

FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND



A Route Map Version 4

Version History	Summary of Changes
V2 19/06/20	Phase 1 marked non applicable Phase 2: Updated guidance re pastoral visits, marriage and funerals Phase 3: Links to Free church website guidance notes on cleaning and risk assessment
V3 15/07/20	Phase 1 & 2 marked non applicable Phase 3: Updated guidance re congregational services, marriages, funerals, pastoral visits, external lettings. Link to detailed Scottish Government guidance for places of worship.
V4 12/08/20	Updated section 3.6 for face coverings and Sunday school. Pastoral care now section 3.9. Other minor wording updates.

Looking at the other side: a route map out of the pandemic

The COVID-19 (C-19) Group is a sub-group reporting to the Board of Trustees. The Board has the responsibility to address risks in finance, reputation, health and safety within the denomination and mitigate accordingly.

The C-19 group has met weekly since March and has communicated advice through mailings, website and the Moderator's Friday video message.

The C-19 Group offers a route map for moving out of lockdown for our congregations.

Guiding principles

The glory of God. The Church does not exist to self-perpetuate and look within. Its mission is to declare the glory of God in worship and mission. In the present climate we are thankful that the word of God is not in chains. We continue our mission, albeit in different circumstances. (1 Corinthians 10:31, 2 Tim 2:9)

Respect for government. The Free Church of Scotland recognise the teaching of The Bible that we are subject to the governing authorities. We recognise the duty and authority of the civil government to protect the wellbeing of the nation. (Romans 13:1-7)

We shall therefore comply with the law, advice and timings given by government.

Gospel reputation. We recognise that we live in a culture of intense scrutiny of behaviour within the lockdown period. The reputation of our Lord and His Church must be jealously guarded. (1 Timothy 2:7)

Clarity in communication. At all points we shall communicate with the wider denomination in a regular and transparent manner. (2 Corinthians 4:2)

Charity at all times. We recognise that the current situation has brought a high degree of fear. Fear breeds anxiety which leads to tensions over how the crisis ought to be dealt with. In particular we urge wisdom and grace to prevail in all our communications with each other but especially identify social media as a particular point of conflict. (1 Corinthians 13)

Unity of the Church. The effects of COVID-19 vary across the nation. Opinions vary regarding the origin, management and treatment of the pandemic. It is a time to put personal opinions aside as we work for the greater good. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

One of the many benefits of being a denomination is the opportunity for a larger group of churches to act as one in moving through the crisis.

We also commit to consult with and learn from other churches.

A route map

It is impossible to give a timeline for the route map as each phase will be introduced as the effects of the pandemic diminish. We are now in Phase 3, the timing of moving to Phase 4 is not yet known. We emphasise that:

- the route map does not have all the answers and does not set exact timescales;
- further guidance will be issued as we move through the different phases of easing of restrictions;
- notice of changes will be given to allow time to prepare;
- it may be that not everything currently listed in a single phase will happen at the same time, as it may be possible to lift some measures more quickly while others may take longer than presently envisaged;
- a single phase may span more than one review period; and
- we do not know exactly what will happen in each of the phases, or how long each phase will last for.

This document is written in the light of current government advice. It is important to bear in mind that this may change over the coming months and beyond and our guidance will be refined accordingly.

1. Phase One

No longer applicable.

2. Phase Two

No longer applicable.

3. Phase Three

The Scottish Government has issued detailed guidance for [Places of Worship](#), it should be read in conjunction with this guidance note.

3.1 When to reopen?

Although churches are allowed to re-open, you should only do so once you have carried out your risk assessment and made all necessary arrangements including for hygiene and physical distancing.

3.2 Who can safely come to church?

The fact that churches can now re-open does not mean that everyone in the congregation should start coming back to church at the same time. Some individuals may not feel comfortable returning to church immediately and consideration should be given as to what alternative provision can be made for them until such time as it is safe for them to return. For example, can you continue or start to provide live-streamed services? Also, some older people may be reluctant to stay away from church. How can they be encouraged to follow the appropriate health advice at the relevant time?

It must be made clear that anyone displaying any of the symptoms of COVID-19, or who have been in close contact with any who have displayed symptoms, should not attend church in any circumstances.

3.3 Preparing the building for use after lockdown – some steps to take

Before bringing any building back into use, various steps should be taken in preparation. Different considerations will apply for congregations who do not have their own building but who use let space – such congregations will require to liaise with the owners of the buildings, but should at all times bear in mind the need to maintain the same physical distancing and hygiene standards as those using their own buildings.

General health and safety

Buildings should be checked over thoroughly to make sure all is in order – wind and watertight, electrics working, no obvious hazards etc. A Covid-19 Risk Assessment must be performed see <https://freechurch.org/covid-19/>

Legionella

This is a particular concern where buildings have been unused for a prolonged period. If your water supply has not been drained, you should ensure that all taps are run for at least 20 minutes, and all toilets flushed. Instant hot water systems should be set to 60 degrees centigrade.

Cleaning

If no-one has been using the building during the lockdown the virus should not be present on any of the surfaces as it will not have survived over the period of lockdown. However, it is likely that as a minimum someone will have been in the building to do security checks and run taps etc. for legionella prevention, and in some cases the building will also have been used by the minister for livestreaming or recording services. You should ensure that all surfaces which may have been touched during the week prior to reopening are thoroughly cleaned e.g. pews, chairs, tables, pulpit, lectern, microphones, door handles, light switches, kitchen and toilet surfaces etc. For latest guidance note on cleaning visit <https://freechurch.org/covid-19/>.

Altering seating arrangements and marking floors

Chairs should be set out a minimum of 2m apart. It is not practical to second guess household groups when setting out chairs. Selected pews should be closed off, and 2m markers placed at suitable points on those left open. 2m markers should be clearly marked on the floors and ground at the entrance/exit areas, both inside and outside the building.

Hand sanitiser

A supply of hand sanitiser should be available at the entrance for use by everyone entering the building.

Bibles, psalm/hymn books, service sheets etc.

These must all be removed from public areas for the time being. People may use only their own bibles etc. Where possible, words should be displayed electronically. People may be reminded that a Sing Psalms App for mobile devices is freely available through iOS and Android stores, and most hymns can be easily found online in advance or during a service.

Offering

As many people as possible should be encouraged to give their offering by electronic means. For those who are unable or who do not wish to do this, a closed donation box should be acquired and securely positioned near the entrance. A supply of disposable gloves for use by those counting money should be provided.

Signage

To assist in communicating the new rules, consider preparing and placing appropriate signage which can be clearly seen and understood by all.

3.4 Altered building capacity – issues arising to be considered

As a starting point, you will need to work out the maximum number of people who can be safely accommodated in your building at any one time maintaining a safe distance of at least 2 metres between individuals from different household groups.

Whilst they should be avoided wherever possible, very brief interactions within 2 metres such as limited numbers of people passing each other in corridors, are considered to be low risk. Use of floor markings can help to minimise this.

Under Government restrictions, no place of worship should admit more than 50 people at any one time, regardless of its size or usual capacity.

Consideration therefore should be given as to how this will affect your gatherings. You need to think about what arrangements you will need to make around this. How will you deal with limiting numbers where this is necessary? How will you seek to avoid situations of people

arriving and having to be turned away? What about too many people arriving all at the same time/late/too close to the start of the service? Ideally arrival times would be sufficiently spread out, to facilitate physical distancing outside the building, around the entrance (inside and out) and inside the building on the way to a suitably distanced seat.

Should consideration be given to dividing numbers between more than one service? If so, on what basis would this be done, and how would it be communicated to the congregation? What about visitors? What about the number of services this would mean the minister having to lead?

3.5 Before a service

All surfaces in the building should have been thoroughly cleaned/disinfected before each use. This includes toilets, kitchen areas (even although teas/coffees are not being served surfaces may still have been touched, e.g. for providing glasses of water), pews, chairs, tables, pulpit, lectern, microphones, door handles and light switches.

If possible, doors should be kept open to avoid the need for anyone having to touch them.

Check that there is sufficient hand sanitiser at the entrance for people to use on arrival.

Welcomers must remain at a 2m distance from everyone arriving, this may mean standing outside rather than in the vestibule/lobby. Welcomers should not shake hands with people arriving. Face coverings must be worn within places of worship.

There should also be stewards on duty to count the numbers arriving and ensure that once the maximum permitted number are in the building no-one else is admitted.

To support the Government's Test and Protect Strategy, it is recommended that congregations keep a temporary register of worshipper contact details for a period of 21 days. A separate [briefing note](#) is available on the Free Church COVID-19 webpage.

3.6 Holding Services

Congregational Worship

Churches may open for congregational worship, communal prayer and contemplation, subject to physical distancing and hygiene standards. Congregations must determine their own safe building capacity in line with 2 metre physical distancing guidelines, up to a maximum total of 50 people at any one time, regardless of building size or usual capacity.

Face coverings must be worn within places of worship. Those who are leading an act of worship do not always need to wear a face covering provided they can maintain a distance of at least 2 metres from others and/or remain behind a protective screen.

Congregational singing should be avoided. A single individual may sing behind a Plexi-glass screen during a service. Any screen used should be cleaned regularly. Instruments that do not require breath to operate (non-wind instruments) may be played.

For the time being, there should be no communion.

Any outdoor services on church grounds are subject to the same restrictions and advice on physical distancing, hygiene standards, risk assessment and face coverings. Churches should not hold formal worship services elsewhere outdoors at this time, unless a risk assessment is carried out and holding a service complies with the latest Scottish Government requirements limiting outdoor gatherings.

Sunday School etc

The limit on the number of other households that children/young people aged 17 and under can meet with in one day, both indoors and outdoors, has been removed.

Children aged 11 or under are not required to physically distance from others. This means that adults teaching/looking after children aged 11 or under do not need to physically distance from them. However, care should be taken to follow appropriate hygiene measures and keep proximity to a minimum where possible.

Adults teaching/looking after children/young people aged 12 or over do require to maintain appropriate physical distancing (2 metres) from them.

In general terms, any shared facilities for children (play corners, books, toys etc.) should be cleaned when groups of children change using standard detergent and disinfectant that are active against viruses and bacteria. Extra care should be taken with hand hygiene immediately before and after using play equipment. Appropriate steps should be taken to ensure the safety of equipment and minimise the risk of transmission through users touching contaminated surfaces, including relevant signs. Detailed Government guidance for educational and childminding settings is available. We advise the application of that guidance, as appropriate. Note especially measures in relation to infection prevention and control.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-reopening-school-age-childcare-services/>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-childminder-services-guidance/>

The maximum number of people currently allowed in a church building at any one time is 50, including any children/young people present.

Funerals

Funerals may be held in church buildings. Good hygiene and physical distancing practices must be followed. Attendance at a funeral service should be limited to 20 people. This is not including the funeral director, essential building staff or minister.

Ministers should familiarise themselves with the specific government guidance on funerals <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-funeral-services/>

Marriages

Marriages may be held in church buildings and good hygiene and physical distancing practices must be followed. Up to 20 people should attend a marriage, provided this can be safely accommodated with physical distancing. This includes all those at the ceremony, including the couple, the minister, the witnesses, any interpreter and guests. It also includes any carers accompanying an attendee. It includes as well any staff who are not employed by the venue, such as a photographer, musicians or others a couple has employed for the purpose of the ceremony or registration.

Ministers should familiarise themselves with the specific government guidance on marriage <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnership-registrations/>

Baptisms

Baptisms are permitted. This will necessarily involve interaction within a 2 metre distance. Face coverings should be worn by all who take part in this close interaction and strict hand hygiene should be maintained throughout. Where an infant is involved, a parent/guardian should hold the infant.

3.7 After the service

People should leave the building one at a time keeping a 2m distance. Worshippers should be encouraged to move on promptly from the place of worship. The appointed stewards should supervise this.

For the time being there should be no social gatherings for tea/coffee etc.

Hand sanitiser should be available at the exit.

Those counting money should do so wearing disposable gloves provided.

Door handles and handrails should be disinfected at the end.

The building should be thoroughly cleaned before the building is next used, which is of course an 'act of necessity and mercy.'

3.8 Lettings

Where a place of worship is used by external groups, only those activities which are permitted to take place should be available. See a list of businesses which cannot yet operate at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-business-and-physical-distancing-guidance/pages/businesses-and-premises-that-must-remain-closed/>

It may be possible to restart short-term/casual lettings of church buildings to other groups however you should consider the risks from COVID-19 before doing so and complete a risk assessment. You should also check your insurance policies for any changes in the cover in place.

You should ensure that external users also carry out a risk assessment and at a minimum that users understand their obligations e.g. cleaning, physical distancing, maximum capacities and 'test and protect'. The congregation should have suitable controls and processes for cleaning between user groups.

3.9 Pastoral Visits

It is possible to meet other people indoors and outdoors. The minister or elder should determine the risks and appropriateness of undertaking pastoral care visits. We emphasise that 2m physical distancing and heightened hygiene measures are essential to avoid creating bridges which allow the virus to spread.

Up to 3 households are permitted to meet indoors, up to a maximum of 8 people. In addition, up to 5 households are permitted to meet outdoors, up to a maximum of 15 people.

You should not meet people from more than 4 other households in total each day (whether indoors and/or outdoors).

Note that the government reminds those at a higher risk of severe illness from coronavirus (including those who had been shielding, people over 70, pregnant women and people with an underlying medical condition) to strictly follow physical distancing guidance.

The local advice of hospitals and care homes should be followed if visiting people at these premises.

You should not engage in pastoral visits if you or someone in the household has coronavirus symptoms or is self-isolating.

4. Phase Four

Once we are in phase 4, the country should have reached the “new normal”. The Scottish Government states: “In this, the final phase in our transition through the crisis, the virus remains suppressed to very low levels and is no longer considered a significant threat to public health, but society remains safety conscious...Scotland is open with precautions and the importance of hygiene and public health are emphasised. It could be many months, or longer, until we reach this phase.”

The Church should also have reached a ‘new normal’, with a new appreciation of the importance of health and safety within our buildings.

*In dwellings of the righteous
is heard the melody
Of joy and health: the Lord's right hand
doth ever valiantly.*

Psalm 118:15 (Scottish Psalter)