

You will be aware of the recent press and updated Government Guidance to help slow the arrival and spread of the Omicron variant. That advice mainly relates to measures associated with arrivals into the country but it also highlights the importance of vaccination.

It is now a legal requirement to wear face coverings in shops and on public transport. In addition those who have come into contact with an individual who may have been infected with the Omicron variant will need to self-isolate. This will apply even if you are fully-vaccinated or aged 18 or under.

These temporary measures will be reviewed in 3 weeks' time.

Specific Government CV-19 guidance in relation to places of worship has not changed since 16<sup>th</sup> June 21 and can be found at:-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july#history>

Similarly the guidance from CBCEW has not been updated.

Our most recent guidance was based on Government and CBCEW advice together with the following principles:-

- providing safe places to worship and congregate,
- building confidence across our communities
- being respectful of those who are more vulnerable within our communities
- maintaining awareness of the prevailing infection and hospitalisation rates across our communities and reacting appropriately should they change

Our guidance recommended the following sensible mitigations:-

- Holy Water stoups must not be filled.
- Track and Trace- to be maintained as long as it is in operation
- Booking systems to continue wherever there is a concern that risk assessed capacity levels may be exceeded
- 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.
- Social distancing to be encouraged
- Providing cards "Please leave a space' for individuals to use either side of them should they wish
- Designating area of the church where there will be greater social distancing if possible,
- Using face coverings where there is any congregational singing
- Maintaining adequate ventilation within our churches to minimise the opportunity for the virus to spread

- Assessing your specific circumstances and perhaps engaging the congregation on how best to proceed

Having reviewed these principles and mitigations we feel that they remain balanced and sensible, particularly in light of the arrival of the new variant and its uncertain impact.

Going forward as we learn to live with CV-19 the emphasis will be on having **appropriate risk assessments** in place which are consistent with our principles and which give due consideration to the mitigations that are recommended above and perhaps most importantly are regularly reviewed. Such reviews should be documented. In the event that we may need to evidence/defend our thinking and practices, the objective robustness of our risk assessments will be key.

Kind regards

The Diocese of Northampton  
1<sup>st</sup> December 2021