

4) Guidance for individual prayer within a place of worship

From 13 June places of worship will be permitted to open for individual worship.

Permitted use

Individual prayer within a place of worship is defined as a person or household entering the venue to pray on their own and not as part of a group, led prayer or communal act. They should be socially distanced from other individuals or households. Collective or communal prayer and regular scheduled services are not permitted at this time as set out in Regulations. This includes a Minister of Religion or lay person leading devotions or prayer of any sort. Those in charge of running a place of worship should engage and communicate with worshippers and the wider community to explain what activity is permitted and what is still prohibited.

Principles

Individuals or members of the same household may enter the building to make personal prayers and it is strongly advised that social distancing is maintained with other households. The fewer the people inside the building at any one time, the lower the risk of transmission.

Individual prayer should be carried out such that adherence to social distancing of 2 metres (3 steps) all round can be maintained between individuals or those from separate households. A household is a person or a group of people who live together in the same accommodation.

Individuals should stay alert at all times. They should not gather in groups, except with members of their own household, inside or outside the building. Steps should be taken to reduce the social interaction between people outside of an individual's household to reduce the transmission of the virus.

In addition to the key principles and guidelines set out in [section 3](#), it is strongly advised that:

- Individuals should be prevented from touching or kissing devotional and other objects that are handled communally. Barriers and/or clear signage should be put in place where necessary.
- Books, reusable and communal resources e.g. prayer mats, service sheets or devotional material should be removed from use. Single use alternatives can be provided as long as they are removed by the worshipper. Items owned by the individual to aid worship e.g. a prayer mat or religious text, may be brought in but must be removed again.
- No food or drink is made available.
- Activities such as singing and/or playing instruments should be avoided, with the exception of organists who are able to use buildings for practice with appropriate social distancing. The government is continuing to work on scientific and medical advice around how such activities can best be managed safely and further guidance will follow on this shortly.
- Any pre-requisite washing/ablution rituals should not be done at the place of worship and shared washing areas should be closed.
- Where possible faith leaders should discourage cash giving and continue to use online giving and resources where possible minimising contact around transactions. Regular cleaning and hygiene should be maintained, and gloves worn to handle cash offerings where giving continues.

Restrictions on capacity

Restrictions should be set locally to limit the number of people permitted to enter the place of worship for individual prayer at any one time, so that a safe distance of at least 2 metres (3 steps) can be maintained between individuals and households.

The size and circumstance of the premises will determine the maximum number of people that can be accommodated whilst also facilitating social distancing.

In defining the number of people that can reasonably follow 2 metres distancing, the total floorspace as well as likely pinch points and busy areas should be taken into account (e.g. entrances, exits) and where possible alternative or one-way routes introduced.

A risk assessment should be carried out to identify points of high risk in the building and mitigating action.

It is recommended that places of worship close to individual prayer during the time normal services would be taking place and continue to stream this regular worship or prayer services (which individuals are not currently permitted to attend) to avoid over-crowding. Venue managers might want to consider advertising set days or times when places of worship are open for individual *prayer **solely for those particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, e.g. those over 70 or clinically vulnerable.***

7. Should you visit if symptomatic?

Anyone showing symptoms of COVID-19 (a new continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell) should not attend the place of worship due to the risk that they pose to others; they should self-isolate at home immediately with other members of their household. Remote participation should be considered, for example by live streaming. This applies equally to individuals who work at the place of worship.

8. Individuals who are self-isolating due to a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the household

Where individuals are self-isolating due to a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19 in the household they should participate remotely. See [stay at home guidance for households with possible or confirmed COVID-19](#).

9. Individuals who are extremely clinically vulnerable/shielding

The NHS has written to around 2.2 million who are considered to be extremely clinically vulnerable to coronavirus, advising them to shield. See the [guidance for this group](#). Current guidance is that shielded patients may wish to go outside with members of their household, or to meet one person from another household if they live alone, maintaining any interactions outside and social distancing. Shielded patients are not advised to meet more than one person from outside of their own household, and therefore not currently advised to attend places of worship.

10. What leaders can do to help prevent the spread of infection

Faith leaders should consider and adopt the guidance above and seek to include changes that could be made to religious rituals that usually involve close contact between individuals. All use of shared objects and food items should be prevented to limit the spread of infection.

Many faiths have issued specific guidance to their faith communities about some of these issues.

Faith leaders should carry out a risk assessment of the place of worship and tailor this guidance as appropriate for the venue and practices being carried out.

Certain groups of people are at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, including people who are:

- **aged 70 or older (regardless of medical conditions)**
- under 70 with an underlying health condition listed below (that is, anyone instructed to get a flu jab each year on medical grounds):
- chronic (long-term) mild to moderate respiratory diseases, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or bronchitis
- chronic heart disease, such as heart failure
- chronic kidney disease
- chronic liver disease, such as hepatitis
- chronic neurological conditions, such as Parkinson's disease, motor neurone disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), or cerebral palsy
- diabetes
- a weakened immune system as the result of certain conditions, treatments like chemotherapy, or medicines such as steroid tablets
- being seriously overweight (a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or above)
- pregnant women

You may wish to inform these groups, in particular, of the symptoms of COVID-19 and current [stay at home and social distancing guidance](#), and ***strongly discourage them from attending faith gatherings during this time or set aside a time for them to attend for individual prayer.***

You may wish to make the government's information on COVID-19 available to your faith community and others, in order to challenge unhelpful misinformation.

11. How can places of worship communicate this guidance to visitors?

Each place of worship is strongly advised to implement the measures set out in this guidance to ensure that visitors comply with Regulations, and any risk assessments completed for the venue, for the safety of all those who visit and work there. The Government strongly advises each place of worship ensures that visitors comply with the social distancing guidelines.

Places of worship and faith leaders should consider how guidance can be communicated to visitors, including before they visit, in a way that is accessible and appropriate for the cultures, languages and reading levels of communities served by the place of worship.