

Highfields Church, Cardiff – COVID Risk Assessment – For the reintroduction of congregational singing

This risk assessment is not a stand-alone document and should be read alongside Highfields Church wider COVID and general safety documentation.

- Under the new Welsh Government guidance in regards to places of Worship, updated 23rd June 2021, religious organisations are permitted to re-introduce congregational singing as part of worship services.
- Highfields church elders and its membership seek to ensure the safety of all attendees and those whom we may encounter during our activities. We are committed to operating in a safe and respectful manner, abiding by all current guidance and legislation put in place to ensure health, safety and welfare of all persons in the relation of COVID19.

Assessment:	Risk Assessment for the reintroduction of congregational singing	Date:	2 nd July 2021
Location:	Highfields Church Building, Monthermer Road, Cathays, Cardiff, CF24 4QW		
Assessment undertaken by:		Leadership member Responsible:	

The Welsh Government guidance has advised that congregational singing can take place where a risk assessment and appropriate mitigations have been put in place. We regard it as a privilege that congregational singing can recommence. However, we understand that this is only possible for as long as the Welsh Government guidance allows it. The updated Welsh government guidance can be found here: <https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus-html#section-44811>. The key paragraph (updated 2nd July) reads as follows:

*Over the course of the pandemic a number of ‘super-spreading’ events have been associated with gatherings where a ‘vocal’ element plays a role in transmission. These include choir practise and recitals, concerts, weddings and worship. The risks of singing, chanting and playing of instruments are then significant. However, scientific advice has concluded these risks are manageable where the community transmission rate is low. **For this reason, singing and the playing of instruments as part of worship practise can take place where a risk assessment and appropriate mitigations have been put in place.** This would include both indoors and outdoors, as well as both performance and congregational singing. However, it is emphasised that extreme caution should be exercised, especially in relation to large groups indoors. (Emphasis added)*

Assessment undertaken by:	Dave Gobbett / Geoff Cresswell (based on Tim Lewis’s work)	Date: 2 nd July 2021
Leadership sign off:		Date:

Rising case rates

While current hospital admissions and death rates are still incredibly low, the community transmission rate (CTR) of Covid in Cardiff continues to rise. (As of 2nd July, the CTR in Cardiff is 100.0/100,000 and is likely to keep going up for the next few weeks.) However, the only specific criteria given by the Welsh Government (WG) for allowing singing, according to their latest 2nd July update, is that *“a risk assessment and appropriate mitigations have been put in place”* not that we routinely analyse the case rates, or that they need be below a certain level (we note that in their most recent 2nd July update, WG doesn’t define what a low transmission rate is). The Evangelical Alliance have advised us that this is the correct reading of the guidance having been in close discussion with WG. More importantly, we do not consider that the CTR is a relevant indicator of the risk for adults attending our services. This is because the rate is being driven up primarily by young people who have not been vaccinated. Our youth and children are catered for in separate meetings and are normally not part of the adult population attending the services, over 90% of whom (according to latest vaccination figures) have received at least one dose. Furthermore, University College London’s recent ‘Confess’ study has proved that wearing a mask while singing in worship mitigates against 85-90% of droplets being transmitted, when added to social distancing and good ventilation means the risk of transmission while singing is very low indeed.

Why do we sing?

Singing is exhorted in the Scriptures (e.g., Ps 96:1-3, Ps 95:2, Col 3:16, Eph 5:19). The first point of our mission statement at Highfields is ‘worshipping our God’. When we gather to do this in song, we give glory to our Saviour, encourage other believers, and declare God’s praises to a watching world. We forwent this Christian duty and privilege for the first fifteen months of the pandemic to our immense loss. We believe that the enormous spiritual harm of not singing outweighs the minimal physical risk of doing so, and so until the Welsh Government expressly and explicitly requires us to cease from singing again, we aim to continue, with the following mitigations in place.

The below information explains how we intend to manage the risk, so far as is reasonably practicable:

Pre attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The elders shall advise that any persons who is symptomatic must not attend and shall ask any person who is symptomatic to leave - A risk assessment shall be completed prior to beginning congregational singing for the first time
Symptomatic persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No person who is symptomatic shall attend - Any person who develops symptoms during the event should leave the event immediately and follow the WG guidance and seek a test
Social distancing and number of persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The church shall be laid out in a socially distanced manner with attendees sat in household groups or bubbles, according to the online booking system. - Communication prior to arrival reminding attendees of mandatory social distancing - The number of persons shall not be increased outside of the numbers that can safely be accommodated according to social distancing requirements.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children are dropped at the entrance to their venues at the start and collected at the end of each worship service, meaning there is no crossover between venues. - The service leader will remind attendees to leave swiftly at the end of the service.
Face coverings and physical barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Face coverings are mandatory for over 11-year-olds within all indoor spaces, apart from exceptions. - All partaking in singing must wear a face mask, they should not be removed for congregational singing, except those leading the singing. - Those leading singing activities should be wearing face masks OR should be positioned behind a suitable shield or barrier, i.e. a Perspex screen.
Duration, frequency and volume of activity	<p>WG guidance indicates that the duration of activity should not be excessive and should be kept as minimal as practicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No extended times of sung worship shall be undertaken. - Normally this will keep to a maximum of three songs per service (exceptions being communion services, when there'll be a fourth song.) - Nothing additional to 'normal service' levels of sung worship - Volume should where possible be kept low – PA equipment and instruments should not be unduly loud as to direct the congregation to sing louder. - Attendees should be encouraged to maintain a 'sociable level' where possible
Ventilation and temperature	<p>Good ventilation introducing fresh, non-recirculated air is highly important:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where mechanical ventilation is not available, traditional methods must be utilised. - Windows and doors must be propped open to allow a positive flow of fresh air throughout the space - Service organisers and stewards must ensure windows are opened and remain open for the duration of the service. - It is acknowledged that keeping the temperature at or above 15 degrees C is preferable. We shall therefore seek to maintain that so far as is practicable.
Cleaning and appropriate timings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective cleaning should be undertaken pre and post services. - Services must be scheduled to ensure that there is appropriate time for effective cleansing to take place - There should be an expected increase in emitted particles and therefore resulted frequency of cleansing. - Cleaning regimes must not be compromised and leadership teams should maintain a watch to ensure compliance

Track and trace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A list of those whom attend the event shall be kept for track and trace purposes, the same as it is for any church service. - All data and processes for track and trace will be the same as for church services and other activities.
Worship performers and musicians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - See separate risk assessment for musicians and those leading singing - Main Covid risk assessment: Page 16 – Ind. 11.4

These measures shall be monitored by the church elders and appointed members with responsibility.

The church acknowledges that meeting in such a manner is a privilege, and we shall so far as possible, operate in a way that respects that.

We will review the activity to assess the implementation of the mitigations and measures and shall update the assessment as required.

Appendix 1:

Welsh Gov guidance – Updated 23rd June 2021 – Places of worship – singing chanting and the playing of instruments

<https://gov.wales/guidance-reopening-places-worship-coronavirus-html#section-44811>

Over the course of the pandemic a number of ‘super-spreading’ events have been associated with gatherings where a ‘vocal’ element plays a role in transmission. These include choir practise and recitals, concerts, weddings and worship. The risks of singing, chanting and playing of instruments are then significant. However, scientific advice has concluded these risks are manageable where the community transmission rate is low. For this reason, singing and the playing of instruments as part of worship practise can take place where a risk assessment and appropriate mitigations have been put in place. This would include both indoors and outdoors, as well as both performance and congregational singing. However, it is emphasised that extreme caution should be exercised, especially in relation to large groups indoors. (Emphasis added)

In conducting a risk assessment places of worship should consider the following:

- a. Infectious particles are present in exhaled breath, and these can vary in size. While the dynamics of the largest droplets are dominated by gravitational effects, the smaller aerosol particles form clouds that can remain afloat for long periods of time*
- b. Activities involving speaking, singing or exhaling breath forcibly result in greater aerosol or droplet generation. Generally, the emission of viral particles from individuals follows the series cough > singing > speaking > breathing.*
- c. The louder/more sustained the activity, the more aerosol or droplets are generated.*
- d. The amount and infectivity of virus emitted by an individual varies, depending on a number of factors including their age, size, stage in the infection cycle, A precautionary approach would treat all participants as having the potential to spread the virus.*
- e. Face-coverings must be worn indoors. This requirement will apply to all participants in congregational singing.*

The environmental factors that would specifically affect the risk to others of an infected individual spreading the virus are;

- a. Lack of social distancing.*
- b. Insufficient ventilation indoors.*
- c. Temperature (environments below 15°C have been identified as contributing to transmission potential and environmental survival.*
- d. Humidity (Droplet dispersal, environment survival and transmission shows a complex relationship with relative humidity. The evidence base is still not clear as different humidities appear to differentially affect survival and dispersal in the air and on surfaces [34-37](#), 65, 80, 81)*
- e. Whether the activity is undertaken indoors or outdoors. The evidence clearly suggests outdoors poses a significantly lower risk than indoors.*

Other factors have been identified as affecting risk of transmission and therefore should be considered as part of a risk assessment. These include;

- Duration of performance (longer duration equals higher risk)*
- Number of singers (more singers potentially equates to higher risk)*
- Audience behaviour (e.g. are the audience likely to sing along to a performance.)*
- Age of singers. Adolescents emit fewer aerosol particles during singing than what has been known so far for adults.*

- *Use of masks/visors/physical barriers may reduce spread although while there is good evidence around masks and visors, physical barriers are much less well studied. It is also important to emphasise that visors alone are not recommended, because while they may provide protection to the wearer, they do not protect others.*
- *Nasal blockage enhances viral discharge from the mouth*
- *Whether individuals sneeze in which large droplets can carry up to 4*
- *Times between services or ceremonies.*
- *Whether amplification is used to reduce singing intensity.*

There are a number of mitigations that can be put in place to reduce (though not eliminate) the risk of transmitting the virus.

- *As set out in national [self-isolation guidance](#) guidance, people with symptoms, have tested positive or who live with people who have symptoms or have tested positive or who have been advised by NHS Test Trace Protect that they are a contact of someone who has tested positive should self-isolate and not attend worship.*
- *Singing and playing of instruments should take place only in larger well-ventilated spaces, or outdoors.*
- *Face coverings should be worn where this is practicable. Singers' masks are available which are designed to hold the material away from the nose and mouth allowing normal vowel production and projection.*
- *Performance, congregational singing or rehearsal is for limited periods of time and should be at a reduced level of loudness, using microphones for amplification if available.*
- *Limited numbers of people sing together. Communal chanting with face coverings should be in a quiet voice.*
- *Singers/musicians are spaced at least 2 metres apart in all directions. This also applies with the members of congregations if singing is to take place.*
- *Audience, gatherings, observers and teachers are also spaced at least 2 metres from the singers or musicians.*
- *Orientation of performers avoids face-to-face positioning.*
- *Avoid sharing of written materials, microphones, sheet music, stands, hymn books etc.,*
- *Due consideration is also given to reducing transmission risk within the venue (hand hygiene, regular cleaning and disinfection of surfaces) and associated secondary activities (e.g. travelling to the venue, public toilets, socialising before, during and after the event). Avoid sharing of refreshments at any point before or after events.*
- *Lateral flow devices or PCR testing for officiants are used in advance, where a congregation is going to be present.*
- *Avoid singing in areas with high disease prevalence.*

Appendix 2:

Link to UCL Confess study

<https://www.confess-study.co.uk>

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=confess+study+ucl+

Appendix 3:

Technical Advisory Group: review advice on communal singing and chanting, including wind instruments and pipe organs

<https://gov.wales/technical-advisory-group-review-advice-communal-singing-and-chanting-including-wind-instruments-and>