

## **Opening for private prayer - Guidance to faith organisations to reduce Covid-19 risk**

The Government has just released guidance for [the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic](#) - below is a summary of that guidance.

“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.”

Individuals or those from separate households must be at least 2 metres away from each other during individual prayer. A household is a person or a group of people who live together in the same accommodation.

### **People with symptoms**

- Anyone who has covid-19 like symptoms (a new, continuous cough or a high temperature or loss of or change to sense of smell or taste) should NOT come for private prayer but should remain at home, order a test and self-isolate for 7 days.
- Anyone living with someone who has symptoms should NOT come for private prayer but should remain at home and self-isolate for 14 days
- Anyone who has been told to self-isolate (because they have had close contact with someone with Covid-19) should NOT come for private prayer but should remain at home and self-isolate for 14 days
- Please make sure that your congregation members are aware of this

### **People who are shielding**

- People who are shielding should follow the shielding guidance given to them by the government and NHS
- It is currently not advisable for them to come for private prayer
- Certain groups of people may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, including people who are aged 70 or older, regardless of medical conditions – they should also be advised to remain at home.

### **Transport**

- People coming for private prayer should avoid using public transport
- Wherever possible people should try to cycle or walk when coming for private prayer

### **Record of people attending**

- Aim to have as few people in the building as possible at any one time
- Keep a record of all people attending for private prayer (name and contact number)
- Ask people to contact your organisation if they test positive for Covid-19 after coming for private prayer
- Contact us if this happens

### **Arrival & Leaving**

- Ensure that people are not touching on arrival or when they depart (no hugs or handshakes, or blessings which involve being closer than 2 metres)
- Ensure people arriving maintain social distance (2 metres) with others arriving
- If entrances and exits can be separate to prevent people passing each other, this would be a good idea
- Ensure people aren't standing within 2 metres of entrances of neighbouring buildings

- If entrances and exits can be separate to prevent people passing each other, this would be a good idea.
- People waiting to enter the building should be reminded to keep 2 metres away from each other (and 2 metres away from staff / religious leaders who are in the building) – you may wish to use a queueing system marked out using tape or paint.
- You may wish to put arrows on the floor to show people where they should be walking (to ensure they stay 2 metres away from others)
- On entering and leaving a place of worship everyone, including staff, should be asked to wash their hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds using soap and water or to use hand sanitiser if hand washing facilities are not available.

### **Social distancing**

- Anyone coming for private prayer should keep at least 2 metres away from anyone who they don't live with.
- Make sure that there is a risk assessment to determine the maximum number of people allowed in spaces (this number will vary by the size of the space – it must allow that people can remain 2 metres away from others at all times when they enter, pray, and exit)
- For frequently used places mark areas using floor tape or paint to help people keep a 2 metre distance from each other.
- If your place of worship is also a work place, then make sure staff working / volunteering there are not put at additional risk (ensure that they are able to remain socially distant from others coming into the building for individual prayer)
- Non-essential areas should be closed off, locked, or signed that they are not open.
- If children are attending for private prayer, parents or guardians should ensure that the children are staying at least 2 metres away from people who they do not live with.

### **Cleaning**

- Cleaning an area with normal household disinfectant after someone with suspected Covid-19 has left will reduce the risk of passing the infection on to other people
- Wear disposable or washing-up gloves and aprons for cleaning. These should be double-bagged, then stored securely for 72 hours then thrown away in the regular rubbish after cleaning is finished
- using a disposable cloth, first clean hard surfaces with warm soapy water. Then disinfect these surfaces with the cleaning products you normally use. Pay particular attention to frequently touched areas and surfaces, such as bathrooms, grab-rails in corridors and stairwells and door handles
- if an area has been heavily contaminated, such as with visible bodily fluids, from a person with coronavirus (COVID-19), use protection for the eyes, mouth and nose, as well as wearing gloves and an apron
- wash hands regularly with soap and water for 20 seconds, and after removing gloves, aprons and other protection used while cleaning
- more information is [here](#)

### **Hand and Respiratory Hygiene**

- People working in and visiting the place of worship should follow the guidance on hand hygiene – which means washing hands more often than usual, for 20 seconds using soap and water or hand sanitiser
- When coughing or sneezing, the mouth and nose should be covered with a tissue or the crook of your arm. Throw the tissue into a bin afterwards, and then wash hands / use hand sanitiser.
- People should avoid touching their faces
- If possible, put up signs / posters to remind people to follow this

- Face coverings are not a requirement (except in hospitals and public transport) but if people are choosing to wear them, they should make sure they wash their hands before putting it on and taking it off.

### **Facilities**

- Shared washing / ablution areas should be closed and worshipers asked to perform washing / ablution at home before coming for prayer.
- When providing handwashing facilities, make sure that soap and disposable paper towels are provided (and suitable bins for the paper towels). Do not use communal hand towels.
- If able, provision of hand sanitiser at entrances and exits, and in frequently used places would be advisable.
- All surfaces, especially those most frequently touched such as door handles and rails, should be cleaned regularly, using standard cleaning products.  
See [guidance on cleaning and waste disposal](#).
- Sufficient time needs to be allowed for this cleaning to take place, particularly before reopening. Frequently used objects, surfaces or spaces, including for example doorways between outside and inside spaces should be given particular attention when cleaning.
- If possible, open doors and windows to improve ventilation to the inside space
- Play areas for children (indoor or outdoor) should remain closed and communal toys should not be provided.
- Do not give food or drink before, during, or after worship

### **Communal Objects**

- Please remove communal objects such as prayer books, mats, and cushions from the prayer areas and lock them away. Anyone coming for private prayer must bring their own items and take them away with them afterwards.
- People should not touch or kiss any devotional objects which are in the place of worship.
- People should not touch or handle items belonging to people that they don't live with (for example shoes and prayer books)

### **Donations / giving**

- Try to discourage people from giving cash - if you have online facilities for people to give money then this is the best method. If cash is the only option then gloves should be worn to handle this cash.
- If people are donating resources, minimise contact and maintain social distancing wherever possible.

### **People becoming unwell at the place of worship**

- If anyone becomes unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 in a place of worship they should be sent home and advised to follow the [stay at home guidance](#).
  - They should also be advised to order a test for Covid-19.
  - If they need clinical advice they should go online to NHS 111 (or call 111 if they don't have internet access).
  - In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. Ensure you tell the call operator that they have Covid-19 symptoms.
  - They should not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.
- People who may have been in contact with the person who has become unwell should wash their hands thoroughly straight away, but they do not need to take any other specific action unless they develop symptoms themselves or are advised to do

so by NHS Test and Trace. If they do develop symptoms they should follow the [stay at home guidance](#).

#### **How to order a test**

- If you have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), you should ask for a test to check if you have the virus.
- The best time to do a test is days 3-5 after the symptoms started.
- People can order a test [here](#).

#### **Further information on Test and trace**

The government has launched an NHS Test and Trace service to manage the risk of the virus re-emerging. The service:

- provides testing for anyone who has symptoms of coronavirus to find out if they have the virus
- gets in touch with anyone who has had a positive test result to help them share information about any close recent contacts they have had
- alerts those contacts, where necessary, and notifies them they need to self-isolate to help stop the spread of the virus
- Further information can be found online including for contacts of people with possible or confirmed COVID-19 infection who do not live with the person and for places of work.