

Risk Assessment for Holding Services at Hanney Chapel during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Version History

- 1. Initial baseline assessment 29th June 2020**
- 2. Revised due to updated guidelines regarding face coverings**
- 3. Revised due to updated guidelines regarding place of worship**
- 4. Revised in light of research on singing**
- 5. Revised in light of the 'Rule-of-Six' and other risk assessments**

Assessment Date	24th September 2020
Valid From	27th September 2020
Review Period	Annual (or when governmental guidance changes)
Approved By	Hanney Elders & Deacons

SCOPE

This Risk Assessment (RA) applies to the Hanney Chapel, East Hanney, OXON. OX12 0HX for the purpose of keeping the building COVID-Secure to facilitate the safe holding of public worship services or prayer meetings during the coronavirus pandemic. This will be achieved by adhering to recommendations and advice provided by the WHO (World Health Organisation) [1] and given in Government Guidelines [2, 3] (the latest of which at the time of writing this RA was the 24th September 2020).

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 (a.k.a. SARS-CoV-2) coronavirus is a newly discovered and highly infectious and acute respiratory disease that has rapidly spread to over 200 countries world-wide. It has the potential to cause a range of symptoms including (but not limited to) a dry persistent cough, fever, shortness of breath, loss of the sense of smell (anosmia) and distortion or loss of the sense of taste (dysgeusia or ageusia). In severe cases there may be loss of life.

The onset of the disease is fairly rapid (of the order of days) and the severity of the symptoms that anyone with COVID-19 may exhibit, vary from person to person. These can range from expressing no symptoms at all (potentially an asymptomatic carrier who is still capable of shedding the virus), to feeling very unwell with flu like symptoms, to requiring emergency hospitalisation and mechanical assistance with breathing (ventilation). Most people infected with COVID-19 will experience only mild to moderate respiratory symptoms and will recover without requiring special treatment.

The demographic of an individual (e.g. their age, gender, blood type, ethnicity etc.) can play a significant part in how they respond to the virus. For example, those that have A blood type, or those over 70 years old, or those who have underlying health conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disorders or cancer, are generally believed to be more prone to suffer acute symptoms, though deaths have also unexpectedly occurred in much younger and healthier individuals.

It should be noted that although some medication and treatments are available to alleviate the most significant symptoms, no effective vaccine currently exists and in approximately 1.4% of cases the disease is fatal.

GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES

Due to the constantly changing knowledge of the extent and impact of the virus in the general population the 'rules of engagement' determined by the government are constantly under review and subject to change at short notice.

As of the 4th July, the government permitted a limited set of individuals / households to meet together. However, for the purposes of this RA - holding public worship services or prayer meetings - the key restrictions are that singing is an activity that is strongly advised against in corporate meetings and that social distancing measures should be maintained between those of different households. The social distance has been reduced to "one metre plus" (1m+) and what this means in practice is that 1m to just under 2m is seen as acceptable so long as additional "mitigating measures" such as the wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE), not sitting face-to-face, or, protective screens are in place. However, the guidance strongly advises that, if it is viable to do so, a full two metres (2m) social distance should still be maintained (even if that requires a reduction in overall occupancy).

As of the 8th August it was mandated in law that face coverings are to be worn inside places of worship. There are however some exemptions to this requirement on the grounds of age, mental or physical health or a physical disability. For example, children under the age of 11, those with breathing difficulties or a physical disability that makes putting on or wearing a face covering difficult, are exempt. A fuller list can be found in the latest government guidelines on the wearing of face coverings [3] which indicates that service leaders (whether employed by the Church or acting on their behalf) are also to be exempt from the need to wear a face covering.

As of 14th September 2020 the government has legislated that there must not be social gatherings of more than 6 people though there are a number of exemptions such as already larger households or support bubbles. Places of worship are also being permitted to meet so long as groups are still maintaining social distancing and do not mingle.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The coronavirus is currently the subject of an intense level of research but it is thought to be most readily transmitted from one person to another by infectious pathogens being carried by airborne particulates (respiratory droplets generated by coughs, sneezes or speaking) and by direct contact with contaminated surfaces.

In normal conversation any large droplets expelled from the mouth will rapidly fall to the floor within about 2m but research by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has shown that some uncontained coughs can project fine aerosol particulates up to 6m and sneezes up to 8m away.

It should also be noted that a recent preprint study from the University of Bristol on the effects of singing compared to either breathing, or, to normal speech [4], indicates that singing, in and of itself, increases the exhaled aerosol particle count by a factor of two. However, this is the case for similar volume levels and increasing the volume (whether spoken or sung) significantly increases the amount of aerosols exhaled. It was found that an individual singing heartily can generate 20 to 40 times more mass of aerosol particles than singing or speaking quietly. There are some modest differences seen between male and females but the issue generally scales-up with the size of group.

By analogy with other epidemics of similar diseases such as the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and MERS (Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome) it is believed that, outside of a host, the virus has a lifetime of no more than 3 days (72 hours).

Although with mitigation measures in place the risks to health can be significantly reduced, it should be noted that overall, the risk of exposure to COVID-19 cannot be totally eliminated or guaranteed to be zero.

MITIGATION OF RISKS

Physical Measures at the Chapel

- There must be a Venue Manager (normally an Elder or Deacon) responsible for the management of the chapel.
- At the Chapel's main entrance there must be signage (easily visible from outside) listing the symptoms of COVID-19 (i.e. new cough, fever, breathlessness, loss of smell / taste) and requesting that anyone exhibiting any such symptom of the virus should not enter the building but should follow the government's self-isolation guidance and to contact NHS 111 for further advice.
- There must be signage warning that face coverings must now be worn (unless legitimately exempt from doing so).
- Hand sanitizer will be made available at the entrance and exit of the building and must be used by all.
- There must be signage displayed in the building encouraging people to maintain the 2m social distancing and not to touch anything unnecessarily.
- Due to social distancing, the crèche facility will not be permitted to operate.
- The Explorers Sunday School classes can operate in the chapel building subject to its own COVID-Secure Risk Assessment [5] but because no extra room or home is safely available, Bible Class will be held online.
- No refreshments (water, squash, tea, coffee, biscuits etc.) will be served.
- The only consumables supplied will be the elements for the Lord's Supper and strict hygiene rules will apply. The temporary removal of face coverings will be permitted in order to consume the bread and wine. The safe methodology of how to administer this is the subject of a separate risk assessment "COVID-19 Risk Assessment for holding Communion Services at Hanney Chapel Issue 2" [6].
- To reduce the potential of household mixing, there will be a one way system in place. Entry to the Chapel building will normally be from the main door and exit via the side rooms and the end door (secondary fire exit). Exceptions will be considered at times when the Explorers Sunday School is using the side rooms, or for anyone that has particular mobility issues or in the case of an emergency evacuation when the nearest safe exit should be used. If the chapel toilets need to be used during the service then it will be permitted to directly return to the main hall so long as the walkway is empty.
- The seating will be pre-arranged prior to any meeting and positioned so that households can maintain the 2m social distancing. It should be noted that when moving to and from the seats, visiting the toilets or exiting from the building, that there may be brief moments where people travelling along a walkway may pass other occupied seating and be closer than the desired 2m.
- Use of shared reusable equipment is to be avoided and this veto includes the coat hooks. No general use will be made of the chapel hymn books or bibles but order of service sheets will be provided or the words projected on a screen. In exceptional circumstances a visitor may be allowed to use a chapel bible but this would then have to be bagged and set aside for at least 48 hours before reuse.
- Access to the chapel stationery cupboard for pens, pencils, crayons, paper etc. is forbidden except when specifically required for the Sunday School classes.

- A small group of people are now permitted to sing in front of worshippers though members of the congregation are still strongly advised against singing. However, in line with the aforementioned study, showing that volume increases risk more than the act of singing itself, any singing should be done quietly. Care must also be taken to ensure that a face covering remains in place, covering both nose and mouth and fitting the face.
- Cash offerings are to be discouraged and the offering box removed. Gloves must be worn if needing to handle cash offerings.
- Weather permitting, doors and external windows should be opened to facilitate a flow of fresh air. To prevent noise from the Explorers Sunday School from interfering with the service taking place in the main hall, the internal windows to the classrooms can be kept shut and the skylight in the toilets, kitchen, storeroom and crèche opened instead.
- There should be a written register taken to capture names of those present though it should be noted that this is with an individual's consent. It is strongly suggested that consent be given but if anyone for personal reasons does not want to have their name registered, they can opt-out. The register must be kept for at least 21 days in case of a need to assist the NHS Test & Trace.
- There will be a NHS QR Code poster available at the entrance and exit to the building for users of the NHS Covid-19 smartphone app to scan and "check-in".
- 1st aid – when treating anyone, the responder should use gloves and mask and preferably a face visor.
- After any corporate meeting, and the congregation has left, appropriate equipment (disposable gloves, mask, aprons and cloths) will be made available for cleaner(s) to clean & disinfect the frequently touched / communal areas of the building concentrating on door handles, hand rails, chairs, lectern, piano, PA equipment and toilets. All disposable PPE used should be bagged, the bag dated and securely set aside for at least 3 days before being disposed of in the normal rubbish. Reusable cloths should be washed at a high temperature (at least 60°C).
- Ideally, the chapel should be left empty between meetings so as to allow any viral infections to die off. Any access to the chapel building during the week must be agreed with the Elders beforehand and the visit logged. Any group activity will require its own COVID-Secure Risk Assessment.

Actions by visitors

- No one who is exhibiting any symptom of COVID-19 should enter the building.
- Everyone must make use of the provided hand sanitizer on entry and exit.
- Care must be taken not to touch anything unnecessarily (e.g. a chair that's allocated to another household).
- The wearing of gloves is optional but the wearing of face coverings is now mandated in law (except for legitimate exemptions).
- All attendees must observe the full two metre (2m) social distancing between households even when wearing a face covering.
- The positioning of the chairs must not be altered.
- Any order of service sheet taken must be removed by the user and disposed of at home.
- If the use of a bible is required then members and regular attendees should bring their own.
- All attendees should consider bringing their own supply of bottled water / drink.
- Parents / guardians of young children are responsible for ensuring that the children do not run around and that they comply with the social distancing requirements.
- Attendees must not enter the kitchen, storeroom or crèche.

- Everyone must ensure that any item brought into the chapel building (e.g. toys, pens, paper, notepads etc. and including coats and jackets) are to be kept with them and removed again on their departure
- For those choosing to use the NHS COVID-19 smartphone app, there is a venue check-in NHS QR Code available in the entrance lobby and on the inside of the rear emergency exit door.

REFERENCES

- [1] WHO <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>
- [2] Safe use of a place of worship <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic>
- [3] Face coverings <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>
- [4] University of Bristol research on breathing, speaking and singing https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/itempdf74155353254prod/12789221/Comparing_the_Respirable_Aerosol_Concentrations_and_Particle_Size_Distributions_Generated_by_Singing_Speaking_and_Breat_v1.pdf
- [5] http://hanney-chapel.org.uk/policies/COVID-19_Explorers_Risk_Assessment.pdf
- [6] http://hanney-chapel.org.uk/policies/COVID-19_RA_Communion_2.pdf