



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

Updated 23rd May 2021

NOTE

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

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

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

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.

The current return to ringing (post 17th May 2021) is predicated on low levels of virus circulation in the community (due to the prolonged lockdown) and to the high efficacy of vaccines to the variants currently in circulation. This means that the probability of an infectious person meeting a vulnerable one in a tower is extremely low. In turn this means

that many of the onerous strategies previously used to minimise viral transmission (and which may well be necessary again in the future) are currently less necessary.

Introduction

This guidance note offers advice about specific issues that are likely to affect bell ringers and bell towers when they consider ringing the bells in towers as Covid-19 restrictions are amended. 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 and updating risk assessments and plans for using the church as restrictions are amended 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.

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 the most recent 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.

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) or tested negative by PCR.**
- 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) Maximise natural ventilation in the ringing room during ringing, to ensure that any infectious aerosols will be diluted and flushed out. (Fans may assist with air circulation but do not necessarily change the air)
- d) Maintain 2 metre social distancing at all times, except that when ringing 1 metre with mitigations is acceptable.
- e) The ringers should be sufficiently experienced and competent that there is no need for tutors or helpers. Regrettably, do not invite learners or recent starters who could lose control or need help.

- f) Ringing can be for any purpose agreed with the Incumbent, and current guidance is that this be for 45 minutes, except if ventilation is particularly good or if ringing is for the purpose of assessing this ventilation.
- g) 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.
- h) All ringers should wash their hands prior to ringing or use hand sanitiser where this is not possible.
- i) Ringers should wear face coverings whilst ringing. This is a legal requirement in a Place of Worship.
- j) 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.
- k) Teaching handling is best postponed till after June 21st. However if it does take place, consider wearing FFP3 masks (see above).

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 (e.g. 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. WHILE RINGING

- a) Open doors and/or windows to create a gentle draught.
- b) Use a (minimum residue) hand sanitiser. Alcohol 70% is recommended. It is not effective until it's dry, so there should be no issue with getting ropes wet.
- c) Ensure the ropes used comply with the social distancing requirements given in 3e) above.

7. GENERAL REMINDERS

- a) A third of 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.

8. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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