



Coronavirus (COVID-19)

FAQs

Version 3 – 2nd October 2020

When will my local church re-open?

The Diocese will be undertaking a phased approach to re-opening its churches. All churches in our Diocese must go through an extensive process that involves a deep clean, risk assessment, and the recruitment of volunteers. Once a church has passed this safety criteria, the parish priest is then able to decide on when the church will reopen, and at what level of service. Further information about the re-opening of more churches will be made available on the Diocesan website at www.rcdhn.org.uk, and on Facebook and Twitter.

How can I find out about future announcements?

To ensure you do not miss any of our future announcements, please sign up to our Diocesan eNewsletter [here](#).

I'm unable to attend church, what can I do?

We will continue to broadcast services and share prayer resources online at www.rcdhn.org.uk. For those who do not have access to the internet, a free postal "Ring a Prayer Resource" has been created, contact 07375934713 for more information. Or alternatively, a Mass by Phone service, provided by the Diocese of Middlesbrough, is available at 01642 130120.

What do I need to do to protect myself when I go to church?

Churches have been following the recent HM Government advice of "Hands, Face, Space" for some time now. When attending church a volunteer steward will outline to you the main protocols in place to keep you safe. You will be asked to sanitise your hands on entering and leaving the church. All those attending churches must wear a face covering unless they are exempt from doing so. A volunteer steward will show you to an allocated socially distanced seat so that you can keep sufficient space between yourself and other parishioners. Our parishes are being encouraged to register a QR code for the church venue. This works alongside the NHS Covid-19 app which you may wish to download before you attend.

Does the 'rule of six' affect our churches?

There is an exemption for places of worship which allows more than six people to gather for communal worship provided the church has been made 'COVID secure'. When attending church people must not sit together in a group of more than six people unless they form part of the same household or support bubble.



DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

An outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) has been identified in the North East of England with the area subject to local restrictions. Do these measures impact on our churches?

Places of worship are permitted to remain open under the current local restrictions.

Parishioners are reminded of the HM Government guidance that you must not socialise with people you do not live with, unless they are in your support bubble, in any public venue including places of worship.

How long can I stay in church for individual prayer?

To ensure fairness for all, we ask that you display consideration for others who may be waiting to enter the church.

Can prayer groups now meet in person?

Prayer groups can meet in numbers greater than six providing that the church or meeting space has been risk assessed and controls put in place to ensure that it is 'COVID secure'.

However, it should be noted that HM Government guidance states:

"However, for activities and social groups where there is a significant likelihood of groups mixing and socialising (and where it will be difficult to prevent mingling and therefore breaking the law) should not take place in a community facility."

This guidance should be taken into consideration when developing the activity specific risk assessment for the prayer group meeting.

Can choirs sing in church?

Small groups of professional or non-professional singers can sing in front of worshippers both outdoors and indoors. Singing in groups should be limited to this small group and should not include congregation participation. If your choir has more than 6 members (noting that arrangements for under-18s are separate and excluded from this), this is only possible if your choir effectively operates as social groups of 6 – ie there must be no mingling between groups, including before and after services and/or rehearsals, and employing appropriate social distancing within each group. Places of worship should take account of the [Performing Arts guidance](#) which outlines additional mitigations.

Can music be played in church?

Where music plays a big part in worship, and recordings are available, we suggest you consider using these as an alternative to live singing to mitigate risks.

Any instrument played during worship should be cleaned thoroughly before and after use. Avoid playing music at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult or that may encourage shouting when people will be trying to converse before or after worship.

What are the current capacity limits in church for weddings and funerals?

As from 28th September HM Government guidance states that marriage ceremonies are limited to 15 people. Funerals continue to be limited to 30 people. People attending must remain physically distant from people outside their household or support bubble.



DIOCESE OF **Hexham & Newcastle**

What are the current capacity limits in church for Baptism?

If a Baptism takes place during a Parish Mass, the number of people attending will be limited to the secure capacity determined by the COVID-19 risk assessment for the church building. People attending must remain physically distant from people outside their household or support bubble.

Currently, the [North East of England local restrictions](#) mean that Baptisms celebrated outside of a Parish Mass are limited to 6 people if outdoors and only one household and support bubble indoors.

We are actively seeking clarification in relation to the North East of England local restrictions and will update you as soon as possible.

What are the current capacity limits in church for 'Life Cycle' Events?

As celebrations of First Holy Communion, Confirmation or the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults take place during a Parish Mass, the number of people attending will be limited to the secure capacity determined by the COVID-19 risk assessment for the church building. People attending must remain physically distant from people outside their household or support bubble.

Currently, the [North East of England local restrictions](#) mean that as First Reconciliation does not take place during a Parish Mass, it is limited to 6 if outdoors and only one household and support bubble indoors.

We are actively seeking clarification in relation to the North East of England local restrictions and will update you as soon as possible.

Can sacramental preparation meetings take place in church?

Catechetical activities such as sacramental preparation sessions are not considered as being affected by the Rule of Six, as these are formal Religious Education and Formation sessions. At this time our churches which have re-opened have been risk assessed for the activity of worship. It would be possible to hold sacramental preparation meetings in church provided that a risk assessment specific for that activity has been completed. It would also be possible to use a parish hall or other meeting space provided that location was deemed 'COVID secure'. It would be good practice to have fixed groups of children and there must always be two adults present both of whom must have a diocesan DBS certificate.

However, HM Government continues to recommend that where meetings can take place digitally without the need for face-to-face contact, they should continue to do so.