

## Frequently asked questions on COVID-19 Guidance

*Note that these FAQs sometimes refer to “Government” and “Church” advice. The former refers to the UK Government making guidance that applies in England and the latter to the Church of England within England itself. Governmental advice in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is published by the appropriate devolved administrations and other countries outside the UK (including Isle of Man and Channel Islands) also have different regulations.*

### **Our area has had extra restrictions imposed. Can we still ring?**

All restrictions imposed by Governments override guidance either from our Churches or the Central Council. The UK’s ‘Rule of Six’ (in its various forms) for instance is a legal restriction aimed at reducing social contact, rather than guidance.

If (as in the North East of England at the end of September and parts of Lancashire shortly thereafter) no indoor mixing of different families is allowed, then it appears that it would be illegal for anyone other than members of the same family to ring, even if church services are allowed. Places of worship do not appear to have been given a specific exemption. The position is unclear, although the UK Government’s intention is clearly to reduce social contact in non-essential settings, citing work and education as the only exemptions.

Elsewhere, if extra restrictions (but still allowing six to meet indoors) have been imposed where you live, then the transmission of Coronavirus is high, and the level of risk greater. The CCCBR’s guidelines do aim to be “Covid-Secure”, but you need to make a local risk assessment (focussing especially on the size and ventilation of your tower and the characteristics of your ringers) to decide if it is appropriate to ring – *and it may well not be*. Remember that the final decision rests with the Incumbent.

### **The guidance says we could ring but our Vicar and PCC say no. What should we do?**

The final decision on whether the bells of a church may be rung lies with the minister (Canons of the Church of England 7<sup>th</sup> ed Section F8(2)), so if the Vicar says you may not ring his or her word is final.

### **Can’t we just form a social bubble comprising the members of our band?**

Current Government guidance only recognises “support bubbles”. These are where a single person (or a single adult with dependent children) can join with one other household and be treated essentially as one household. However, all of the members of that support bubble can only be a member of that one support bubble. They can’t also mix freely or closely with those from elsewhere.

In the unlikely event that a band consisted of one family living together plus one other person who lived alone then that would be acceptable under the current guidance.

Any future changes to the concept of social bubbles will be reviewed to see what effect it could have for ringing.

**Social distancing has been reduced in many situations to 1m+. Why is ringing staying at 2m?**

Just before infection levels started increasing again in early September, we had reached agreement in principle (with the Church of England specifically) to reduce the distance between ropes to 1m provided mitigations are in place, particularly the wearing of face coverings. This is currently on hold.

**Do you have any evidence whatsoever that the virus is safe in 15mins but dangerous suddenly after the 15min mark?**

No. The risk of catching the infection is related to the time spent in the presence of someone who is carrying and shedding the virus into the air. There is no specific cut off but the exposure during a 30 minute period is likely to be twice that in 15 minutes and so on. In a poorly ventilated space the levels of any virus dispersed into aerosol form will tend to build up with time as well. The guidance used in contact tracing defines a significant contact as being with someone within 2m for more than 15 minutes so this was a sensible cut off point. It is also an amount of ringing time that is viable for a service.

**We are not going to be able to ring our bells up, ring some rounds or changes, and then ring the bells down in 15 minutes. Can we ring for longer?**

15 minutes is the current limit unfortunately. Some bands are arranging to ring bells up the day before ringing (with the incumbent's permission) and then have more time actually ringing on the Sunday.

**Why can't we just put up Perspex screens like they do in shops?**

While Perspex may well reduce the risks from people coughing or sneezing at you in some settings they do not in themselves prevent aerosols moving about and might even disrupt what natural airflows there are in ringing rooms. More importantly the risks of ropes catching or the screens moving during ringing are significant. After extensive discussion with Public Health England it has been agreed that Perspex or similar screens should **not** be used as a mitigation measure in a ringing setting.

We have also considered the use of face visors and do **not** recommend the use of visors while ringing for similar reasons.

**What is the CCCBR doing to help get us ringing again?**

Since the initial total lockdown, the CCCBR has achieved the first step, of getting ringing for services started once more.

The next stages are going to be much more complex, because there will be considerable variation between districts, towers and ringers. The working group is taking the opportunity of the current second wave (which has slowed down the liberalisation of restrictions) to plan in detail successive steps, and to put in place resources and support for local decision making.

**Early guidance talked about just ringing for Sunday service. Can we ring for a wedding?**

Yes you can. As long as the ringing is permitted by the Incumbent and follows the guidance, it does not have to be for a Sunday service. Remember though if ringing is going to take place the following day as well, e.g. Sunday after a Saturday wedding, you will need to have same ringers again on the same bells because of the '48 hours between ringing' restriction.

**We are a ground floor ring with a large East door. Surely we can ring for longer as there is less risk?**

We cannot yet give different guidance for different ringing chambers. This would lead to too much inconsistent interpretation of the guidance. It may be possible in due course to view well ventilated ground floor rings differently but not at the moment.

**Can we ring for longer on a simulator if it is individual practice?**

One person ringing alone could ring for as long as they like but not safely of course. Two people from the same family or social bubble could ring for as long as they liked.

Two unconnected people, socially distanced, with mitigation of face covering and good hand hygiene in a large ventilated space, is relatively low risk. As you get up to more people you ought to be bringing the time down to the 15 minutes that we have overall agreement for, because it is all about aerosol dispersion in the air. You should also include taking people's contact details (I know you do anyway) so you can trace if anyone subsequently develops Covid. Even ringing silently on a simulator should be with the incumbent's permission or churchwardens' knowledge, as you are in the church building.

**How do we get this guidance across to young ringers who might not want to study the detail?**

Parents are responsible for ensuring that their children are safe at all times and especially in the current circumstances. Parents will need to understand and explain to their children, especially the younger ones. Older ones could be encouraged to read it as well themselves, depending on the individual's and parent's wishes. Where the parents are ringers, they will appreciate what ringing involves and will have to read and understand the procedures for themselves anyway. It could be more difficult and time consuming for parents who are not ringers to understand and explain to their children. Tower captains therefore will have the duty to ensure that parents and children are content with the arrangements.

**I find this really confusing and it all seems unfair!**

You are not alone in feeling like that. Although the Government seems to have lifted many restrictions all at once they have to some extent taken the approach of trying to relax restrictions in some areas to see how things go. Now we are finding restrictions being increased in some locations as restrictions may have been lifted

too far. We are actually better off than some activities - church and cathedral choirs aren't able to sing even in services.

Some of the confusion arises from the way in which new and old advice fits together and how announcements may be made some time before new changes come into effect. The best places to find up to date guidance are

- <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus> - for HM Government advice
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july> - for specific HM Government guidance relating to places of worship including churches
- <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/media-centre/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-churches> - for central Church of England advice
- <https://cccbr.org.uk/coronavirus/> - for advice from the CCCBR agreed with the CofE
- Your local Diocesan website for any local variations