



Local Interpretation of the Guidance for “Step 4” of Easing of Restrictions for the Covid 19 pandemic. From 19th July 2021 – updated 29th July 2021
Reviewed 1st September 2021 – this interpretation and guidance to continue (given the continued high case rate in the area) until 13th October.

Background:

The government has moved to “step 4 in its roadmap” of the easing of restrictions – in essence this is to remove most of the legal requirements for distancing and mask wearing. The Church of England has recently provided guidance for churches- available here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance#na>

The instruction is that the “incumbent” should assess the local risk and put in place the best guidance for our communal worship and use of buildings.

This, at the same time that the levels of covid infection continue to rise rapidly locally (mid July 2021 – **rates continue at high level 1st Sept 2021**), and the Government, Scientists and the Church of England all advise extreme caution.

Each Parish has already carried out, and updated, risk assessments throughout the pandemic. This is now an additional guidance for this next phase. These measures will be temporary and depend on the changing nature of the pandemic and future guidance we receive from Church and Government.

In general terms, we still need to be meticulous in keep good hand hygiene, maintaining distance as much as we can, and wearing masks to protect others. As Christians we need to remember the need to protect others as much as ourselves – we do not all have the same level of risk nor the same perception of risk.

We continue to request that people do not enter our buildings if they have any Covid symptoms or have tested positive for Covid 19.

The Minister leading the service will guide the congregation in keeping this guidance, in addition to new signage for entrances.

Masks:

Masks should be worn in our church buildings for public worship by everyone, unless medically exempt. Those leading worship may then remove their mask to speak to the congregation (see note on Holy Communion below) provided they keep 2 metre distance from others.

For more informal meetings / social events in the building, masks will only be required if there are more than 8 people in the building.

Sanitising:

We will continue to provide hand sanitiser and ask that everyone sanitises their hands on entry and before receiving the bread at Holy Communion.

Distance and ventilation:

We will continue to encourage the use of alternate pews to keep distance but will leave worshippers to decide who they sit with and what distance to keep.

We will provide laminated signs (for collection at the entrance) for those who would prefer/need to keep distance from others, to place on the seat next to them indicating this.

Church doors and windows should remain open to allow good ventilation where possible.

Singing:

Singing is now permitted for everyone. Congregations should keep their masks on whilst they sing. Choirs may also sing behind masks or, if they need to remove masks, must keep at least 2 metres distance between them and other people.

The Peace:

We will continue to "share the peace" at a distance and avoid moving around the church building to do this. We continue to discourage hand-shaking at this or other points of the service.

Surfaces / service sheets etc:

We will continue to maintain a good level of general cleaning in the buildings. Hymn books and service sheets will continue to be used / reused. Good hand hygiene should help reduce transfer of viruses along with there being at least 1 week between usage.

Congregants may kneel / sit / stand as they wish during the services – still encouraged to keep the touching of any surfaces (eg pew backs and ends) to a minimum.

Refreshments:

Parish church wardens and PCC's will decide locally when they wish to restart serving refreshments after services - this may depend on the facilities each has.

Any refreshments should be prepared and served by the minimum number of people possible, and servers should:

- a) maintain excellent hand hygiene
- b) wear masks when preparing and serving.
- c) Those serving should add milk / sugar etc before passing the drink to an individual.
- d) There should be no "communal" spoons / jugs etc left out.
- e) Care will be needed in serving any food eg biscuits, and communal plates should not be left out (to avoid others breathing on or touching food.)

A "one-way system" to collect refreshments and move away will help to avoid crowding around the refreshment areas.

Holy Communion:

Clergy will continue to maintain excellent hand hygiene and wear a mask when preparing, blessing and distributing the elements of bread and wine.

They will continue to evaluate the best way to distribute the Sacrament to the congregation.

Test and Trace:

It would seem to be good practice to maintain our system of asking people to "sign in" for services with their contact details. As yet, we have not had to use these – but they provide a way of contacting attendees should we learn of an infected person worshipping with us.

These records need to be shredded/destroyed 21 days after the date they were compiled to adhere to GDPR regs.

“Life Events” (weddings / baptisms / funerals)

These events carry the potential to be the most crowded within our buildings.

We will encourage those attending (and advise those organising in advance) of our current risk assessment (as in this document) and encourage them to maintain the same restrictions with their guests. Where possible they should prepare a seating plan to enable distancing during the service.

In the event of the minister not able to lead a service:

A reminder that we have an “emergency” service-of-the-word booklet should the Minister be unable to lead a service at short notice (the risk of this is increased during the pandemic due to self-isolation rules) – the church warden, or another person present, should then lead the service. Church wardens and PCC members should check they know where to find these booklets and familiarise themselves with them.

Review date: 12th October 2021

Mary Styles, Incumbent, South Quantock Benefice. 1st Sept 2021

This guidance will be distributed to PCC's, worship leaders, and others leading informal and formal activities in the church buildings and displayed publicly on church notice-boards.