

*Diocese of Northampton –
Liturgy Commission and Finance Office – July 2021
Issued with the authority of Bishop David for use until further notice*

17. STEP 4 GUIDANCE – for parishes – July 2021

This is a version of the Covid-19 Route Map: Step 4 Guidance from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales amended to reflect the current circumstances across our Diocese. This replaces all previous guidance except for **8B Holy communion to the Sick**

Insurers expect all parishes within the Diocese to adopt the local Diocesan recommendations as a minimum as a condition of their ongoing insurance cover. This is also an important element of the legal duties placed on Diocesan Trustees as part of their Health and Safety obligations.

This guidance sets out a minimum level of mitigations which should apply across our Diocese and its parishes but clearly these may be enhanced where local risk assessments suggest that is appropriate.

1. Guiding Principle

- The guiding general principle is to continue to provide and be seen to provide safe environments in our places of worship and their ancillary buildings recognising the continuing presence of the virus in the population.
- We need to adopt an attitude of care for people who wish to attend mass and build confidence across our communities that the church is a safe place to enter and worship.
- This necessitates maintaining a cautious approach to the relaxation of restrictions irrespective of the position under the law.
- It is important to acknowledge that even with high levels of vaccination we have many among our communities who for various reasons remain more vulnerable to or concerned about possible infection and as a community we must act in a way that is sensitive to such reservations.

2. Other Principles

i. Prevailing Local Conditions

- We must always consider the prevailing local conditions for the virus.
- Local parishes must maintain an awareness of the rates at which people are being vaccinated in the locality, the prevalence of new variants of the virus, the local rates of hospital admissions and any local public health advice.

ii. Being well prepared

- hand sanitiser at entrances and exits
- face coverings to be the norm for those in church
- general cleaning to a good standard, using commonly available cleaning fluids and detergents.

iii. Social Distancing and Capacity of Churches

- social distancing is an important feature of public confidence and should be encouraged
- where local prevalence of the virus and public confidence suggest we can increase church capacity, we can do so subject to a written risk assessment supporting the local position
- in such circumstances consider producing cards ‘Please leave a space’ for individuals to use either side of them
- members of the congregation should be seated and risk assessed capacities should reflect this
- in larger churches it may be possible to designate an area of the church where there will be set places, socially distant from each other,
- it may also be possible to offer one weekend mass with full social distancing
- booking systems should continue wherever there is a concern that risk assessed capacity levels may be exceeded

iv. Congregational Singing

- indoor congregational singing is legally permitted from 19 July.
- the use of cantor groups and other choirs is now permitted.
- face coverings should be used where there is any congregational singing
- phase singing in gently with shorter pieces [Alleluia, Sanctus. Memorial Acclamation, Amen, Agnus Dei] rather than longer pieces [Gloria, Creed, hymns/songs].

3. Our Worship and Liturgy

i. Opening of Churches

- churches can be left open daily, with QR codes or other forms of test, track and trace arrangements visibly in place.
- hand sanitiser should be prominently available for people to use.

ii. Holy Water stoups must not be filled.

- Holy Water can be made available either via
 - individual bottles already filled and blessed [bottles easily available eg ampulla.co.uk]
 - in a closed container which has a tap for people to fill their bottles.
 - Open containers may not be used.

iii. Test, Track and Trace

- to be observed as long as it is in operation
- booking systems should continue wherever there is a concern that risk assessed capacity levels may be exceeded

iv. Movement of people

- current systems that help avoid close contact such as one way systems (especially for the Communion Procession) should be encouraged
- stewards should continue to offer their valuable ministry of welcome and support, whilst also reminding the congregation of the local mitigations in place which will help people returning to mass feel more secure.

A. Mass

- all usual ministers for the celebration of Mass : servers, cantors, readers, stewards, welcomers and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.
- if there is a procession of Gifts, it should consist of only the bread and wine which must be in covered containers.
- collections : baskets at the door and contactless forms are recommended.
- Sign of Peace – a simple gesture such as a bow or nod to others is possible, but no physical contact.
- Holy Communion to be administered under one kind only
- Ministers of the Eucharist must sanitise their hands beforehand and afterwards, and wear a face covering whilst distributing.
- communion should be distributed in the hand.
- anyone wishing to receive communion on the tongue should come last, and the minister will need to sanitise between each such communicant.
- it is important that any reserved Blessed Sacrament be renewed at least every two weeks in the current situation. [cf Canon 939]
- Concelebration is permitted. Concelebrants receive only by intinction in a separate chalice to that of the principal concelebrant.

B. Celebration of Baptism

- no legal restrictions on numbers attending however to be limited to locally risk assessed capacity
- only one child (or children in the same family) should be baptised in a single celebration, within or without Mass
- use a cotton wool bud or if you use the thumb then clean and sanitise before and after each application. [Oil of Catechumens, Sacred Chrism]
- there is no physical touching at the signation with the cross or at the Ephphatha prayer

C. Celebration of Confirmation

- no legal restrictions on numbers attending however to be limited to locally risk assessed capacity
- Laying on of Hands: celebrant[s] extends his hands over the *confirmandi* without any physical contact.
- the Sign of Peace is likewise without any physical contact.

D. Celebration of the Sacrament of the Sick

- Covid Liturgy Note 8B Holy Communion to the Sick Protocol continues to apply.
- hospital or care home : the institution will determine its protocol for PPE etc
- there should be no physical contact at the Laying on of Hands or the Sign of Peace
- use a cotton wool bud to anoint with the Oil of the Sick

E. Home Visits/ Communion to the Sick

- Covid Liturgy document 8B Holy Communion to the Sick continues to apply

F. Celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation

- if possible celebrate the sacrament in larger well ventilated spaces or outdoors rather than a confessional, observing social distance, and wearing face coverings.
- in a confessional a physical barrier, such as a Perspex sheet or heavy curtain, should cover the grille between the confessor and the penitent.
- good ventilation on both sides of a confessional is required.
- confessional boxes should be cleaned after each period of confessions and well aired

G. Celebration of Marriage

- no legal restrictions on numbers attending however to be limited to locally risk assessed capacity
- Nuptial Mass will follow the guidance for Mass in A above
- Marriage Service outside of Mass should apply the usual norms
- Track and Trace details must be obtained in advance for main wedding party

H. Celebration of Funerals

- no legal restrictions on numbers attending however to be limited to locally risk assessed capacity
- should there be any concerns that the risk assessed capacity will be exceeded then consideration should be given to specific restrictions being imposed or to a booking arrangement being implemented
- Requiem Mass will follow the guidance for Mass in A above
- Funeral Service outside of Mass should apply the usual norms.
- Track and Trace details must be obtained in advance for main mourners
- good collaboration with Funeral Directors over the local conditions and regulations regarding the place of committal is important
- in the present circumstances receiving the body overnight is not recommended

I. Celebration of Ordination

- no legal restrictions on numbers attending however to be limited to locally risk assessed capacity
- the Bishop and those who lay hands on the one to be ordained should sanitise their hands before and after the action. The anointing should be by the Bishop.
- care should be observed to minimise the number of people handling the symbols of ministry which are given and received as part of the rite.
- the Sign of Peace should be a gesture without touching.

4. Other Matters

i. Employment

- despite the Government removing much of the legal regulation/guidance around how to keep employees and the public safe, the Diocese has a legal duty to ensure clergy, employees and others are reasonably safe (from CV-19 as well as from other risks) when attending our premises and our insurers require us to act as a reasonably prudent insured by assessing the risks, identifying appropriate mitigations and ensuring they are implemented.
- the Government is encouraging employers to exercise caution given CV-19 is still in circulation and, in fact, rates in most areas are rising

www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do#england-moves-to-step-4-from-19-july

- CV-19 risk assessments must be revisited and updated where necessary as a result of England moving to Step 4 from 19th July 21.
- it is important that we should keep all current CV-19 mitigations in place such as screens where fitted, sanitiser, cleaning routines (particularly focussed on surfaces people touch regularly), ventilation and social distancing where appropriate. In addition staff are encouraged to test twice weekly for coronavirus using the lateral flow tests that are available for free at

www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing/regular-rapid-coronavirus-tests-if-you-do-not-have-symptoms/

- the main legal restrictions which remain from 19th July 2021 relate to your obligations in the event of developing symptoms of CV-19, test positive or if you are identified as a close contact of someone testing positive.
 - if you develop CV-19 symptoms you must self-isolate immediately and get a PCR test, even if your symptoms are mild. You should self-isolate at home while you book the test and wait for the results. You must self-isolate if you test positive. Your isolation period includes the day your symptoms started (or the day your test was taken if you do not have symptoms), and the next 10 full days.
 - you must also self-isolate if you are told to do so by NHS Test and Trace, for example if you have come into contact with someone who has tested positive.

ii Social Activities

- parish social activities can be resumed from 19th July.
- it is essential that a risk assessment for both the activity and the space is completed for the gathering.
- government guidance for the use of multi-purpose facilities can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities

iii Catechetical Groups/Formation Groups/Prayer Groups

- it is recommended that a blended mode of catechesis takes place moving forward, with a combination of both in-person meetings for those involved as well as online sessions.
- the requirements for covid security should be determined locally, following any Government guidance that becomes available and following the spirit of the principles set out above

iv Visiting Presbyteries/Parish Offices etc

- when receiving visitors at presbyteries and/or parish offices, due consideration should be given to the fact that such venues are often both places of work and residential environments
- in addition to any standing mitigations which may be in place, the CV-19 concerns of those visiting and those being visited should be considered in line with the guiding principle above and if necessary mitigations increased accordingly
- as a minimum hand sanitiser should be readily available

Iv Non-Church Buildings

- CIS Ltd has provided a set of guidance for the safe use of parish halls and other ancillary spaces for church premises which sets out the obligations on Church authorities, groups and hirers. The guidance and its associated template documents have been provided along with this guidance

Appendix 1

Recommended Key Mitigating Actions against Virus Transmission in Churches which should continue post 19th July 2021

1. Sanitising hands on entry to churches and before liturgies as in current church guidance reduces risk.
2. Ensuring people wear face coverings properly will reduce aerosol or droplet spread.
3. Ventilating buildings well (especially during and between services) remains important.
4. Maintaining a good general standard of routine cleaning using usual cleaning detergents is sufficient for regular use:
 - a) Cleaning high frequency touch points in buildings after each act of worship.
 - b) Thoroughly cleaning the church once a week.
5. Clearing spillages of body fluids (faeces, blood, vomit etc) should always follow specific higher standards not just because of SARS-CoV-2 but because of other pathogens. This guidance is reproduced in Appendix 2, again for ease of reference. If your own cleaners have a specific protocol in existence for body fluid spillages, then follow that.
6. If someone has tested positive for Covid-19 who has used your building in the last 24 hours, and you are aware of this, then you should clean thoroughly using ordinary detergents. That does not mean a “deep clean”, which is not necessary. See detailed guidance at www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings
7. The risk of surface contamination while generally low is higher where there is long exposure time in the building, ventilation is poor, there is a high throughput of people, and where there is greater aerosol generation. Mitigating against these reduces risk.

Appendix 2

Cleaning spillages of body fluids in all situations

- Guidance has been in place for some time on cleaning spillages of bodily fluids to prevent spread of pathogens such as Hepatitis, E Coli, Norovirus and so on. You may already have guidance in place for this from your health and safety adviser or insurer, in which case this should be followed.
- Body fluid spillage kits are strongly advisable, especially those which have granules which can absorb fluids and prevent splashes on those cleaning the spillage or others. They provide materials and instructions for safe cleaning and disposal and can be obtained from good cleaning suppliers. Following manufacturer's instructions on these is important because the content of kits differ. Such kits also contain cleaning fluids which are less likely to cause harm to surfaces than making up solutions of hypochlorite bleach.
- Spillages of body fluids such as blood, sputum, vomit, faeces or urine can present an infection risk for a variety of infections and should be cleaned up immediately. Cleaners should treat every spillage of body fluids or body waste as potentially infectious.
- Specific guidance applies from government to play groups for children.
- Cleaners should wear protective gloves and aprons and use disposable wipes wherever possible. Eye protection is advised if there is risk of splashing.
- For a spillage of blood, a 10,000ppm hypochlorite solution (1:10 chlorine releasing eg bleach to water) should be used. Staff should follow the procedure below. Even better is to use a body fluid disposal kit which has granules in it which absorb and solidify the spillage.
 1. Put on disposable gloves and apron (protective goggles should be used if there is danger of splashing) and ensure that the area of the spillage is well ventilated and clear of service users, other staff and visitors.
 2. If using a hypochlorite solution, prepare it in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions — if using granules apply directly to the spill.
 3. Cover the spillage with paper towels.
 4. Carefully wipe up the spillage with more towels soaked in hypochlorite.
 5. Dispose of the waste in a clinical waste bag.
 6. Wash hands in soap and water.
- Solid or semi-solid matter (eg faeces) in the spillage should be removed first as this can inhibit the disinfectant.

Note:

Chlorine releasing disinfectants such as hypochlorite should never be used directly on urine spills as this can release irritant chlorine gas. Urine should be cleaned up using towels and the area cleaned with detergent before applying disinfectant.

Appendix 3

Catholic Insurance Services (CIS) Advice on Safe Operation of Ancillary Church Buildings

- Please see separate documents setting out the current advice from the CIS regarding the opening and operation of ancillary church buildings