



## Document 1: Risk assessment for bell ringers returning to ring after Covid-19

### NOTE

This document has been prepared by the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers, Stewardship & Management Workgroup. It is issued in draft form and is likely to be revised as advice regarding Covid-19 is updated. It should be read and considered prior to ringers starting to ring church bells when Covid-19 restrictions are eased. It has been prepared along with two other related documents concerning risk assessments and health and safety.

Once completed, only ring if it is deemed safe to do so, considering both Covid-19 related factors, as well as any other relevant issues.

Please provide any comments or suggestions to [SMLEAD@CCCBR.ORG.UK](mailto:SMLEAD@CCCBR.ORG.UK)

*THESE NOTES DO NOT STATE WHEN IT MAY BE POSSIBLE TO RING AGAIN*

*RINGERS SHOULD RESPECT LOCAL CONSTRAINTS AND ACCEPT THAT PRECAUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ARE AIMED TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AND OTHERS*

*AS A RESULT OF ASSESSMENTS, SUCH AS ADVISED IN THESE NOTES, IT MAY NOT BE CONSIDERED TO BE SAFE TO RING BELLS IN ALL CHURCHES*

*IT IS IMPORTANT TO APPRECIATE THAT IF WE CHOOSE TO RING, WITH ALL PRACTICAL MODIFICATIONS IN PLACE AS ELSEWHERE, THERE IS STILL A RISK OF TRANSMISSION THAT WE CAN'T MEANINGFULLY REDUCE. This risk is not just to us, but to the other ringers we ring with that day, and also to the general public as any transmitted virus is taken out of the ringing room and passed on further. It is for individuals and the church to consider their responsibilities towards public health.*

## **Introduction**

This guidance note offers advice about specific issues that are likely to affect bell ringers and bell towers when they consider returning to ring the bells in towers as Covid-19 restrictions are lifted. These notes may assist incumbents, church officers and church bell ringers; they do not intend to provide comprehensive information about health and safety or risk assessments generally. Few churches were designed or built to comply with current legislation and many are extremely historic and vulnerable structures. Ringers may be in churches at times when the building is otherwise unoccupied, and also in parts of the building that are separate and less accessible from the rest of the building.

Most towers with one or more bells are within the jurisdiction of the Church of England. The notes therefore focus on these but the issues are likely to apply to rings of bells in towers owned by other organisations, in churches of other denominations, and also churches elsewhere in the world. The notes apply broadly to all bells and towers, whether a single bell, more than one bell hung for full circle ringing, or bells rung by other mechanisms, such as chimes. Local advice, legislation and circumstances should always be taken into account.

## **Responsibility for health and safety**

It is important to note that the responsibility for safety and risk assessment in a church building rests with the church authorities. Normally, the Incumbent will appoint a “Responsible Person” for Health and safety matters and they are likely to be preparing the risk assessment and plan for using the church after closure due to Covid-19.

First, while in the church and bell tower, ringers should respect the arrangements set out by the church following Government guidance. Secondly, ringers need to use their experience and knowledge of ringing and bell installations to assist the church authorities to carry out and implement additional precautions in the tower and during ringing. It is essential that the ringers work together with the church authorities on this and that the church authorities date the record of the assessment and update as advice is amended.

This note therefore helps the church and ringers enable an initial return to ringing the bells. This could concern a single bell, manual chimes or change ringing bells. The notes may assist incumbents, church officers and church bell ringers; they do not intend to provide comprehensive information about health and safety or risk assessments generally. How many and which bells can be rung, by whom and for how long will depend on local factors. These notes aim to help ringers and churches prepare a risk assessment that will help to determine whether any ringing will be feasible and if so, with what practical arrangements.

## 1. MECHANICAL CHECKS

- a) Before any bells are rung, it is recommended strongly that the condition of the bells and tower are checked. See the companion document (Document 2) in this set.
- b) The assessment and implementation of access restrictions and hygiene requirements apply to those doing the checks as well as those who wish to ring the bells.

## 2. GENERAL ORGANISATION

- a) These notes aim to help the tower captain (or an experienced person delegated responsibility for the tower and bells by the Incumbent) and person responsible in the church for preparation of the plan. They will need to take into account local and national guidance, discuss and agree the plans with the Incumbent and church officers.
- b) The tower captain will brief the ringers to be involved, ideally through a written procedure, based on this plan, in advance and again on arrival at the church. This is so that they understand and agree to the arrangements, what will be expected of them and what will not be permitted.
- c) The briefing also provides an opportunity for them to ask questions to clarify what is involved and resolve any concerns that they may have.
- d) After a long silence, it is advisable for the Incumbent and ringers to alert church neighbours and the local community that limited ringing will be resuming at specific times, and that the ringing may sound “different” from normal ringing, at least for an initial period.
- e) Ringers are requested to not ring before the plan is agreed and in place. They should also follow national publicity, coordinated by the CCCBR as there may be an agreed time and date when ringing may be restarted, where this is feasible.

## 3. SPECIFIC ARRANGEMENTS TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE PLANNING – THESE ALL AIM TO MINIMISE THE RISK OF VIRUS TRANSMISSION

- a) **Anyone with Covid symptoms, who has tested positive or been in contact with anyone with symptoms, must not participate until they have self-isolated for the recommended time (2 weeks)**
- b) Routes into and out of the tower should be marked so that maintaining 2m spacing is ensured. Emergency exit routes and signage should be added to indicate how they are to be used.

- c) Liaise with the church officer to ensure that other people will not use the same access for over 72 hours before or after. Or that arrangements are in place for cleaning.
- d) Maximise natural ventilation in the ringing room during ringing, to ensure that any infectious aerosols will be diluted and flushed out. Consider very carefully whether ringing should occur at all in towers with very small or no windows that can be opened. Do not use air-conditioning equipment. (Fans may assist with air circulation but do not necessarily change the air)
- e) Ropes to be used should be at least 2m apart to comply with current Government guidance. Measure this accurately so that you are sure where ringers will stand and move during any ringing. Mark this out on a floor plan, ideally on the floor if this can be done safely and without lasting damage to the floor surface. In most towers this will only enable only a few bells to be used while maintaining “social distancing”. As well as spacing, consider seriously the sound that will be heard by neighbours; use only musical combinations of bells, but only where they are 2m apart.
- f) Avoid using heavy bells that would require considerable effort to ring or ring up to avoid risk of exhaled droplets.
- g) The age profile of ringers is such that some will be cautious about any risk of infection for themselves and those of others in their household. Some may therefore be unwilling to ring, even if invited to do so.
- h) The ringers should be sufficiently experienced and competent that there is no need for tutors or helpers, to eliminate the risk of sharing ropes and minimise the number of people involved. Regrettably, do not invite learners or recent starters who could lose control or need help.
- i) Remember that after a long break, even experienced ringers may take a while to get comfortable ringing their bell.
- j) Ringing will be for specific purposes only agreed with the Incumbent, and for a short period, no more than 15 minutes.
- k) Advise ringers that in the limited time they will only ring up, ring a short touch and ring down. Pre-plan what it may be feasible to ring given the constraints.
- l) Try to involve ringers local to the tower (to minimise interactions and travel distance). Members from the same household will reduce the likelihood of mixing.

- m) Plan one band only with a named individual ringer for each bell – there will be no standing out to avoid different people handling the same rope.
- n) Any ringers prone to cough or sneeze should not be included in the band. If the ringing room is inherently dusty, and likely to cause sneezing, consider whether ringing should occur. (Ringers can't "catch" a sneeze while ringing or may be tempted to try and then lose control)
- o) **SPITTING ON HANDS OR ROPES IS NOT PERMITTED.** Anyone who does this habitually and involuntarily, is best advised that they are not included in the band.
- p) The ringers should be able to access the ringing room without the assistance of another person. The only exception may be 2 people from the same household who are both planned to ring.
- q) Arrange for ringers to arrive at the designated time using appropriate transport – no shared cars except by household groups, on foot or cycle (minimise contact with others)
- r) All ringers should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water prior to ringing. Do not share towels etc. Run taps for several seconds if the water has not been run for a day or more. Or use hand sanitiser where this is not possible.
- s) Agree by phone / email etc what is to be rung prior to arriving at the tower. Since it is unlikely that all bells will be rung in a tower, only very simple ringing is likely to be possible. Concentrate on striking, for the benefit of neighbours, in particular.
- t) Do not share books, phones or other physical items. Minimise the handling of items in the ringing room. If appropriate and feasible, mark off areas to be used and areas to be avoided. In some towers items such as church furniture have to be moved to enable access to the ropes; in such towers it may be decided that this poses too great a risk of creating dust, sneezing and transmission of the virus.
- a) If required, ringers should agree to use protective equipment correctly. Each ringer should wear a face covering, put on before entering the church and removed only after leaving the church. Use a suitable washing / disposal facility. Consider most towers to be more akin to public transport as a guide to what protection to adopt. Note that gloves do not provide any protection.

The risk of sneezing and heavier breathing while ringing makes use of a face covering desirable. Avoid touching your face or face covering whilst wearing it.

- u) Sessions in one tower should be timed to occur more than 72hours apart (to reduce viability of the virus). Similarly, ringers ringing at more than one tower in one day, tower “grabs” and ringing outings should not occur.
- v) To accommodate more people, arrange a different band for subsequent sessions. Tower captains may need to discuss plans for ringing with others in the local area to enable towers to accommodate ringers wishing to ring in suitable churches.
- w) This is not the time to resume teaching. However, a learner and a tutor from a single household may be accommodated when restrictions are partially lifted, in a specific session, while still implementing all other precautions, and using a simulator.
- x) Minimise speaking (especially shouting) to reduce the risk of droplet spread.

#### 4. ACCESS TO CHURCH

- a) Arrange for ringers to arrive at the church at the agreed time, ready for being reminded of the briefing.
- b) Where possible, access the bells via an external door (and staircase), to minimise contact with other church users.
- c) If bells are only accessible from inside the church (via stairs, or ground floor ring), liaise with the church officer, in particular to “stagger” arrival times for other users, to avoid a crowd using the same door.
- d) Abide by any registration system in place (eg for track & trace, emergency purposes and safeguarding)

#### 5. STAIRCASE ACCESS TO RINGING ROOM

- a) As much as possible, maximise the number of air changes through the staircase – open any windows and leave open intermediate doors. Make sure that *ad hoc* arrangements are safe and will not cause other hazards.
- b) Leave at least a 2m gap between consecutive people and do not allow people to cross on the staircase
- c) Use a quality hand sanitiser (high alcohol content) prior to and after ascending, then prior to and after descending.

#### 6. VIRUS HYGIENE DURING RINGING

- a) Open doors and/or windows to create a gentle draught but avoid a strong draught that could blow ropes or dislodge things.

- b) Use a (minimum residue) hand sanitiser and do not use creams or lotions that leave residues on ropes. Alcohol 60% - 70% is recommended. Allow it to dry as per the instructions (maybe 15s – 20s) so there is no residue and any flammable vapours have dispersed and certainly before operating any switches.
- c) Minimise the sharing of items e.g.
  - a. One person only, operates the rope spider
  - b. One person only, operates the door handle, windows, light switches etc.
  - c. One pen per person for any attendance book or preferably a “virtual” book. Or only one person completes the attendance records.
  - d. Do not allow any refreshments, sweets etc in the tower. If essential, individuals may bring their own water in a bottle.

## 7. RINGING

- a) Whoever rings the bell up, rings it to the end of the session and then rings it down.
- b) Ensure the ropes used are at least as far apart as the prevailing social distancing rule (2m)
- c) Please consider the listeners and ensure the quality of the ringing and choice of bells sounds makes a pleasant even if unusual sound.
- d) Face the centre of the circle rather than the ringer you are following
- e) Minimise loud speaking to reduce risk of exhaled droplets (aerosols). This is a particular consideration for the conductor with loud bells or with ringers who are hard-of-hearing.
- f) In the unlikely event of someone losing control, helping recover the bell takes precedence over transmission risk. DO NOT RING AGAIN UNTIL any risk of virus transmission has been minimised (hand washing etc, as appropriate) and actions have been taken to prevent a similar incident recurring.
- g) Face coverings will muffle commands, so keep the ringing simple.
- h) If you lower a “service bell” rope. Beware of multiple handling.

## 8. GENERAL REMINDERS

- a) Many people infected by Covid-19 will show no symptoms but can spread the virus.
- b) The virus is spread through droplet transmission from breath, through talking, and especially through shouting, coughing, sneezing and hard breathing.
- c) Anyone can spread the virus via their hands from shared objects.
- d) Avoid touching your face.
- e) Wash your hands before leaving home, on arrival at the tower, before leaving and on returning home.
- f) The virus can stay live on hard surfaces such as plastics, tables or stone walls for at least 72 hours
- g) The virus stays live on soft surfaces e.g. paper or sallies (and pets) for up to 24 hours

#### 9. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- b) Please do not neglect routine health and safety, safeguarding and other requirements such as protection of personal data, while implementing specific measures associated with Covid-19