

COVID-19 Risk Assessment Template for Church Activities

Introduction

This template has been prepared to assist churches as they plan their activities in accordance with their legal duties under Health and Safety legislation when regarding the risks posed by COVID-19. Although it is hoped that this template will be helpful, churches remain responsible for their own risk assessments and the FIEC and the author of this template can accept no liability for a risk assessment being conducted poorly using this template.

Government guidance and other resources

Churches should begin by consulting the applicable government guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship>

<https://gov.wales/places-worship-and-funerals-potential-reasonable-measures-action-card-coronavirus-html>

The FIEC has a number of other relevant resources which can be found at: <https://fiec.org.uk/resources/series/coronavirus>

Use of this template

This template is designed to support an assessment of risk specifically in relation to the spread of COVID-19, and should be used to supplement, rather than replace, existing risk assessments. It may also be necessary to review existing risk assessments, as changes to activities arising from controls identified here may render those assessments no longer applicable. This template includes a prompt to consider such matters.

In the template, it is proposed that hazards are grouped together under a set of hazard categories which cover different aspects of the COVID-19 risks that require management. You may or may not wish to use these categories - do so only if you find them helpful. The categories are not strictly mutually exclusive and so you may find a particular hazard or control can be discussed under more than one heading - feel free to pick and choose the most appropriate place to discuss each issue and do not duplicate discussions unnecessarily.

A set of checklists is provided with this template to act as an aide memoir for various activities, hazards and control measures you might consider. These checklists are intended to serve as a prompt and will not cover every eventuality - you also may not want to use all of them. Activities covered should not be limited to gatherings but should include routine work carried out by staff and volunteers using the premises.

How to fill in the template

This template is designed to assess risk for each activity separately. This is intended to encourage you to consider differences between activities that may require different controls. A blank template and an illustrative example are provided. To risk assess an activity, follow these steps:

- 1) Copy the blank template tab and rename it with the name of the activity in question. If the activity is similar to one you've already assessed, consider copying and editing the tab you filled in for the similar activity instead of starting from a blank template.
- 2) In the cells at the top of the page, enter the name of your church and the name and description of the activity, including any assumptions you are making as part of the risk assessment (these can be reviewed later to check if they are valid).
- 3) Fill in the date the assessment was conducted, and the date at which it should next be reviewed - all risk assessments should be treated as 'living documents' and reviewed periodically and when significant changes occur which could affect their content. You should review assessments for any new activities after the first one or two times they are carried out, as well as when the guidance changes.
- 4) Fill in the names of the assessor(s) and reviewer(s). It is always a good idea to have at least one additional person review a risk assessment.
- 5) In the table, start filling in entries for hazards you identify for each activity. Refer to the checklists for ideas to get you started (these can be discussed in separate line entries or lumped together).
- 6) You may wish to use the hazard categories in the first column to help identify hazards - feel free to add your own categories or remove some of the existing ones if you do not find them relevant, just as long as you cover all relevant risks. You may wish to leave blank rows between categories to make the table easier to read, and insert / delete rows as appropriate.
- 7) It may be helpful to add a reference number for each hazard identified to make it easier to refer to entries in the table later.
- 8) Provide a brief description of each hazard, who may be harmed and a list of the existing control measures in the appropriate columns.
- 9) Enter Y or N in the acceptable column to indicate if the risk is acceptable - this will require subjective judgement.
- 10) Identify any actions that are required, and assign each an 'action owner' to ensure it is carried out and the date by which it should be completed. In the right hand column, record when an action has been completed. There should be at least one action for any hazard with N in the acceptable column. You may wish to record multiple actions over multiple lines for clarity.
- 11) After all actions are completed, you may wish to update the risk assessment to show updates to existing controls.

Viewing and printing options

The template can be viewed on screen, saved as a PDF or printed. Note that Excel sometimes does not display the full content of a cell with a lot of text. This problem usually does not arise if viewing at 100% zoom, and should not carry over to printed or PDF versions. The full content of a cell can always be viewed by double-clicking in the cell. This template is not locked for editing, but be careful if you edit the layout or formatting. A number of Excel features are hidden in this template but can be made viewable again if desired.

Judging when a risk is acceptable

You should only put Y in the Acceptable column if you are satisfied that your legal duties do not require you to reduce the level of risk further, and if you are comfortable with the level of risk. If you put N, you should seek to identify actions that can get you to a point where you can put Y here - otherwise you may not be able to proceed with the activity in question.

Your legal duties will usually be to reduce risk *so far as is reasonably practicable*, which means there is nothing you can do to reduce the risk further without incurring a cost (in time, effort, inconvenience or money) that is *grossly disproportionate* to the reduction in risk achieved. Usually, regulatory bodies will accept that you have met your legal duties if you are fully compliant with all relevant guidance, but the only definitive test is in a court. Where hard legal requirements apply, ensure you are meeting these too. The FIEC provides further guidance at: <https://fiec.org.uk/resources/health-safety-after-lockdown>

The same principle of *reasonable practicability* needs to be applied after you have identified all reasonable controls, as you still need to justify running the activity instead of reducing risk further by not running it at all. For this, consider whether the 'cost' of not being able to run the activity at all is *grossly disproportionate* to the benefit of removing the remaining safety risk. Again, as a rule of thumb, if you can run the activity in line with the available guidance you should generally be alright, but the decision is subjective and yours to make.

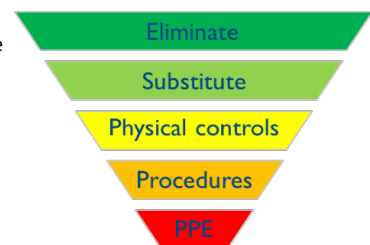
Many risk assessment approaches use a structured risk ranking method to determine whether risks are acceptable or not, taking into account the likelihood and severity of a risk event occurring. This template does not use such a method for several reasons:

- Explicitly estimating the likelihood and severity of various outcomes, imprecise at the best of times, is extremely difficult to do for COVID-19 because we are still learning new information about the disease and its spread. Therefore any ranking runs the risk of being arbitrary.
- Compliance with guidance is a much easier criterion to test when determining if the risk level is acceptable, and is traditionally accepted as the basis for legal defence in health and safety cases involving other 'strong guidance' from the government or regulatory bodies.
- Risk ranking approaches can lead to a temptation to 'engineer' the results to meet the requirements for acceptability.
- The pro-forma COVID-19 risk assessment template on the HSE website (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/risk-assessment-template-and-examples.htm>) does not use risk ranking.

If you would prefer to adopt a ranking approach, you will still be able to use this template - just use whatever method suits you to determine when to put a Y or N in the table and either capture your likelihood and severity scores in the existing columns or insert additional ones.

General considerations when choosing control measures

Safety controls should be considered working progressively down the "hierarchy of hazard control" (see right). This means thinking about ways to completely eliminate risk first, then finding ways of substituting a hazard with someone less hazardous, then considering physical controls, then procedures, and finally Personal Protective Equipment as a last resort. When choosing controls to manage COVID-19 risk, start by asking "can we remove this hazard" before asking "how do we manage this hazard" - for example, instead of managing the contact risk of handling collection bags, ask first if collections can be replaced completely with online giving or substituted with a static box that doesn't get passed around. Similarly, physical controls are better than procedures, which rely on human compliance to be effective - so anything less reliant on behaviour is better (e.g. physical cordoning is more effective than floor markings,



which are more effective than just asking people to maintain distance). PPE should be considered after other measures - not because it is ineffective (masks are useful) but because it should supplement other controls rather than replace them.

Another point to consider is what the government guidance is emphasising. Non-compliance with non-mandatory guidance may still mean failure to meet existing legal duties under health and safety legislation, so the guidance should not be viewed lightly. For example, recent government guidance continues to emphasise general hygiene measures, ventilation and encouraging of mask-wearing in crowded spaces.

Next steps and developing an action plan

Once you have completed a risk assessment, the next steps are to develop an action plan based on the listed actions in the assessment. Every action must be completed, the risk assessment updated accordingly and any relevant instructions about the controls disseminated clearly and in a timely manner to everyone responsible for their implementation. Once a control is established in the risk assessment it is vitally important it is followed - otherwise the risk assessment becomes a meaningless paper exercise that does not help in the management of safety risk. This would also create a serious legal liability as your own risk assessment could be used as evidence against you. Finally, you should agree a review date for every assessment - probably not too far in the future for new or significantly altered activities, so you can quickly adapt to lessons learned.



COVID-19 RISK ASSESSMENT

CHURCH NAME: EXEMPLAR BAPTIST CHURCH

Activity:	20s and 30s Group outdoor meet-up
Description (including assumptions made for risk assessment):	Members of 20s and 30s to meet outdoors at local park to meet, talk, play sports and eat picnic food.

Assessment date:	19/07/2021
New review due:	31/07/2021

Assessor(s):	John Smith
Reviewer(s):	Simon Peters

Hazard category	Ref.	Hazard description	Who might be harmed	Existing controls	Acceptable (Y/N)	Further actions			
						Description	Owner	Target date	Done
Infected person attending event	1	Person infected with COVID-19 attends event, risking infection of others	Attendees	Attendees reminded to follow government guidance to isolate if displaying COVID-19 symptoms Anyone taken ill with COVID-19 symptoms during event to be advised to follow government guidance	Y	Remind group that symptomatic individuals should follow government guidance	John Smith	31/07/2021	
Physical contact between persons	2	Transmission of COVID-19 through direct physical contact with an infected person	Attendees	Attendees reminded about physical contact and social distancing Attendees will judge their own risk tolerance but will be reminded to consider that others may be more cautious about contact than they are	Y	Disseminate finalised version of guidance to all attendees	John Smith	31/07/2021	
Airborne transmission	3	Transmission of COVID-19 through airborne particles between people	Attendees	Outdoor environment is well ventilated Sensible hygiene to be observed (covering mouth and nose when sneezing, using tissues and disposing immediately)	Y				

Hazard category	Ref.	Hazard description	Who might be harmed	Existing controls	Acceptable (Y/N)	Further actions			
						Description	Owner	Target date	Done
Surface transmission	4	Transmission of COVID-19 through shared objects	Attendees	Attendees advised to bring hand sanitiser and use after touching face / before eating / before and after handling shared items Sensible hygiene to be observed (covering mouth and nose when sneezing, using tissues and disposing immediately)	Y				
Transmission to the clinically vulnerable	5	Transmission of COVID-19 to those who are clinically vulnerable	Clinically vulnerable attendees	Group reminded to follow government guidance if vulnerable (up to individuals to choose how to manage their own risk)	Y	Remind group that vulnerable individuals should follow government guidance	John Smith	31/07/2021	
						Check if any volunteers helping run event are vulnerable and discuss as appropriate	John Smith	31/07/2021	
Wider outbreak in community	6	COVID-19 case at event leads to potential wider outbreak in the community	Attendees and wider community	List of attendees kept for 21 days to support contact tracing if required	Y				

Checklists for Activities, Hazards and Controls

Activities

Regular services

Morning gatherings
Evening gatherings
Gatherings with / without children

Special services

Weddings (see government guidance on weddings)
Funerals (see government guidance on funerals)
Baptisms (note guidance on use of water in ceremonies)

Fellowship and activity group gatherings

Indoor gatherings
Outdoor gatherings
Prayer groups
House / home groups
Outreach activities

Routine staff, volunteer and contractor activity on the premises

Work in an office environment or equivalent
Cleaning and maintenance
Building work
Meetings

Children and youth activity

Youth groups
Children's teaching (see government and CofE guidance on out-of-school settings)
Parent and toddler groups

Hazards

Infected person attending event

Infected person attends event
Person in same household as infected person attends event
Person recently exposed to infected person attends event
Person displays COVID-19 symptoms during event
High local infection rate

Physical contact between persons

Handshaking and hugging
Accidental physical contact

Airborne transmission

People in close proximity
Singing / corporate reading / corporate prayer
Speaker projecting from the front
Musicians - vocalists and woodwinds / brass
Conversations - people speaking to and facing each other
Uncontained coughing and sneezing

Surface transmission

High contact surfaces (e.g. door handles, handrails, light switches)
Toilet facilities
Catering facilities and foodstuffs
Communion
Shared items (e.g. Bibles, service sheets)
Handling of personal items (e.g. coats)
Cash collections
Furniture (e.g. desks, tables, lecterns)
Handling of equipment (e.g. AV, computers, music)

Transmission to the clinically vulnerable

Clinically vulnerable person attends event
Visit to or items sent to clinically vulnerable person at home

Wider outbreak in community

Transmission at church event leads to wider spread of COVID-19 in local area
Local outbreak raises base level of exposure risk at all events

Other safety hazards arising from COVID-19 control measures

Compromised fire safety from wedging doors
Handrails not used leading to trips and falls
Slip hazards from cleaning substances

Health and safety issues arising from cleaning (e.g. chemical safety)

Safety issues arising from reduced use of premises

Hygiene (e.g. festering rubbish, dust levels, toilet regurgitation)
Maintenance (e.g. water ingress, deterioration of fixtures and fittings)
Legionella from stagnant water in pipes
Overdue inspections on firefighting equipment and alarm tests
Overdue inspections of gas and electricity systems and portable appliances
Overdue checks for legionella, lead and asbestos
Overdue statutory inspections on stairlifts
COVID-19 measures render content of other risk assessments out of date
Overdue risk assessment reviews
New activities requiring risk assessment (e.g. outdoor events)
Adjustments to entrances / exists / queues may affect physical accessibility

Operational issues

Key personnel become unavailable due to need to self-isolate
Outbreak within the church forces cessation of resumed activities
Local outbreak necessitates cessation of resumed activities

Controls

Communications

Preparation of action plan outlining control measures
Dissemination of action plans / risk assessments to key personnel / leadership
Communications to members - email, start of service etc.
Signage on premises relaying key hygiene and distancing messages
Guidance for / liaison with contractors coming on site

Travel to service

Encourage attendees to follow guidance
Advance booking for some or all events

Limitation of general exposure risk

Shorter services

Limitation of numbers

Determination of safe venue capacity in all relevant rooms
Pre-booking arrangements
Determining who can attend

Crowd management

Social distancing where appropriate
Discourage physical contact (e.g. handshaking, hugging)
Management of entry and exit of premises
One-way systems
Floor markings
Areas designated out of bounds
Staggered arrivals / departures (people told to go to / remain in seating)
Placement of seating
Identify fixed locations where key personnel must sit (e.g. computer desks)
Allocation of seating
Cordoning off seating
Encouraging people not to linger indoors and provision of online / outdoor alternatives
Queueing for shared facilities (e.g. toilets)
Limitation of toilet use (e.g. one person at a time regardless of no. of cubicles)
Mingling before and after services to be discouraged inside building

Cleaning

Pre- and post-service cleaning requirements
Enhanced cleaning routines for certain areas e.g. toilets
Volunteer engagement and rostering
Targeting of shared surfaces - desks, handrails, light switches, door handles
Availability of surface cleaner / wipes
72 hour isolation of surfaces / objects which cannot be cleaned
Encourage attendees to clean toilets / sinks / door handles after themselves
Providing guidance / signage on cleaning toilets
Building not used for 72 hours as alternative to 'deep clean'
Waste handling procedures - all waste assumed contaminated

Personal hygiene

Provision of hand sanitiser at entries / exits / shared surfaces
Encouraging covering of mouth and nose when coughing / sneezing
Encouraging hand hygiene and avoiding touching the face
Attendees encouraged to take their waste away with them

Minimising surface contact