

COVID-19 - Cleaning Church Buildings

This note carries advice or recommendations. The document is subject to change as our response to COVID-19 develops.

Version History

Version	Date	Summary of Changes
V.1	18/06/2020	First version of document

At present all church buildings are closed. This guidance note is intended to supplement the information provided in the Free Church of Scotland Route Map as regards cleaning requirements for church buildings when they are back in use.

Please note this advice is intended for congregations that use their own church buildings. Where congregations rent/use other buildings for services, they should undertake a risk assessment and agree and document the cleaning measures that will be undertaken by the landlord (and/or or the congregation) in advance of services, to ensure that the same standards are met. There should be a clear protocol for the reporting of a known or suspected case of COVID-19 in the building during or between lets.

Before re-opening

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 this period. 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.

The infection risk from coronavirus following contamination of the environment decreases over time. It is not yet clear at what point there is no risk. However, studies of other viruses in the same family suggest that, in most circumstances, the risk is likely to be reduced significantly after 72 hours. Therefore, in circumstances where no-one has been in a building for this period or longer, this will reduce the level of cleaning required.

You should assess the building and ensure that all surfaces which may have been touched during the 72 hours prior to reopening are thoroughly cleaned e.g. pews, chairs, tables, pulpit, lectern, microphones, door handles, light switches, kitchen and toilet surfaces etc. Opening windows and doors as frequently as possible to encourage ventilation is also recommended.

After re-opening – clean to reduce risk from coronavirus

Coronavirus can transfer from people to surfaces and can be passed on to others who touch the same surfaces. Keeping the building clean on an ongoing basis after re-opening reduces the potential for transmission of the virus and is therefore of crucial importance.

On any occasion where a known or suspected case of COVID-19 has been in the building then the latest Health Protection Guidance on “*Environmental decontamination (cleaning and disinfection) after a possible case has left a workplace or other non-healthcare setting*” should be followed. It is available within the [HPS Guidance for non-healthcare settings](#)

Otherwise you should follow this guidance.

Identify frequently touched surfaces

Surfaces that are frequently touched, especially anything that is touched by lots of people, will need more regular cleaning than normal. Examples of such surfaces/objects include:

- Handles on doors and windows.
- Rails and bannisters.
- Light switches.
- Common areas like toilets.
- Desks, pews and tables.
- Computer keyboards, printers, touch screens, monitors and phones.
- Taps, kettles, water heaters, fridges, microwaves and cupboards.
- Dispensers and water coolers.

You should put in place measures to clean such surfaces and objects after each occasion when the building is used.

Reduce the need for cleaning

Reducing people's contact with surfaces and objects is better than relying on cleaning after contact. Consider if and how you can:

- restrict access to certain parts of the building if this is practical, to reduce the area of regular cleaning required. Areas that are not accessible to the public should not require such frequent cleaning as other areas.
- reduce people's need to touch surfaces or objects.
- minimise equipment available to reduce what needs to be cleaned.
- keep doors propped open to reduce the need to touch door handles (excluding fire doors or other doors that must be kept closed).
- use posters to help remind people of their responsibilities in situations where you consider it reasonable for users themselves to clean objects/equipment after use as part of your cleaning regime.

Because of the likelihood of risk being reduced significantly after 72 hours, where possible the building should be left for a minimum of 72 hours after each use before being cleaned or being used again.

Cleaning staff/volunteers

Anyone considered vulnerable or at above average risk and/or with an underlying health condition should not be cleaning church buildings. Otherwise any suitable person can clean. The numbers of those cleaning the building should be kept to a minimum, and physical distancing between them practised at all times.

You should provide those responsible for carrying out cleaning with the following items:

- An adequate supply of protective disposable gloves and aprons.
- Disposable cloths and suitable surface wipes.
- Normal domestic cleaning products (with a detergent or disinfectant that is active against bacteria and viruses), suitable for each of the areas to be cleaned. Cleaning products should be stored safely and always used at the concentration recommended by the manufacturer.

- Bin bags for disposing of used disposable items.
- Hand washing facilities with hot water, liquid soap and paper towels.
- Hand sanitiser at multiple locations in the building.

Government advice is that additional PPE is not generally beneficial other than in situations where the risk of COVID-19 transmission is very high. In a church building setting, including for those cleaning, risk should be managed through social distancing and through high hygiene standards – frequent hand washing and avoid touching their faces. Some individuals may choose to wear a face covering when in a building with more one person not from the same household to protect others.

You should ensure that cleaners know and understand the importance of thorough cleaning while also protecting themselves, and that in particular they should:

- maintain physical distancing while cleaning.
- dispose of all used cleaning cloths etc. in the bin bags provided, seal them and safely dispose of them.
- Ensure that used cloths are never placed on cleaned surfaces, but rather are placed in a bin bag immediately after use – to facilitate this cleaners should always have a bag near at hand.
- never touch their faces without first washing their hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- always wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water when they finish cleaning.

Frequency of cleaning

This will depend on your risk assessment and various factors, such as the number of people using the building, whether access to some parts have been restricted etc. As normal, enhanced cleaning may be required for busy areas.

Whilst church buildings are only being used for very limited purposes, such as by the Minister for live streaming, cleaning should be proportionate to the use being made of the building or part of the building.

Bins should be emptied, and rubbish removed, after each occasion when the building has been used.

Toilets

Toilets are a specific risk area. These should be kept clean, with liquid soap provided and where possible paper towels rather than hand dryers. You should set clear guidance for the use and cleaning of toilets, to make sure they are kept clean during opening times and that appropriate physical distancing is maintained. As toilets have several frequently touched areas e.g. handles, taps, particular attention is required. Depending on the cleaning resources available to you, you may wish to consider having some limitation/control on access to toilets.

Chairs

The present understanding is that unless they have been soiled soft furnishings do not need any special or additional cleaning over and above what is normal, such as vacuuming with a soft brush attachment.

Sources and additional information

Health Protection Scotland

[COVID-19 - guidance for non-healthcare settings](#)

Health and Safety Executive

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/cleaning.htm>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/cleaning/index.htm>