

National Lockdown Guidance January 2021

Following the Prime Minister's statement this evening, the following has been published by the Government and can be found at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/949536/NationalLockdownGuidance.pdf

The Guidance for Places of Worship published this evening states:

Communal worship and life events

You can leave home to attend or visit a place of worship for communal worship, a funeral or event related to a death, a burial ground or a remembrance garden, or to attend a wedding ceremony. You should follow the guidance on the safe use of places of worship and must not mingle with anyone outside of your household or support bubble when attending a place of worship. Weddings, funerals and religious, belief-based or commemorative events linked to someone's death are all subject to limits on the numbers that can attend, and weddings and civil ceremonies may only take place in exceptional circumstances.

You must not mingle with anyone outside of your household or support bubble if you do attend a service.

The Places of Worship Guidance (updated 22nd December 2020) summarises the position for our churches. This can be found in full here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-2-december>

Relevant extracts (comments are provided to assist interpretation):

Communal worship, including prayers, devotions or meditations led by a Minister of Religion or lay person

Limits for communal worship should be decided on the basis of the capacity of the place of worship following an assessment of risk (see Section 5 'Restrictions on Capacity').

People must follow the restrictions on social mixing set out by their area's local restriction tier and adhere to social distancing between households.

In Tier 1 areas, people must not mingle in a group of more than 6 (other than with those they live with or have formed a support bubble with).

In Tier 2, Tier 3 and Tier 4 areas, people must not mingle indoors with anyone they do not live with or have formed a support bubble with.

You must not attend or mix with anyone outside your household or support bubble.

Comment: Mass and other acts of worship can continue as normal following the covid-security guidance that has been published by the Bishops' Conference after consultation with officials from Public Health England and MHCLG.

Marriage ceremonies

In Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 areas marriages, civil partnerships or alternative wedding ceremonies must have no more than 15 people. Anyone working is not included as part of the limit on those attending.

In Tier 4 areas weddings and civil partnership ceremonies must only take place with up to 6 people. Anyone working is not included. These should only take place in exceptional circumstances, for example urgent marriages where one of those getting married is seriously ill and not expected to recover, or due where to undergo debilitating treatment or life-changing surgery.

Please refer to the [guidance for small marriages and civil partnerships during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#).

Attendees should socially distance from anyone they do not live with (unless they are in their support bubble).

Comment: As national lockdown is essentially Tier 5, only 6 people can attend a marriage (apart from anyone working as part of the ceremony) and these should only occur in exceptional circumstances. Weddings planned for the next 6 weeks should be deferred.

Funerals

In all areas, there must be no more than 30 people attending. Anyone working is not included as part of the 30 person limit.

Please refer to the [COVID-19: guidance for managing a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic](#).

Attendees should socially distance from anyone they do not live with (unless they are in their support bubble).

Commemorative events to celebrate the life of a person who has died

These are events which occur to commemorate or mark the deceased's passing. Examples include a wake, a stone setting ceremony or the scattering of ashes.

In Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 areas such events must have no more than 15 people in attendance, excluding those who are present for work purposes.

In Tier 4 areas such events must have no more than 6 people in attendance.

Such gatherings cannot take place in a private dwelling or garden.

Comment: As national lockdown is essentially Tier 5, only 6 people can attend a commemorative event which would include the interment of ashes after a cremation. The immediate burial of a coffin after a church or crematorium-based service would be subject to 30 people or the restrictions imposed locally by the graveyard or crematorium authorities.

Significant life cycle events, outside of marriage ceremonies and funerals

In all areas where such events are an element of communal worship, they are subject to the requirements for communal worship set out above.

Comment: This means that the numbers of people permitted to attend life-cycle events such as baptisms, confirmations and other significant sacramental celebrations are subject to the covid-security determined limits of the church.

Supervised children's activities

In Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 areas, these are limited to the number of people who can safely socially distance in the venue in line with COVID-19 Secure guidance. See [guidance for providers of out-of-school settings](#).

This includes, but is not limited to, activities such as mother and baby groups with multiple adults supervising children. In these situations, adults should maintain social distancing with other adults from different households.

In Tier 4, these activities must only take place where reasonably necessary to enable parents to work, seek work, attend education or training.

Comment: As national lockdown is essentially Tier 5, any activity which is church-based must be fully risk assessed and necessary for the above reasons.

Support groups

In all areas, support groups can take place with up to a maximum of 15 people in a public place, if the support group is organised by a business, a charitable, benevolent or philanthropic institution, or a public body to provide mutual aid, therapy or any other form of support to its members or those who attend its meetings.

This includes, but is not limited to, providing support:

- to victims of crime (including domestic abuse)
- to those with, or recovering from, addictions (including alcohol, narcotics or other substance addictions) or addictive patterns of behaviour
- to new and expectant parents
- to those with, or caring for persons with, any long-term illness, disability or terminal condition or who are vulnerable
- to those facing issues related to their sexuality or identity including those living as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender
- to those who have suffered bereavement

Organised parent and child groups can also take place with up to 15 people. Any child under 5 is not included in this limit.

Comment: These activities should be fully risk-assessed and full covid-security measures should be in place.

Small prayer and study groups

In Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 areas, limits for prayer and study groups should be decided on the basis of the capacity of the place of worship following an assessment of risk (see Section 5 'Restrictions on Capacity').

People must follow the restrictions on social mixing set out by their area's COVID Local Alert Level (Tier) and adhere to social distancing between households and described above for communal worship.

In Tier 4 areas, prayer or study groups must not take place in person.

This guidance applies to places of worship when being used for a religious purpose or in preparation for a religious purpose.

Comment: As national lockdown is essentially Tier 5, in person prayer or study groups (which would include catechesis for the celebration of the sacraments) should not take place physically, but only using online means.

For permitted uses of a place of worship not included in this guidance, you should refer to the specific guidance linked below:

- [Tourism, retail](#) and [restaurants](#) and [other hospitality industries](#)
- Meetings or small gatherings, as permitted in other [multi-purpose community settings](#)
- Places of worship should take account of the [performing arts guidance](#) in organising any indoor or outdoor performances, paying particular attention to the sections on singing.

Face Coverings

Face coverings must be worn in places of worship, unless you are exempt. This is now law. Guidance on face coverings and exemptions is here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>

Summary

It is important that during this time all places of worship continue to provide hand sanitiser at points of access and egress, there should be stewarding and managed social distancing within the church space and that full cleaning of the space should be done immediately after the church has been in use.

The time that people are in the church should be minimised (so the use of liturgical choices should reflect this, including a short homily, the omission of the prayers of the faithful and any other permitted mitigations) and the church must be well ventilated even during the liturgical celebrations. There should be no congregational singing as part of the liturgical celebrations and if a choir or cantors sing, the choices of music should be such that the exposure time is not excessively prolonged.

It is very important to encourage all who attend our churches to abide by these covid-security restrictions and to protect themselves and those around them. It is also an opportunity to thank those who clean and steward our churches for their generosity of service to the local community.

Rev. Canon Christopher Thomas

4th January 2021