithful	Can be reintroduced
Offertory Procession	Can be reintroduced with those involved sanitising their hands before.
Sign of Peace	Remains suspended
Holy Communion	Under one kind only

Notes:

1. Stewards for liturgical celebrations are only needed for Sunday worship where there is likely to be an oversubscription of the stated capacity of the church. There needs to be a methodology for track and trace (QR Codes or Mass Booking systems) because at these larger celebrations of Mass knowledge of who is present, should it be needed, is necessary. Otherwise, stewards are not needed for covid security purposes at weekday celebrations or other times when the church is open unsupervised for individual prayer. Individuals entering churches should take responsibility for track and trace (via scanning QR codes) and each church should display these prominently.
2. The physical exchange of a Sign of Peace remains suspended at this time as it is not a necessary part of the Mass and would mean the physical engagement with people outside their family groups or bubbles. This will be kept under review as we continue the journey towards easing restrictions.
3. Holy Communion will continue to be under one kind and the minister will continue to wear a face covering, although it is permitted to announce "The Body of Christ" for each communicant. Communion is recommended to be distributed in the hand, but if people wish to receive on the tongue, then they should wait until the end of the communion line and receive then. Communion on the tongue exposes the minister's hand to their aerosol and increases the possibility of viral infection. The minister should sanitise their hands after distributing communion on the tongue. Communion on the tongue should not be given in areas with very high spikes in local infections.
4. Concelebrations are permitted. Communion should be by intinction by the concelebrants and those assisting with the distribution of Holy Communion should ensure they sanitise their hands after they have received their own communion and replaced their face coverings. The numbers of concelebrants at any one celebration should be determined by the safe considerations of local conditions.

⁶ The guidance offered here for liturgical life of the church is active from 17th May 2021. Further guidance will be prepared for the step 4 date of 21 June. This will be published in due course.

5. It is possible to resume the offertory collection at Mass not by passing a basket around the congregation but with a static receptacle, either fixed in position or held by a volunteer. The Fundraising Regulator has offered useful guidance on this aspect of cash collections⁷. Where possible, remote giving or contactless giving should be continued.

Celebration of Holy Baptism	
Capacity	30 people at a stand-alone celebration; Reassessment of covid-secure capacity of the church as outlined above if during Mass
Servers and Assistants	As needed
Anointings	Should be applied using a cotton bud
Pouring of Water	With caution to prevent splashing
White garment	Do not use communal white garments, but a garment particular to each child
Multiple baptisms in one celebration	Single family groups

Celebration of Confirmation	
Capacity	Reassessment of covid-secure capacity of the church as outlined above
Servers and Assistants	As needed
Laying on of Hands	Extension of hands over the <i>confirmandi</i>
Anointing with Sacred Chrism	Should be applied using a cotton bud
Sign of Peace	Gesture without touch

Celebration of the Sacrament of the Sick ⁸ (Not Covid-19 cases)	
Laying on of Hands	Extension of hands over the sick person
Anointing with Holy Oil	Should be applied using a cotton bud
Sign of Peace	Gesture without touch

Celebration of Ordination	
Capacity	Reassessment of covid-secure capacity of the church as outlined above
Servers and Assistants	As needed
Laying on of Hands (for priests and bishops)	Bishop and a small number of concelebrants ensuring hand sanitising before and after
Anointing with Sacred Chrism	Should be applied using a cotton bud
Vesting	By a suitable person
Giving of the symbols	Both to sanitise hands before liturgical action
Sign of Peace	Gesture without touch

⁷ https://www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/more-from-us/resources/coronavirus-covid-19-cash-collections-guidance?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=FR%20May%202021%20newsletter&utm_content=FR%20May%202021%20newsletter+CID_4e9360fc2df072ffce034c53dca2bc8b&utm_source=Campaign%20Monitor&utm_term=cash%20collections

⁸ For those who have covid-19, in person visits should not take place when they are unwell and infectious at home. For those in hospital or care homes visits should follow the infection control guidance of the facility.

Celebration of Marriage	
Capacity	30 people
Servers and Assistants	As needed
Exchange of Vows	As usual
Exchange of Rings	As usual

Celebration of Funerals ⁹	
Capacity	Reassessment of covid-secure capacity of the church as outlined above
Servers and Assistants	As needed
Reception of the Body and vigil	Permitted
Coffin Bearers from friends and family	Permitted (less than 6)
Sprinkling of the Coffin	Permitted
Placing of the Pall and Christian Symbols	Permitted
Incense and Holy Water at final Commendation	Permitted

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Until now, the use of confessional boxes or rooms has been prohibited because of the risks of virus transmission. One of the most important aspects for the use of the confessional is the ventilation of the space between penitents. For closed confessionals or confessional rooms, there needs to be some form of assistance for a throughput of air. This can be having an open window or a fan to circulate air, or leaving the door open for a minute between each penitent.

Between the penitent and the priest, a heavy curtain or other such material (Perspex or plastic film) should be fixed where the penitent kneels or sits against the grille. As risk from surface contact is reduced at this time, cleansing of the confessional on the penitent's side is not needed after each confession, but the confessional should be cleaned after each session of use. If the confessional is a Roman Style, with the priest and penitent perpendicular to each other, the same covering of the grille should be used to protect transmission through the grille itself. Again, the confessional should be cleaned after the period of confessions is complete.

Home Visits

Home visits can now take place by priests, deacons and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and other volunteers. It is important that the Government Guidance for people working in, visiting or delivering to other people's homes is followed.¹⁰

Of importance is that the minister to the sick or housebound person takes care to ensure that a minimum of visits takes place to different homes in a single session. There are three important steps to avoid possible spread of the virus, especially if infected but asymptomatic:

- It is recommended (outside hospital and hospice etc chaplaincies who have infection control in place) that one morning and one afternoon visit is made in a day

⁹ Continued good collaboration should take place with funeral directors over the arranging of funerals.

¹⁰ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5eb967e286650c2791ec7100/working-safely-during-covid-19-other-peoples-homes-200812.pdf>

- The use of regular freely available covid-19 home test kits is recommended for those doing pastoral visits, to ensure they are not potential vectors of infection to those who are sick and medically vulnerable. These can be obtained through www.gov.uk/find-covid-19-lateral-flow-test-site
- Careful hand sanitisation and minimising of exposure times indoors are important considerations as well.

Social Activities

Many parishes' social activities have had to be suspended during the time of the pandemic. As the virus transmission rates begin to fall, these can be resumed in line with latest guidance providing a risk assessment for both the activity and the space is completed. Guidance for the use of multi-purpose facilities is referenced.¹¹

Catechetical Groups/Formation Groups/Prayer Groups

Catechetical and faith formation groups are divided into two areas, groups for under 18s and those for over 18s.

From 17 May, any group provision (educational or social) for under 18s may meet indoors or outdoors without limitations on group size. The regulations no longer require a limit on bubble sizes to a maximum number of attendees (per bubble). However, it is recommended that parish groups review their risk assessments for these groups and take steps to reduce the risk of community transmission between families and bubbles. All standard covid-security measures (social distancing, hand hygiene and face coverings etc.) will continue to be required.

Meetings for over 18s may meet indoors or outdoors in groups of no more than 15 (plus staff, volunteers, catechists and carers).

Non-Church Buildings

CIS Ltd has provided a set of guidance for the safe use of parish halls and other ancillary spaces for church premises which sets out the obligations on both Church authorities and groups and hirers. This is appended to this document.

Rev. Canon Christopher Thomas
FINAL
15th May 2021

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities>

Appendix 1

Cleaning spillages of body fluids in all situations

Guidance has been in place for some time on cleaning spillages of bodily fluids to prevent spread of pathogens such as Hepatitis, E Coli, Norovirus and so on. You may already have guidance in place for this from your health and safety adviser or insurer, in which case this should be followed.

Body fluid spillage kits are strongly advisable, especially those which have granules which can absorb fluids and prevent splashes on those cleaning the spillage or others. They provide materials and instructions for safe cleaning and disposal and can be obtained from good cleaning suppliers. Following manufacturer's instructions on these is important because the content of kits differ. Such kits also contain cleaning fluids which are less likely to cause harm to surfaces than making up solutions of hypochlorite bleach.

Spillages of body fluids such as blood, sputum, vomit, faeces or urine can present an infection risk for a variety of infections and should be cleaned up immediately. Cleaners should treat every spillage of body fluids or body waste as potentially infectious.

Specific guidance applies from government to play groups for children.

Cleaners should wear protective gloves and aprons and use disposable wipes wherever possible. Eye protection is advised if there is risk of splashing.

For a spillage of blood, a 10,000ppm hypochlorite solution (1:10 chlorine releasing eg bleach to water) should be used. Staff should follow the procedure below. Even better is to use a body fluid disposal kit which has granules in it which absorb and solidify the spillage.

1. Put on disposable gloves and apron (protective goggles should be used if there is danger of splashing) and ensure that the area of the spillage is well ventilated and clear of service users, other staff and visitors.
2. If using a hypochlorite solution, prepare it in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions — if using granules apply directly to the spill.
3. Cover the spillage with paper towels.
4. Carefully wipe up the spillage with more towels soaked in hypochlorite.
5. Dispose of the waste in a clinical waste bag.
6. Wash hands in soap and water.

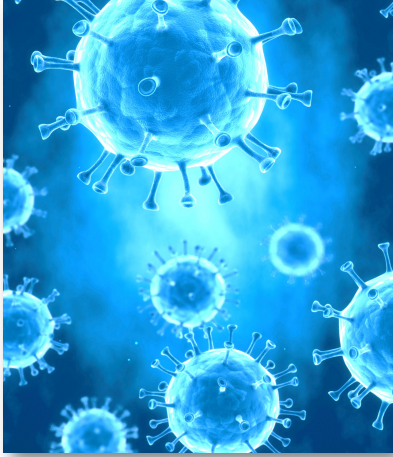
Solid or semi-solid matter (eg faeces) in the spillage should be removed first as this can inhibit the disinfectant.


Note:

Chlorine releasing disinfectants such as hypochlorite should never be used directly on urine spills as this can release irritant chlorine gas. Urine should be cleaned up using towels and the area cleaned with detergent before applying disinfectant.

Appendix 2

CIS Advice on Safe Operation of Ancillary Church Buildings





Making your Parish Centre Secure

A guide to COVID-secure Parish Centres for clergy, staff and volunteers

Our Objectives are to ensure that . . .

Parish Centres are safe to work in and to visit despite the continued prevalence of Covid-19.

All those who use Parish Centres know how to behave safely in an environment where Covid-19 remains endemic to help keep themselves and others safe.

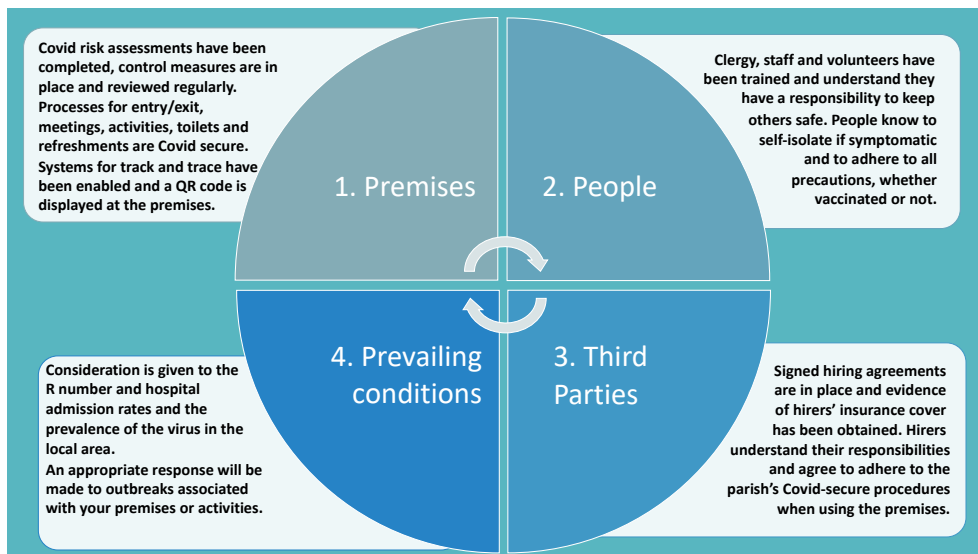
The Parish and Diocese discharge their duties under health and safety legislation to minimise the risks of incidents and claims.

Ensuring a Covid-secure Parish Centre

Please ensure you refer to the rules for your jurisdiction and local area, and only open your Parish Centre when you are permitted by law to do so.

Making and keeping a Parish Centre Covid-secure for the protection of all who participate in the life of the parish is everyone's mission, and there are four key areas to address.

These four areas are shown on the next page. Each area has several steps to complete and on the following pages those steps are explained, with links to further guidance and templates.



1. The Premises

Make your buildings safe to work in and visit

- ✓ **Full Covid risk assessments have been completed.**
 See attached: [Catholic Insurance Service template Covid risk assessment](#)
TIP: Don't forget your usual risk assessments and building inspections, it's not just about Covid
- ✓ **Adequate measures are in place to address the risks identified in your assessments and they are reviewed regularly.**
- ✓ **Processes for entry/exit, meetings/activities, toilets and refreshments are Covid-secure.**
 See our [10 Tips on the next page](#)
- ✓ **An NHS QR code is displayed in the premises.**
 This should assist you to enable track and trace in compliance with data protection rules, see:
[Create a coronavirus NHS QR code for your venue - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
[Maintaining records of staff, customers and visitors to support NHS Test and Trace - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- ✓ **Covid posters and signage are displayed.**
 Display this notice to show you are managing the risks: [Staying COVID-secure notice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
 Use signs to direct people around one-way systems & posters to remind them to socially distance

10 Tips to Help make your Buildings Safe

1. Calculate the maximum safe capacity with social distancing and advise all who need to know.
2. If you can, create a one-way system through the building, with separate entrances and exits.
3. Put sanitiser stations at all entrances, encourage people to sanitise regularly, and ensure adequate supplies of **liquid (not bar)** soap and paper towels in kitchens and toilets.
4. Have a plan and adequate supplies for regular cleaning, including cleaning high touch points (e.g. door handles) during activities and the wider area (including furniture) between activities or groups.
5. Ensure good ventilation by keeping windows and doors open (except fire doors).
6. Ensure confined spaces such as kitchens and toilets are used only by those visiting the premises for legitimate purposes, are included in your cleaning plan and that social distancing is maintained.
7. Consider how to maintain social distancing outside the premises if there may be queues to get in and consider a pre-booking system for popular events or activities.
8. Ensure your re-opening plans offer fair access to all members of the parish community.
9. Plan how to manage complaints from those who may disagree with your measures.
10. Have a plan for what to do if someone who has visited the premises tests positive for Covid-19.

2. People

Key behaviours to keep everyone safe

- ✓ **Clergy, staff and volunteers have read your risk assessments and have been trained in your procedures.**
This should help everyone to feel safe and to understand they have a responsibility to keep others safe.
TIP: You could have a Zoom/Teams meeting to share your assessments and procedures with staff/volunteers and ask for feedback to ensure everyone feels safe.
- ✓ **Posters are displayed reinforcing key messages (e.g. Hands-Face-Space).**
Posters are available to download here: [Posters - Coronavirus Resource centre \(phe.gov.uk\)](https://www.phe.gov.uk/covid19/posters)
- ✓ **Provide clear communication to people before they visit the premises.**
This will help ensure everyone knows what they must do (e.g. wear a face mask) and what to expect (e.g. toilet facilities may be unavailable, wrap up warmly as windows will be open for ventilation).
- ✓ **People know to self-isolate if symptomatic and that they must follow all protocols, even if they have been vaccinated.**
- ✓ **Clergy, staff and volunteers know what to do if someone wants to enter the premises without a face mask.**

3. Third Parties

Requirements to which they must adhere

TIP: Consider re-opening for limited activities before hiring out your premises again to third parties or only allowing one group to use the premises per day at first to minimise and get used to managing the risks.

- ✓ **You have clearly set out to hirers what are their responsibilities and what are yours.**
(e.g. hirers must ensure their activities are permitted under Covid regulations and must undertake their own Covid risk assessment in respect of their activities).
- ✓ **Signed hiring agreements incorporating indemnities are in place.**
See attached: [Catholic Insurance Service templates](#)
- ✓ **Hirers understand and agree to adhere to your Covid-secure rules and to discharge their responsibilities when using the premises.**
See attached: [Catholic Insurance Service 'Covid-19: Special Conditions of Hire' template](#)
- ✓ **Evidence of hirers' Public Liability insurance cover has been obtained.**
TIP: if you aren't sure what to ask for, contact Catholic Insurance Service.
- ✓ **If your premises are being used as a vaccination or testing centre, you have notified Catholic Insurance Service of the change in use of the premises. This is an insurance requirement.**

4. Prevailing Conditions

Be mindful of local epidemiology

- ✓ **You monitor the prevailing conditions.**
Before re-opening and regularly thereafter, you consider the R number, hospital admission rates and the prevalence of the virus in your local area and will close the premises if the risks increase too far or you are required to do so.
See: [Daily summary | Coronavirus in the UK \(data.gov.uk\)](https://www.data.gov.uk/dataset/daily-summary-coronavirus-in-the-uk)
- ✓ **You have a plan in place for an appropriate response to be made to outbreaks associated with your premises or activities.**
(e.g. advice will be sought from H&S consultants and the local authority)
See: [Catholic Insurance Service Emergency Action Plan Template](#)
- ✓ **You treat your COVID risk assessment as a live document.**
Reflect on the prevailing conditions, the efficacy of your control measures, people's behaviours and up to date advice received, updating your risk assessment as necessary.

Further Guidance

Helpful sources of information

- ✓ For access to template documents, insurance and risk management advice, contact Catholic Insurance Service:

Tel: 01296 422030 or email: enquiries@catholicinsuranceservice.co.uk

- ✓ [Enter details of diocesan H&S contacts/external consultants or the HSE]
- ✓ The Bishops' Conferences have a range of advice for worshipping safely during the pandemic:
<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/our-work/health-social-care/coronavirus-guidelines/>
<https://www.bcos.org.uk/COVID19/tabid/127/Default.aspx>
- ✓ Visit the gov.uk websites for information and advice relevant to your jurisdiction:
<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
<https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>
<https://gov.wales/coronavirus>



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