

COVID 19 Mission and Ministry with Children, Young People & Families in a Church Setting

Issue Date	Version	Issued by
21 st July 2020	1.1	The Diocesan Children and Youth Advisers Network
Update from version 1.0: Government guidance issued on the 17 th July on face coverings in enclosed spaces strongly encourages their use. The additional italicized paragraph has been introduced below to reflect this.		

This document has been prepared with information available by the issue date. It will be kept under review and updated as the situation develops, with each update issued as a new version.

This document contains background material, frequently asked questions and a flow chart at the end to help navigate the guidance.

Please note Government [guidance](#) strongly encourages people to wear a face covering in enclosed public spaces where physical distancing may be difficult and where you come into contact with people you do not normally meet. This includes places of worship and most other indoor venues such as church or community halls. Children under 11 years of age do not need to wear a face covering.

Introduction

As lockdown measures start to ease, we are working to understand what a safe return to face to face mission and ministry with children, young people and families may look like, as the readiness levels changes in your area.

It is important to remember to stay alert to changes in guidance as restrictions may continue to ease or be re-enforced should there be a local outbreak of coronavirus. Key reference points for this guidance are the [Church of England website](#), for those working with young children the [Early Years Alliance website](#) and for those working with 8-25 year olds, the [National Youth Agency's website](#). This document has chosen to quote guidance that follows both government guidelines and best safeguarding practice for children and youth work in a church setting. The hyperlinks provided within this document will guide you to the source of the information.

Children's Activities

The National Youth Agency guidance has been produced in collaboration with Public Health England and the Health and Safety Executive. It provides regular updates, determining the COVID-readiness level for the youth sector in England, specifying permitted group sizes, as well as a range of other control measures referenced below. Users should ensure they are referring to the most up to date document, which can be found on the www.nya.org.uk website.

As of 7th July, the Church of England website states that children's activities being organised by the place of worship alongside or within a service or at other times during the week should follow principles in the general guidance from the [Department for Education on Out of School Settings](#).

In outline, these recommend that, to reduce the risk of transmission, children and young people who attend should be kept in small, consistent groups, and of no more than fifteen, including children and

leaders. Groups should continue to operate the recommended safeguarding adult to child ratios which vary depending on the ages of the children in the group. Children should be assigned to a particular class or group and should then stay in those consistent groups for future sessions and avoid mixing with other groups in your setting.

All activities should still comply with current safeguarding guidance as set out in the [Parish Safeguarding Handbook](#).

Where possible, those attending should practise physical distancing in line with the government's current guidance. As the risk of transmission is considerably lower outdoors, providers who normally run sessions indoors should consider whether they are able to do so safely outside on their premises.

All children and youth activities should also comply with the government [COVID-19: Guidance for the safe use of places of worship during pandemic 4 July 2020](#) which gives guidance on the use of food, singing and musical instruments. There are some discrepancies between government advice on group sizes depending on whether you are in a worship setting (2 households can interact physically distanced) or a children and youth group setting (up to fifteen in a physically distanced group including leaders). **Each church will need to assess the risk in their own context and make a clear plan of how to manage expectations, particularly if children and young people spend time in both the main worship service and separate groups.**

Reopening Children and Youth Provision

Once the guidance has been read in full, we recommend that churches take their time to reopen their children and youth provision only after consultation and consent from volunteers, parents, and young people. In addition, each church needs to complete regular risk assessments taking into consideration what is possible in their [buildings](#) and [spaces](#), particularly if [different groups share the same facility](#). It is important to remember that there is no 'one size fits all' that captures all nuanced types of practice, therefore, **this document should be used as a guide to inform local decision making**. Diocesan children, youth & family ministry advisors are available to help with any troubleshooting for your context. Action plan and risk assessment templates for youth groups, plus 5 steps to safer working posters can be found <https://youthworksupport.co.uk/>

Churches need to make sure that their plans for restarting face-to-face meetings and activities are developed so that volunteers, children and young people at all times:

- Comply with physical distancing requirements (determined by the government).
- Ensure hygiene levels are maintained, particularly in the areas of hand washing, use of toilet facilities and surface and equipment cleaning.
- Safely manage any risk to volunteers, young people and the wider community, including a reduction in group sizes where necessary.
- Make sure vulnerable young people and adults can be effectively safeguarded, both in relation to COVID- 19, as well as other risk factors.
- Volunteers, parents, children and young people all clearly understand what adjustments need to be made to ensure everyone's safety, and have had a chance to inform them.
- Once the planning and consultation phase is complete, each church can make the decision when to resume face-to-face meetings and activities, whilst remaining within the government guidelines. We anticipate a phased return and encourage churches to consider a mixed mode of digital and gathered meetings.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Q. Do I have to re-open my children and youth activities?

A. No. It's important to only start back when you have planned, prepared your building, consulted your families, young people and volunteers and made a fresh [risk assessment](#), which is approved by the PCC.

Working with Early Years

2. Q. Can my church stay and play baby and toddler club meet?

A. Not yet. As of 6 July, the following advice was published by the [Early Years Alliance](#):

As it stands, the Department for Education has confirmed to the Alliance that this is not possible, and that parents or carers should not be allowed into settings unless this is essential.

However, in light of current plans to lift a number of existing coronavirus restrictions, we are currently seeking clarification from the Department on whether this guidance is set to change in the near future. As soon as we have more information on this, we will provide an update.

3. Q. Can my Church Community Centre re-open?

A. From 4 July, community facilities can also open for the provision of other services for children and young people, however they should ensure that people from different households can socially distance from anyone they do not live with or who is not in their support bubble, and should not facilitate indoor sports or fitness activity until after 25 July.

People meeting in a club or group context at a community centre should be encouraged to physically distance from anyone they do not live with or who is not in their support bubble. In general, people are being advised to only:

- meet indoors in groups of up to 2 households
- meet outdoors in a group of no more than 2 households (including your support bubble) or in a group of up to 6 people from different households."

<https://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>

Churches that host formal childcare and educational settings in their community centres should refer to the relevant Early Years and childcare [government guidance](#). Please note the current advice for [Early Years Settings is](#) to reduce face-to-face contact with and between parents and carers.

Reduce contact between parents and carers when dropping off and picking up their children, for example by limiting drop off and pick up to one parent or carer per family and staggering timings. **Do**

not allow parents or carers into the setting unless this is essential and arrange for children to be collected at the door if this is possible.

4. Q. Can my church host a crèche during a church service?

A. Not yet. For the time being, children of all ages are expected to remain with their families when gathering as a congregation to worship.

Government guidance on young people and children attending places of worship states:

- Young children should be supervised by the parent or guardian. They should wash hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with running water and soap and dry them thoroughly or use hand sanitiser ensuring that all parts of the hands are covered. Places of worship can help remind children and young people, and their parents and guardians, of the important actions they should take during the COVID-19 outbreak to help prevent the spread of the virus. Posters on general hand hygiene can be found on the [eBug website](#).
- Any shared facilities for children, such as play corners, soft furnishings, soft toys and toys that are hard to clean, should be removed and/or put out of use.

Families are encouraged to bring their own resource pack that might aid their young children to worship within the main congregation. Alternatively, churches can provide play boxes **instead** of pew bags but they must contain items that can be easily cleaned. The boxes should be deposited in a separate area after use and follow the [Church of England Worship Guidance](#) on sharing:

In circumstances where worshippers cannot bring their own books, places of worship should keep a selection of clean books for individuals to use. Clean books should be quarantined for 48 hours since their previous use and should be quarantined for 48 hours again after use. Items which cannot be easily cleaned should also be subject to the 48-hour quarantine after use.

Working with Primary School Age Children

5. Q. Can my Church host a Holiday Club or Junior Church activities?

A. These are allowed to meet after the end of the Summer School term, and come under the Department of Education guidance for [Out Of School Settings](#):

Providers who run community activities, holiday clubs, after-school clubs, tuition and other out-of-school provision for children will be able to operate over the summer holiday with safety measures in place. Adjustments to the current measures for these providers are part of Step 3 of the government's recovery strategy (from 4 July). Children will be able to attend settings such as tuition and learning centres, extracurricular clubs (such as ballet classes, gymnastics training, football coaching), uniformed youth organisations (such as Scouts and Guides), supplementary schools, private language schools and religious settings offering education (for example madrassahs, yeshivas, and Sunday schools).

These guidelines are set to reduce rates of infection so please consider carefully if your group will be able to fulfil the requirements and recommendations:

This means that you should consider sending your child to the **same setting consistently**, in order to prevent your child from mixing with multiple different groups of children.

You are also advised to choose settings that are **local to you**. Where possible, parents, carers and children are encouraged to walk or cycle to the setting or to use a private vehicle. If you are using a private vehicle to take your child to an activity, you should avoid using it to take other children from outside your household to the same activity even if they are in the same small, consistent group. You are also encouraged to avoid using public transport to get to activities, particularly during peak times.

The scientific evidence suggests that there is a moderate to high degree of confidence that the susceptibility to clinical disease of younger children (up to age 11 to 13) is lower than for adults. However, it remains important that protective measures as outlined in this guidance are put in place to help reduce the risk of transmission.

6. Q. What activities can I do indoors?

A. If you choose to run sessions indoors there is a higher risk of transmission. **You should maintain physical distancing and consider the risks accordingly.**

OOSS will have different risks depending on the type of activity or provision they offer. If your provision is classroom-based, you should find the Department for Education's [Planning guide for primary schools](#) or [Guidance for secondary school provision](#) helpful in determining how to carry out a risk assessment, depending on the age of the children you cater for.

Our interpretation of the guidance suggests activities you can do:

- Use digital media.
- Share stories such as Bible stories and personal testimonies, discussion.
- Pray.
- Non-contact indoor games e.g. *Simon says*.
- Craft activities. **Sharing of equipment is not advised**, particularly of malleable materials e.g. playdough. Resources for activities e.g. painting, sticking, cutting, small world play, indoor and outdoor constructions should be washed before use. An alternative to providing equipment is to encourage children to bring a pack with their own equipment, Bible and snack.

Hands should be washed before and after use.

Singing, shouting-out, blowing instruments and sharing of food is **not** permitted yet.

Indoor gyms can reopen from 25 July and some indoor sports may be possible provided activities are kept short, social distancing is adhered to and there is adequate ventilation. Government guidance can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/providers-of-grassroots-sport-and-gym-leisure-facilities>

7. Q. Can we sing and play blown instruments indoors?

8. Q. Can our choir rehearse and perform indoors?

A (7&8). Not yet. New guidance for what is possible from September will be issued by the government soon. Currently [Church of England guidance](#) states:

- People should avoid singing, shouting, raising voices and/or playing music at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult or that may encourage shouting. This is because of the potential for increased risk of transmission from aerosol and droplets.
- Activities such as singing, chanting, shouting and/or playing of instruments that are blown into should be specifically avoided in worship or devotions and in rehearsals. This is because there is a possible additional risk of transmission in environments where individuals are singing or chanting as a group, and this applies even if social distancing is being observed or face coverings are used.
- Where essential to an act of worship, one individual only should be permitted to sing or chant, and the use of plexi-glass screens should be considered to protect worshippers from them, as this will further prevent transmission and the screen can be easily cleaned.
- Where music plays a big part in worship, and recordings are available, we suggest you consider using these as an alternative to live singing. You might like to consider using Makaton or BSL to sign to worship songs as an alternative to singing.
- You are advised only to play musical instruments that are not blown into. Organs can be played for faith practices, as well as general maintenance, but should be cleaned thoroughly before and after use.

9. Q. Can we serve food as part of our children and youth work?

A. Not yet. The [Church of England guidance](#) suggests where food or drink ('consumables') are essential to the act of worship, they can be used, however the sharing of food should be avoided, as should the use of communal vessels.

However, you can encourage children and young people to bring their own snack and water bottle to your activity group, although sharing is not allowed.

10. Q. What activities can I do outdoors?

A. As the risk of transmission is lower outdoors, activities should take place outdoors as often as possible and when it is safe to do so. Equipment should be regularly dis-infected and social distancing should be maintained.

Please refer to the government [Guidance on the phased return of outdoor sport and recreation](#).

Outdoor playgrounds are permitted to open where a risk assessment shows that it is safe to do so, see relevant government guidance. Particular attention should be paid to cleaning frequently touched surfaces by children and those that are at child height.

11. Q. What size group can I have? How many groups can I have?

A. To reduce the risk of transmission, children and young people who attend should be kept in small, consistent groups, and of **no more than fifteen, including children and leaders**. Groups should continue to operate the recommended safeguarding adult to child ratios which vary depending on the ages of children in the group. Children should be assigned to a particular class or group and should then stay in those consistent groups for future sessions and avoid mixing with other groups in your setting. Those attending out-of-school settings should practise social distancing in line with the [government out of school setting guidance](#):

Key Measures are:

- keep a register of both children and adults within each group, so that should someone become unwell with COVID-19 during or after a session, details can be given to NHS Test and Trace, these should be kept for a minimum of 21 days.
- minimise contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring those who have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms do not attend their setting. This also applies if a member of their family has symptoms or if they have been advised by NHS Test & Trace as ‘a close contact’ to isolate at home.
- encourage staff and children attending to clean their hands more often than usual, including before and after activities and before and after using toilet/washroom facilities.
- ensure good respiratory hygiene by promoting the ‘catch it, bin it, kill it’ approach.
- clean frequently touched surfaces more often than usual using standard products, such as detergent or bleach. If you are in a historic church setting you should consult the guidance on cleaning available [here](#).
- Increase frequency of cleaning of toilets and washrooms.
- minimise contact and mixing between groups of children by altering the environment to allow for social distancing between children and keeping children in small consistent groups.

If you are working with more than one group of fifteen, we recommend that you follow [NYA section 4.0 Covid-19 secure venue group size guidance](#), which meets the government requirement for COVID Secure. This would permit multiple groups (of 15 people each) in venues that are large enough **and** have put in place all the measures outlined in their guidance.

Key measures include:

- Groups should not join with other groups. Individuals should remain in their group allocated for that day, and stay consistent for future sessions.
- As the risk of transmission is lower outdoors, activities should take place outdoors as often as possible and when it is safe to do so.
- Different groups should ideally enter and exit through different doors – when sessions begin, during breaks and when leaving the site. If not possible, then stagger arrival and departure times where possible.
- Organisers should encourage young people to arrive only with members of their group and to avoid mingling before and after sessions. We understand that organisers have limited control in this regard, but we encourage you to brief young people and to educate them on social distancing requirements.
- Shared spaces such as sports halls, kitchens, etc. must be deep cleaned thoroughly between use if different groups are to use them on the same day (sequentially). Spaces should not be used at the same time by more than one group.

- Enhanced regular cleaning of commonly used surfaces, such as equipment and door handles, should be ensured.
- It is not necessary for each group to use separate toilets; however, efforts should be made to limit the numbers of users at a given time. Use of different toilets for each group is ideal. Please consider safeguarding concerns when planning and preparing your risk assessments.

Working with Young People

The [National Youth Agency](#) amber level came into place from 4 July in England, except in Leicester where the level remains red. It suggests that following completion of an action plan and risk assessment (consistent with the NYA guidance on managing youth sector activities and spaces during COVID-19), individuals may gather indoors or outdoors, provided there are **no more than 15 people per group, including leaders**. Where possible, the groups should be smaller. Please refer to the FAQ: **What size group can I have? How many groups can I have?**

The following activities are permitted at the amber readiness level:

- Online and digital youth services.
- Detached local youth activities, including pre-planned outdoor activities.
- 1-2-1 indoor sessions with young people.
- Indoor group sessions.

Further guidance can be found in the following document:

<https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Amber-Aware.v2.5.pdf>

When planning activities, physical distancing, hygiene measures and risk assessments should be in place together with the following considerations:

- 1) Until 24 July youth groups **will not** be able to play sports indoors. However, indoor gyms, swimming pools and sports facilities can reopen from 25 July. Government guidance recommends to keep activity time short and to ensure there is adequate ventilation:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/providers-of-grassroots-sport-and-gym-leisure-facilities>

Please refer to updates on the [NYA website](#).

- 2) [Governments guidelines](#) currently state that in worship or devotions:

People should avoid singing, shouting, raising voices and/or playing music at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult or that may encourage shouting. This is because of the potential for increased risk of transmission from aerosol and droplets.

We anticipate new guidelines to be published for singing activities from September onwards.

Whilst this guidance may negate some of the usual youth work activities, please remember that there are no restrictions on discussion, Bible study, sharing of testimonies and prayer. Encourage your group to think creatively about how they would like to run their session and which activities are important to them for building faith.

Young people should be encouraged where possible to bring their own equipment (Bible, snack and drink) and avoid sharing of equipment.

It is important to discuss with young people expectations and reasons for the changes in behaviour (e.g. complying with physical distancing) and activities (no singing or shouting). We encourage leaders to agree a code of conduct with young people and be prepared to follow through on a protocol should a young person choose to ignore the behaviour code.

12. Q. Can I take my youth group away camping?

A. No. Overnight stays will not be permitted during this readiness level.

This flow chart is to be used in conjunction with ALL current Covid 19 guidance, whilst stimulating conversations between those within a leadership role for local contextualisation and operating within a PCC approved Risk Assessment.

