

About continuing to worship (with joy!) safely

Guidance for the ELCE

Version 13, Issued 3rd December 2021: This revised guidance has been prepared by the Executive Council based on guidelines published by the British and devolved governments, particularly in light of the latest Covid variant (omicron).

Hello!

The legal situation with regard to coronavirus restrictions, particularly in worship, has not changed in each of our jurisdictions, but the new variant has raised potential concerns regarding the spread of COVID-19. Congregations should consult with their members to determine the comfort level and agree the practices that facilitate a feeling of safety.

The current situation in England is that, in light of the new C-19 variant, we are encouraged to act in ways that promote safety amongst all.

In Scotland, there is no change to past requirements at the moment.

Wales is at Level 0, which means there is no change to past requirements, including the requirement for face coverings.

In all regions, government guidelines continue to emphasise personal responsibility in relation to COVID-19 safety, but we must ensure that we provide an environment that allows people to remain COVID secure.

What follows in this document is ELCE guidance regarding public worship, for all ELCE congregations irrespective of location and charity status.

Region	England	Scotland	Wales
Document Links	<p>November 30: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do;</p> <p>July 16: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship</p>	<p>October 26: https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-safe-and-protecting-others/</p> <p>September 18: https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/</p>	<p>November 4: https://gov.wales/alert-level-0-guidance-public;</p> <p>November 15: https://gov.wales/alert-level-0-guidance-employers-businesses-and-organisations#section-44811</p>
Face Coverings	Not required by law, but ELCE recommends wearing of masks at least for congregational singing.	Still required for worship leaders and congregants	Still required for worship leaders and congregants
Distancing	Please be sensitive to the concerns of others and, for now, maintain a safe distance.	Please be sensitive to the concerns of others and, for now, maintain a safe distance.	2 meters between members unless sufficient additional measures taken to minimise risk (see the government guidelines)

Region	England	Scotland	Wales
Singing, chanting, instruments etc	Must be carried out in a way that is safe for your congregation, noting size of worship space, number of people and ventilation.	Full risk assessment and mitigation required	Full risk assessment and mitigation required. 1 meter distance between all singers.
Track and trace / Test and protect / Test, trace and protect/	While not required by law, it is good to keep track of attendance.	No change to current practice	Not compulsory but strongly recommend collecting contact information from each person on the premises and storing it for 21 days
Post-service Sociability	After service refreshments may be served in ways that maintain safety for all present (e.g. collect from a serving hatch, avoid sharing cutlery, dishes etc.)	No change to current practice	After service refreshments may be served in ways that maintain safety for all present (e.g. collect from a serving hatch, avoid sharing cutlery, dishes etc.)
Offerings	While all methods are possible, we recommend that your current practice be maintained.	No change to current practice	While all methods are possible, we recommend that your current practice be maintained.
Holy Communion	We may use the chalice, but please be sensitive to the concerns of others recognising that we are still susceptible to an air-borne virus, which means you may continue your current practice. For now, clergy should continue to wear masks for the Service of the Sacrament and sanitise the hands before this part of the service.	No change to current practice	We may use the chalice, but please be sensitive to the concerns of others recognising that we are still susceptible to an air-borne virus, which means you may continue your current practice. For now, clergy should continue to wear masks for the Service of the Sacrament and sanitise the hands before this part of the service.
Hymnals, hygiene	Hymnals can be used but should not be shared.	No change to current practice	Hymnals can be used but should not be shared.
Kneeling, pew cushions	Pew cushions may be used in the pews but not shared. Communicants should stand when receiving communion at the altar rail, and avoid kneeling.	No change to current practice	Pew cushions may be used in the pews but not shared. Communicants should stand when receiving communion at the altar rail, and avoid kneeling.
Cleaning	Advice is still to maintain rigorous standards of cleaning; it should be the users' responsibility to clean before use (e.g. include in rental agreements)	No change to current practice	Advice is still to maintain rigorous standards of cleaning; it should be the users' responsibility to clean before use (e.g. include in rental agreements)
Self-tests	Clergy should test regularly during the week and definitely before a Sunday service.	Clergy should test regularly during the week and definitely before a Sunday service.	Clergy should test regularly during the week and definitely before a Sunday service.

Region	England	Scotland	Wales
Bible Study, Sunday School, ladies' fellowship and other activities	May take place in ways that maintain safety for all present	May take place in ways that maintain safety for all present	May take place in ways that maintain safety for all present
Weddings, Baptisms, Funerals	May take place in ways that maintain safety for all present	May take place in ways that maintain safety for all present	May take place in ways that maintain safety for all present
Signage	No change to current practice	No change to current practice	No change to current practice
Hand Sanitisers	Continue to provide hand sanitisers at many points	Continue to provide hand sanitisers at many points	Continue to provide hand sanitisers at many points
Ventilation	We recommend that doors and windows remain open. Adequate ventilation is important as it has been shown to reduce transmission of the virus.	No change to current practice	Adequate ventilation is an important mitigating factor for social distancing.
Movement & Seating	No restriction on movement between standing and sitting, but conduct service in ways that maintain safety for all present.	No restriction on movement between standing and sitting, but conduct service in ways that maintain safety for all present.	No restriction on movement between standing and sitting, but conduct service in ways that maintain safety for all present.

Please note that the COVID-19 risk assessment is to be completed if you make substantial changes to your current practice. Failure to complete a COVID-19 risk assessment constitutes a breach of Health & Safety legislation, as could having a risk assessment with insufficient measures set out. Places of worship are encouraged to make their risk assessments available online where possible.

The guidelines for Safe Use of Places of Worship have been published for **England** and were updated on **November 30** <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do> and July 16 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship> and for **Scotland**, updated on **September 18**: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/> and for **Wales**, updated on **November 4**: <https://gov.wales/alert-level-0-guidance-public>; and on **November 15**: <https://gov.wales/alert-level-0-guidance-employers-businesses-and-organisations#section-44811>

All ELCE congregations should continue to be proactive in any and all actions to mitigate the C-19 transmission rate and need to remind all members with any symptoms that they are to stay at home. All ELCE congregations also need to assure those who are vulnerable, those who are shielding, and those who have any concerns about the spread of COVID-19 that they should stay at home and be supported by whatever online or postal provision exists.

ELCE Executive Council, 3rd December 2021

Other Points to Note

Singing

- 1) There are no restrictions on singing, but bear in mind that in Scotland masks are required in worship settings; in Wales they are an important mitigating factor for reducing social distancing and in England they are strongly recommended in all indoor settings, particularly when ventilation is poor.

Renting to other groups

- 2) If you are renting to other groups, you should have a signed agreement with each renter regarding their responsibilities for complying with this guidance and observing all local and national government regulations.
- 3) Where your building is used by other user groups, only those activities permitted by law should take place.

Dealing with Positive COVID-19 Test results among congregants

- 4) Congregants should be informed that if anyone tests positive for COVID-19 they should inform the pastor immediately. Congregations then use their track and trace list to inform anyone who has attended within the past 14 days that an individual has tested positive. The name of the COVID-19 positive person is only to be shared with the congregation with the permission of the COVID-19 positive person. Reasons for sharing the name (with permission) are so that others can assess their proximity and also pray for the person.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance> (Updated November 30)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person> (Updated November 30)

Anything we have missed?

- 5) Please contact the Secretary of the Executive Council if you encounter a situation not covered by these guidelines, or if the guidelines are not clear.