

Safe Use of Places of Worship

This guidance is regularly reviewed and will be updated if any changes occur.

This guidance for the safe use of places of worship should be regarded as supplementary to the [general guidance on staying safe and protecting others](#).

We are hugely grateful to the efforts and collaboration of Scotland's faith and belief communities in continuing to follow best practice guidance in places of worship.

With the recent rapid increase in Omicron COVID-19 cases, we are facing an exceptionally challenging winter and know that this presents significant risks to the National Health Service. It is within the context of these pressures, that further regulations have been introduced: [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus\) \(Requirements\) \(Scotland\) Amendment \(No. 5\) Regulations 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

Those responsible for a place of worship must take such measures as are reasonably practicable, to minimise the risk of the incidence and spread of coronavirus on the premises.

This includes measures

- **to reduce crowding and encourage distancing such as changing the layout of furniture;**
- **appropriate use of signage;**
- **controlling the use of entrances,**
- **smaller spaces and shared facilities.**

It is essential that those responsible for a place of worship, carry out a full risk assessment to help decide which actions to take to ensure the safe management of a place of worship. They must have due regard for the guidance.

Some protective measures remain in law, such as **the use of face coverings** in most indoor public places – including places of worship - subject to exemptions. Face coverings continue to be an important part of stopping the spread of coronavirus and should be worn correctly. The current guidance and exemptions are set out here: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): face coverings and masks - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

We strongly advise encouraging congregations and visitors to **physically distance** in places of worship where possible and to undertake Lateral Flow Testing before attending services or gatherings.

Places of worship may wish to continue to **collect visitor details for the purposes of supporting [NHS Scotland's Test and Protect](#) system**. Ensuring **adequate ventilation** in buildings also remains an important precautionary measure.

Further guidance for the Christmas season and festivities [is available](#) however if you are unsure about additional activities and events at a place of worship (beyond acts of worship) over the Christmas period, **consider the advice to limit your contacts where possible and assess whether such activities and events can be deferred.**

Every person and every organisation in Scotland has a part to play in protecting the most vulnerable in society and staff working in public-facing roles, easing the burden on the NHS and supporting our economic recovery. Thank you for your continued support.

Faith-specific practices

In addition to the requirements above we advise that:

General risks

- services or ceremonies that would traditionally take place over a period of hours or days are adapted to **reduce the time spent gathered together** and therefore reduce the risk of transmission.

Hygiene and communal resources

- **good respiratory hygiene** (“Catch it, kill it, bin it”) is required at all times
- individuals are prevented from touching or kissing devotional and other objects that are handled communally, or from placing their face or head in the same location as other worshippers. Use barriers and signs where necessary.
- individuals avoid touching property belonging to others
- where communal resources such as **books and service sheets** are required to be used as part of worship, you should follow good hygiene principles (careful hand washing/cleansing with soap and warm water/alcohol-based hand sanitiser before and after handling books or similar objects/items of equipment and avoiding touching the face with unwashed hands).
- any personal items brought in to aid worship are removed by the user
- cash giving is discouraged, with online giving used instead. **Where cash offerings continue, any receptacle should be set in one place and not handled communally.**
 - Any person who has handled money should wash their hands thoroughly afterwards and avoid touching their face.

Singing, projection of voices

- the use of a microphone and sound system can mitigate the need for the projection of voices where appropriate. **Any microphone used should not be handled communally.**
- face coverings must be worn when involved in congregational singing, chanting and the playing of instruments.
- **There is an exemption** for performers and those leading an act of worship, **subject to physical distancing of 2 metres (revised from 1m)** or use of a partition or screen. Full details can be found in the [Guidance on the use of face coverings](#). A risk assessment should be carried out to consider any mitigating measures that may be put in place.

Food and drink as part of worship

- where the consumption of food and drink is part of the act of worship, the use of communal vessels is avoided.
- other mitigations for the preparation and handling of food which is part of the act of worship are taken, including strict hand hygiene. Face coverings must be worn while preparing and handling food unless an exemption applies.

Cleansing, ablutions and use of water

- where rituals or ceremonies require water to be applied to the body, where possible full immersion is avoided and only small volumes are splashed onto the body. Where an infant is involved a parent/guardian should hold the infant. Strict hand hygiene should be maintained throughout.
- during the immersion, clergy/the officiant may place their hands on the head of the person being immersed, but they should consider the need to touch them in any other way.
- during the immersion, the person being immersed should remove their face covering, however any officiant/clergy attending them should wear a face covering unless an exemption applies;
- if any contained body of non-chlorinated water is used in full immersion, such as a baptismal font, the water should be drained and the font cleaned, after each immersion;

Following best practice guidance for Places of Worship helps to reduce the transmission of COVID-19, protects the NHS and saves lives.

Useful Links to Relevant Regulations and Guidance

- [Guidance - Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): staying safe and protecting others](#)
- [Guidance on carrying out a COVID-19 risk assessment](#)
- [Returning to work](#)
- [General Guidance for Safer Workplaces](#)
- [COVID-19: guidance for non-healthcare settings](#)
- [NHS Inform Coronavirus Communications Toolkit](#)
- [Covid-19 ventilation guidance](#)
- [Guidance on collection of customer and visitor details](#)
- [Guidance on the use of face coverings](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): organised activities for children - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- Guidance for performers is contained in the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): safer businesses and workplaces - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)
- Guidance for hospitality - [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): tourism and hospitality sector](#). Where a place of worship manages a hospitality business, e.g. café, they should follow this guidance.
- [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus\) \(Requirements\) \(Scotland\) Amendment \(No. 5\) Regulations 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)