



THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

GUIDANCE FOR REOPENING CHURCH HALLS AND ROOMS

Updated 12.3.21

This guidance will be further updated as further guidance/regulations are available

Note: The introduction to this guidance is new. References in the guidance to specific activities, for example consumption of food and fitness classes will be relevant only when those activities are permitted again.

INTRODUCTION- WHAT IS PERMITTED AND WHEN?

Following the guidance published by government on 22nd February, the potential purposes for which for church halls can be used will be widened as follows:

Now-

- support groups
- childcare provided by a person who is registered under Part 3 of the Childcare Act 2006 or supervised activities for children
- education or training
- providing essential voluntary services or public support services, including digital access to public services, medical treatment, the provision of food bank or other support for the homeless or vulnerable people, blood donation services or support in an emergency
- voting, counting of votes or activities ancillary to voting or the counting of votes in an election or referendum

From no earlier than 29th March

- organised outdoor sport allowed and outdoor sports facilities can reopen for adults and children, in compliance with guidance issues by national governing bodies
- outdoor parent and child groups can meet, with a limit of 15 people attending (children under 5 are not counted)

From no earlier than 12th April

- community centres will be permitted to reopen
- indoor children's activities will be permitted
- indoor leisure will be permitted for use individually or within household groups only (i.e. not for fitness classes or group sports)
- parent and child groups can meet indoors, with a limit of 15 people attending (children under 5 are not counted)
- wedding receptions or wakes for up to 15 people will be permitted
- outdoor consumption of food will be permitted but table service will be required
- strict observance of social contact rules will be required, i.e. between household groups or individuals

From no earlier than 17th May

- adult indoor group sports and exercise can reopen
- conference centres can reopen, for a maximum of 50% of the venue's capacity
- wedding receptions and wakes for up to 30 will be permitted
- indoor meeting will be limited to groups of 6 or two households, but events can take place with multiple such groups

- outdoor performances will be permitted

From no earlier than 21st June

- most restrictions will be removed

Where there is an existing lease, licence or hiring agreement with a hall user, parishes should permit that user to start back when their use is permitted under the Roadmap. For new potential users, parishes are not obliged to re-open halls or make them available for use (see below).

General

- This guidance is designed to help parishes decide when and to what extent they can reopen their halls and rooms which may be hired out to others or used by the parish. In the rest of this guidance, any reference to “hall” includes all such halls and rooms.
- The parish is not obliged to re-open the hall immediately and the parish should **not** do so until the parish has been through the Covid-19 Risk Assessment for Re-opening Church Halls and Rooms produced with this guidance.
- Many parishes will continue to focus just on church re-opening at this time.
- It may simply be uneconomic to reopen the hall when considering income against any increased costs, given the current restrictions.
- The guidance refers to use by hirers throughout, but exactly the same principles apply to parish use, even though the formalities will not be the same, (for example there would be no need to complete and return the Hirer’s Pack) However the parish needs to act in the same way as it expects its hirers to act. Please see the note on Parish Group Guidance provided.
- The parts of this guidance in bold (other than headings) indicate matters which the parish must act on before reopening the hall.
- Please **complete the Covid-19 Risk Assessment for Re-opening Church Halls and Rooms before the hall is reopened**, and make it available on request, and **put a copy in the hall, on a wall**, so that each page can be read without it being handled. Please also upload that risk assessment to xCenta
- The parish may want to open the hall gradually, starting either with parish use, or those regular hirers who are most anxious to return, assuming that the purpose for which the hirer wants to use the hall is permitted by law.
- At the moment kitchens should remain closed, as it will be very difficult to ensure proper cleanliness during use by a hirer and between uses by hirers.
- Please contact all regular hirers to establish who wants to restart and when. **There is with this guidance a Hirer’s Pack. The parish should send this to all existing or potential new hirers and ask them to sign and return it.** It has three elements:-
 - The questionnaire asks hirers to let the parish know their needs for space and timings.
 - There are Special Hiring Conditions which take effect over and above the normal hiring agreement
 - There is a risk assessment which must be completed by the hirer.

The parish will need to customise the Hirer’s Pack by completing/considering the options in the sections highlighted in yellow. There is guidance relating to the options for cleaning in section 6 of this guidance.

- The parish might wish to take this opportunity to update its standard hiring terms-please look at the documents available on the diocesan website at <https://www.birminghamdiocese.org.uk/Pages/FAQs/Category/property-resources>
- It is now a legal requirement that all church halls which are open must have a QR code which can be used by those who have the NHS Track and Trace App. This should be a different QR code to any which has been obtained for the church A QR code can be created from this website- <https://www.gov.uk/create-coronavirus-qr-poster>. The NHS QR code will then be emailed to you to be printed and put up. The process is straightforward, but should you have any issues, there are answers to Frequently Asked Questions lined to

that website. The obligation to ensure that anyone attending an event either checks in on the app using the QR code or provides their contact details is the responsibility of the Hirer, as set out in the Special Conditions in the Hirer's Pack

- m) As part of opening after lockdown, **self-certification should be displayed at the entrance to the hall and on the parish and/or hall website** that the hall complies with COVID-19 Secure Guidelines. This will also help hirers feel confident about using the hall. There is a sample on the last page of this guidance, which will need to be customised - the areas where local information needs to be added are highlighted in yellow.
- n) **In relation to all members of staff or volunteers (other than cleaners) who work at the hall please ensure that the Diocesan Risk Assessment for those Returning to Work in a Parish Office is completed with them by their line managers.**
- o) **For hall cleaners please ensure that the COVID 19 Risk assessment for those regularly cleaning parish premises (other than churches) with this guidance is carried out with them by their line manager before the hall is reopened.**
- p) If the hall cleaner is a contractor, ask the cleaning company for a copy of their risk assessment for each member of staff who cleans the hall.
- q) **If the parish does not have a current risk assessment in relation to the cleaning of the hall, to ensure the safety of all, please also ensure the attached Cleaning Risk Assessment is carried out before the hall is reopened.**
- r) To complete the first part of the Risk Assessment for Reopening Church Halls, which relates to general health and safety, please use the guidance already issued for reopening churches.
- s) To complete the second part of the Risk Assessment for Reopening Church Halls, please use the following guidance.
- t) If the parish wishes to allow one organisation only to use the hall, so that organisation will be the only one in and out, and there will be no use by anyone else, even parishioners, then that can be permitted on the basis that all responsibility for cleaning and compliance rests with that one hirer. This assumes that the use is permitted as set out above. In these circumstances the parish can use its own hiring conditions or the standard diocesan ones referred to at 1(q) above, together with the letter available with this guidance and headed Letter to Sole User during Covid-19 Pandemic. In these circumstances the hirer will need to be sent the Hirer Pack, or to return it completed, but should provide the parish with a copy of their Risk Assessment for their activity. The parish must however still carry out the Risk Assessment for reopening church halls and rooms and make that available to the sole hirer.

2. Signage

The following signage should be put up in church halls:-

- a) The NHS QR code is now a legal requirement (see 1 (n) above for more detail)
- b) **Put up signs emphasising the need for social distancing in the entrance area and in halls and in corridors**, particularly leading to toilets. Signs can be downloaded at https://www.npa.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/501534_Safe-Distance_A4_Poster_WHITE_No-Crops_AW_2_b_07-April-2020.pdf
- c) **Put up Catch it bin it kill it signs in all halls and in common areas and in toilets.** Signs can be downloaded at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/south/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/09/catch-bin-kill.pdf>
- d) **Put up signs emphasising the need for frequent hand washing in the entrance and in all halls used by hirers and by all hand washing facilities.** Signs can be downloaded at <https://www.berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk/media/33429304/nhs-hand-wasing-technique.pdf>
- e) **Put up signs about the safe use of face coverings in the entrance area** – signs can be downloaded at [https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/clothing-masks-infographic---\(web\)-logo-who.png?sfvrsn=b15e3742_16-](https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/clothing-masks-infographic---(web)-logo-who.png?sfvrsn=b15e3742_16-) go to the green infographic part way down the page
- f) **Put up a sign asking everyone to use the hand sanitiser or hand washing facilities at all entrances to and exits from the building**
- g) **Put up a sign asking everyone to wear a face covering unless they are exempt by law from doing so**
Think about whether the following signs or floor markings are needed

- h) Think about whether signs at the toilets are needed indicating a “one in one out” system- only put such signs up if that approach is not likely to lead to more of a bottleneck.
- i) Think about whether signs and social distancing floor markers around storage areas are needed.
- j) Consider displaying photos showing socially distanced table and chair layouts in the hall to show hirers their options.
- k) If the parish has hirers who use the hall for exercise or dance, consider whether this use can be permitted within government guidance and only if it is, then consider marking the floor of the hall with 2 metre boxes in tape

3. Social Distancing

- a) It will be necessary to assess the maximum capacity of each hall to ensure that there can be social distancing at all times. At present social distancing requires a distance between individuals of 2 metres (the 2m rule) unless other mitigations are put in place, e.g. wearing of face coverings. If there is mitigation, a distance of at least 1 metre between individuals must be achieved- this is the 1 m plus rule
- b) The parish will need to **assess the capacity of each hall for both the 2m rule and the 1m plus rule.**
- c) The Hirer’s Pack requires each hirer to let the parish know whether, for their hire, they will adopt the 2m or the 1m plus rule. A Hirer can only adopt the 2m rule when their use involves exercise or any activity where wearing a face covering would negatively impact their ability to do that activity, or eating or drinking (but please see the restrictions on this above)
When a parish is using the hall they also need to decide which rule they will adopt, and record that.
- d) The current government guidance states that if up to 6 members of the same household or “support bubble” (this is where, if there is only one adult in a household, that person can expand their support network so that it includes one other household of any size) come to the hall together, those individuals must socially distance in relation to anyone outside their household or support bubble, but do not have to socially distance between themselves. However, **when assessing the capacity of the hall, assume that there will be no such groups attending.**
- e) **Make arrangements to manage people at “pinch points”** e.g. arriving for an activity and exiting afterwards, in toilets and corridors. **In these areas put down floor markings** and use signage, which can now be based on the 1m social distancing requirements, as those using the facilities will be wearing a face mask. **If more than one group is using the building at any one time, then liaise with them to plan staggered arrival and departure times**, and where appropriate, staggered break times so as to reduce queuing and avoid compromising social distancing.
- f) **Implement a one way system if possible to help avoid congestion. The parish will need to put up appropriate signposting. If entrances, and exits are being changed and the parish is planning for socially distanced queues, consider the needs of those with physical disabilities.** Implementing a one-way flow internally, may not be possible, as people may have to cross a common area to reach the toilets.
- g) Some lapse in social distancing may be difficult to avoid, e.g. where people pass in internal corridors. Government guidance indicates that such transitory contacts are lower risk and it will be for hirers to try and arrange their activities to avoid these risks if possible, particularly for older or medically vulnerable people. This is covered in the Special Conditions in the Hirer’s Pack.
- h) In Tier 2 and Tier 3, people can only come to an event either alone or with members of their own household or support bubble. There must be social distancing in place between every individual or every household group/support bubble and everyone else. There should be no social interaction or shared activity between those who are not members of the same household or support bubble.

4. Hygiene and face coverings

Make sure there is hand sanitiser or there are hand washing facilities available at every entrance to and exit from the building, and also that there is hand sanitiser in every hall used by hirers. The signs referred to at 2 “) will request that these facilities be used by all.
Face coverings are now required to be worn in community centres.
Once in the hall, those

- undertaking exercise or
- undertaking any activity where wearing a face covering would negatively impact their ability to do that activity, or
- eating or drinking

can remove their face covering. Face coverings can be removed only during that activity and should be worn at all other times when in the hall or its entrance/other facilities. Please consider whether uses which involve exercise or eating and drinking are now permitted- see the green additions in paragraph 1.

Face coverings are defined by law as “a covering of any type which covers a person’s nose and mouth”. Therefore a visor is a face covering.

Hirers whose activities involve any of these activities will need to observe the 2 metre social distancing requirement.

Be aware that some people are exempt from wearing face masks, particularly if someone has a physical or mental illness or impairment or disability or wearing a face covering would cause them severe distress. If a person coming to the hall states that they are exempt from wearing a face covering, that should be accepted as the case. Children under 11 are not required by law to wear face coverings.

5. Toilets

- Make sure that there is a good supply of liquid soap, hand sanitiser and paper towels.** Make sure the hand sanitiser is available on entry to the toilets Even if there are hand driers, obtain some stocks of paper towels in case of breakdown. Expect significantly higher usage than normal and stock accordingly.
- Open the windows and if there are extractor fans, check they work.**
- Put social distancing markers where queues for the toilets form.**
- Think about whether a larger bin is necessary, as there will be more waste if paper towels are used, and do not use a bin which has to be opened by hand.**
- If the toilets are not operating a ‘one-in-one-out’ policy, think about blocking off alternate cubicles and/or sinks, if that would be necessary to ensure social distancing.
- All hirers who run activities involving any form of exercise (if that remains permissible- see green additions to paragraph 1) must ensure that their participants do not use the toilets as a changing room. The only exception is for participants with disabilities or special needs.

6. Cleaning arrangements and PPE

- The parish will need to decide how frequently the hall cleaner should be asked to clean the hall, based on an assessment of risk, and how much the building is used.** For most halls and parishes, it is not viable for the hall to be cleaned by the parish in between sessions. In the Hirer’s Pack, the Special Conditions require each hirer to clean before and after their session. Ultimately however the responsibility for ensuring cleanliness and avoidance of potential spread of the virus lies with the parish. To make that decision, and to decide which option to cross out in the Hirer’s Pack before using it, consider the following questions:
 - How frequently is the hall used? Is it every day or by more than one hirer per day?
 - If it is more than once per day, what period of time is available for cleaning?
 - Is the whole of the building used by all hirers or are there some that have limited access?
 - If there are multiple halls, is it intended end to allow more than one hirer at any one time in the building?
 - Who uses the hall? Do some hirers involve children or vulnerable people? What specific arrangements are required to ensure safety for them?
 - Can the parish rely on the ability of hirers to adequately clean?

The answers to these will influence what cleaning regime a parish will need to consider. The greater the number and frequency of hirers the greater the likely implications for the parish.

This will also influence what tasks will be undertaken by parish volunteers, by professional cleaners engaged by the parish and by hirers. Whatever arrangements are to be put in place will need to be set out clearly and agreed in advance between the parish and the hirer.

If a particular parish decides not to ask hirers to clean before and after each session but will take those obligations on itself, then the Special Conditions in the Hirers Pack should be changed accordingly. There are alternatives provided. The sections which would need to be changed are highlighted in yellow
The Special Conditions allow for a surcharge per session to be charged for cleaning materials and disposable gloves provided

Hand sanitiser, cleaning materials and cleaning materials for use by hirers (including cleanser, spray disinfectant and disposable cloths, bins and bin bags and disposable gloves) will need to be kept replenished

- b) **Ensure the hall cleaner pays particular attention to keeping the following clean in toilets -hand wash basins, taps, cubicle doors and locks, flush handles/buttons and the following clean in halls- door handles and push plates, chairs, tables, window catches, equipment and all other high touch surfaces.**
- c) **Make sure that the relevant parish representatives and the hall cleaner know how to follow government guidance in cleaning an area where someone has been taken ill with suspected COVID 19** available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-interim-guidance-for-first-responders/interim-guidance-for-first-responders-and-others-in-close-contact-with-symptomatic-people-with-potential-2019-ncov>
- d) **Make sure sufficient stocks of PPE- disposable masks, gloves and aprons are available for the hall cleaner** for use every time they clean the hall
- e) If a hirer does not leave the hall clean after use, then they are in breach of their hire agreement. The parish should make contact to point out the breach, and explain that the hirer will need to reimburse the cost of having the hall cleaned by a third party.

7. Halls which are used by pre-schools and nurseries and before and after school clubs

- a) Government guidance on wider opening of childcare settings advises them to avoid other people attending unless essential. For example, within Pre-schools children are encouraged only to mix with a group of up to 8 other children and one or two staff members, to minimise spread in the event of a COVID-19 case. Government advice is to limit external visitors to the childcare setting and ensure external visitors only come into the area used by children when strictly necessary, for example if providing an essential service or essential support for a child's health and wellbeing. The usual safeguarding procedures also apply. The special Conditions also require such hirers to comply with the Department for Education guidance on protective measures for out of school settings
- b) Its best if cleaning and maintenance organised by the parish can take place outside the childcare group's hiring hours if at all possible.
- c) **Where common areas serve other parts of a hall which are used by other hirers at the same time as a childcare group is in place (such as entrance lobbies, corridors, and toilets), timing of arrangements will clearly need to be discussed with the childcare group. For example, the childcare group will need to be aware when the toilets will be being cleaned by hirers. If there is a toilet which could be designated for use only by the childcare group while hirers are using other parts of the building, that could be helpful.**
- d) Hirers' arrival and departure time will also have to be arranged so that they do not coincide with the staggered arrival and departure times implemented by the childcare group, or a separate entrance/exit used e.g. fire exit or a separate waiting/queueing arrangement created outside.

8. Booking Arrangements

- a) **Whoever takes bookings for the hall needs to be aware that each booking needs to be extended by an hour, for which no charge will be made, to allow the hirer to clean before and after their use.**
- b) If the parish becomes aware that a hirer proposes to use the hall for a use which is not at that time permitted or does not comply with the social distancing required for that activity, then the parish should take this up

with the hirer, and if they will not assure the parish that the use will be legal and the required social distancing will be enforced, then the parish should inform them that the booking is cancelled.

9. **Hall layout**

- a) Depending on how the hall is normally used, but particularly if it is used for fitness/exercise groups (subject to the limitations in green at paragraph 1) the parish may want to put tape on the floor to mark out 2 metre squares.
- b) The parish may wish to put some photographs up where tables and chairs are stacked to show layouts which are compliant- visual aids can be more helpful in these circumstances than written instructions
- c) Hirers are required under the Special Conditions of Hire to position furniture or arrange the hall as far as possible to facilitate people sitting side by side, with at a sufficient gap to comply with social distancing requirements at the time rather than face to face. If tables are being used, hirers are required to place them so as to maintain a distance between people who are face to face of at least 2 metres across the table if face coverings are not worn for the activity or at least 1 metre if face coverings or other mitigations are in place e.g. using a wide U-shape or a hollow square
- d) Hirers should be reminded to put all furniture back at the end of their session

10. **Strategy for dealing with ill people**

- a) **All relevant parish representatives should familiarise themselves with the government guidance at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-interim-guidance-for-first-responders/interim-guidance-for-first-responders-and-others-in-close-contact-with-symptomatic-people-with-potential-2019-ncov>**
- b) If in doubt, call an ambulance
- c) Anyone assisting a person who has fallen sick will need to wear personal protective equipment consisting of a face mask, gloves and an apron
- d) Such an incident should be notified to the parish health and safety coordinator who must report the incident to the Head of Planning via email on Paul.oconnor@rc-birmingham.org
- e) Those parts of the building which they have used should be closed for 72 hours. After cleaning in accordance with the guidance referenced at 10a), all PPE equipment used including gloves should be disposed of into a sealed plastic bag and secured for 72 hours before rubbish is collected. The cleaner should launder all personal clothing worn on arrival home.

11. **Strategy for dealing with fire**

- a) In case of emergency it is important to prioritise safety. In the event of fire or accident people do not have to stay 2m apart if it would be unsafe to do so.
- b) Ensure hand sanitiser is available to those who have to evacuate the building in the case of a suspected or actual fire, and that they disperse to comply with social distancing again once they are outside the building.

12. **Car Park**

- a) **Think about the practicalities of how the car park is used.** It may be that having a gap between events so that hirers have time to clean will mean that bottlenecks are in any case reduced. **If there is a one way system in the building which means that the normal entrance is not used, then put up signs to make that clear**

13. **Storage and display areas**

- a) Think about appropriate signage to encourage social distancing

14. **Use of an outdoor area (if the parish has one) by a hirer**

Any hirer should be asked to confirm that they have read and understand the guidance at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation/guidance-for-providers-of-outdoor-facilities-on-the-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation>

If you have any queries about this guidance and the related documents, please contact Clare O'Brien, clare.obrien@rcaob.org.uk 0121 230 6231 or Geoff Taylor Geoff.taylor@rcaob.org.uk 0121 230 6282



.....PARISH HALL

HELP KEEP THIS HALL COVID-19 SECURE

1. You must not enter if you or anyone in your household has COVID-19 symptoms.
2. If you develop COVID-19 symptoms within 7 days of visiting these premises alert Test, Track and Trace. Alert the Hall Contact on[insert phone number]and alert the organiser of the activity you attended.
3. Maintain 2 metres social distancing or 1 metre plus with face coverings: Wait behind the marked lines as you go through the entrance hall to your activity and observe any one-way system marked.
4. Use the hand sanitiser provided on entering the premises. Clean your hands often. Soap and paper towels or hand driers are provided.
5. Avoid touching your face, nose, or eyes. Clean your hands if you do.
6. “Catch it, Bin it, Kill it”. Tissues should be disposed of into one of the rubbish bags provided. Then wash your hands.
7. Check the organisers of your activity have cleaned door handles, tables, other equipment, sinks and surfaces before you arrived. Keep them clean. We cannot clean all surfaces at the hall between each hire.
8. Take turns to use confined spaces such as corridors and toilet areas. Standing or sitting next to someone is lower risk than opposite them. Briefly passing another person in a confined space is low risk.
9. Keep the hall well ventilated. Close doors and windows on leaving.