

## COVID-19 UPDATE

26 April 2021

With effect from Monday 26 April the whole of Scotland is in protection level 3. The Scottish Government have re-written the guidance for the safe use of places of worship, and this new guidance can be accessed here -

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/>

Links to other relevant sets of guidance (e.g., on marriages, funerals, children's work etc.) can also be accessed via the above link.

Note: The legal restrictions and requirements which apply at each level of protection are set out in the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Regulations 2020. The Regulations now state that a person who is responsible for a place of worship, carrying on a business or providing a service must also have regard to guidance issued by the Scottish Ministers (such as the above noted guidance) about measures which should be taken to minimise the risk of the incidence and spread of coronavirus on those premises. This in effect gives the guidance the force of law.

It is essential to read the guidance in full, to ensure that all aspects of the safe use of church buildings is adhered to, but some key points to highlight are as follows:

- The number of people who can be admitted to a place of worship is no longer capped at 50 but is still subject to 2m physical distancing between households, so capacity will be determined by the size of a building and on how many people attend on their own or in larger household groups. Children under 5 are not counted in determining the number of people who can be accommodated, unless they occupy a separate seat. Should a building have more than one room or hall, worshippers can/should be suitably divided between them to ensure appropriate physical distancing. Balconies and galleries can also be used, and the safe occupancy level must be calculated and included in the total occupancy level for the building. Congregations should only use balconies and galleries if it is safe to do so and ensure that pinch points or bottlenecks are not created by those accessing or leaving the balcony, or in any other parts of the building. Particular attention should be paid to ventilation in areas with reduced height, and where seating is sloped, it may be necessary to increase the distance between rows, to avoid the risk of people breathing over one another. The guidance contains detailed information on maintaining physical distancing, and also additional guidance on calculating capacity is available here - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-calculating-physical-distancing-capacity-in-public-settings/pages/overview/>.
- Congregational singing, both indoors and outdoors, should continue to be avoided at this time.
- Travel to lead worship or attend a person's usual place of worship is allowed across all protection levels, including crossing into another area if necessary.
- Detailed guidance on funerals can be accessed here - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-funeral-services/>. In level 3 the number limit is 50.

- Detailed guidance on weddings can be accessed here - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnership-registrations/>. In level 3 the number limit is 50.
- Indoor hospitality is now permitted, so food and drink can be served after church services, provided this is done in line with the hospitality guidance - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-tourism-and-hospitality-sector-guidance/pages/overview/> but note that places of worship are **not** eligible to apply reduced distancing of 1m.
- It is now requested that, for Test and Protect, contact details be collected for each worshipper instead of only one lead contact per household.
- Children’s work and youth work - The Scottish Government advises that where a place of worship is providing activities for children and/or young people, they will need to determine which set of guidance is most relevant for the activity in question. Unregulated indoor activities for under 18s, including activities organised by places of worship (such as Sunday Schools) should follow this guidance, which includes details of number limits in all protection levels - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-organised-activities-for-children/pages/overview/> - and which is the default general guidance to be followed unless other sector specific guidance is in place for the activity. In addition, YouthLink Scotland, in conjunction with the Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland, have developed a framework to support the resumption of more formal youthwork services, which can be read here - <https://www.youthlinkscotland.org/media/5974/youth-work-covid-19-guidance-framework.pdf>. For work with young people to be classed as “youthwork” and come under this guidance there must be a clear educational focus and structured programme. For example, a drop-in youth club with activities but no educational programme would come under the general guidance with lower number limits as detailed above. Number limits for indoor and outdoor activities in all protection levels are given in the guidance, but it should be noted that in level 3, youth work should be provided online or outdoors and should only be carried out indoors in very limited and exceptional circumstances, as detailed in the YouthLink Scotland guidance.
- Support groups – these should be delivered remotely where possible but are permitted in-person if necessary and in that event the following guidance must be followed - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-one-to-one-support-and-support-groups/>.
- Recreational and social groups – people may only meet indoors in accordance with the relevant restrictions on indoor socialising for the current protection level. It is therefore unlikely that such groups would be able to meet in church buildings at the present time.

Please also note **that from 17 May 2021**, there will be a legal requirement to publicly display the number capacity at the entrance of church buildings - Public Display Notice of Physical Distance Based Capacity (PDBC). Local Authority Environmental Health Officers will be responsible for the enforcement of the PDBC. Guidance on this is available here - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-calculating-physical-distancing-capacity-in-public-settings/pages/overview/>.