

COVID-19 Advice for the conduct of Confirmation services

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12 th January 2021	4.5	The House of Bishops Recovery Group
Update from version 4.4: this document has been reviewed following the announcement by the Government of a new national lockdown on the 4 th January.		

The Recovery Group has been set up to support the Church of England as government guidance changes through the COVID-19 pandemic. This document has been prepared with information available by the issue date. It will be kept under review and updated as the situation develops, with each update issued as a new version. The current version will always be available to download from the Church of England website via the [Coronavirus FAQs page](#).

The following advice is intended to assist clergy in preparing for a confirmation service, which may include baptism and/or other rites of initiation. It is not exhaustive but addresses essential issues that should be considered. In many cases confirmation will take place in a service of Holy Communion. This guidance will need to be read alongside that for public worship in general and (if relevant) that for Holy Communion, both of which can be found [here](#).

1. What should I do before the Confirmation?

- It is important that interaction with the candidates must be done as safely as possible. This might mean meeting via video link or talking on the telephone. If face-to-face meetings are held, please follow the [government guidance](#) on working in other people's homes and ensure that everyone adheres to physical distancing requirements and that numbers are limited, preferably to a minimum. Such meetings should not be held in the home of anyone who is self-isolating or who is in a vulnerable group.
- It is important to be careful about sharing documents, books, photos etc. and to remember to wash hands thoroughly before and after the meeting.
- The health implications for those in a vulnerable group should be discussed and if some people in these groups intend to be present at the confirmation, their welfare should be of paramount importance. Actions will include advising other attendees that there is a vulnerable person attending, reminding them to take particular care in observing physical distancing and refraining from attending themselves if they feel unwell. If someone from a vulnerable group intends to be present, they should be advised to travel to the church in the safest way possible, preferably in a car by themselves or with someone from their household.

2. How many people can attend the Confirmation service?

- For a confirmation the limits should be decided locally on the basis of the capacity of the place of worship, following a risk assessment in the same way as for public worship.
- The Government has re-introduced a three tier system of Covid risk areas. In all tiers Places of Worship can remain open and confirmations can continue. However, in tiers 2 and 3 (high and very high risk areas) the 'rule of six' does not apply. In these areas individuals,

households and support bubbles can attend worship but must not mingle with others and physical distancing should be maintained.

- In tier 1 areas there should be no mingling between groups of six and even within those groups, people should continue to physically distance from people they are not living with or are not part of a support bubble with.
- These restrictions mean that gatherings will inevitably be small, and it is likely that in most dioceses additional services will be required to accommodate the number of candidates, where normally confirmations are large and include many if not all to be confirmed in a deanery. It is recommended that dioceses hold more confirmation services where only a few candidates are confirmed at a time.

3. Should face coverings be worn?

- Face coverings are currently mandatory on public transport and in a range of indoor venues including Places of Worship and church halls. While there are exemptions (please see our [guidance document on face coverings](#)) **this is a legal requirement.**
- Those who are leading services or events in a place of worship, and those who assist them (for instance by reading, preaching, or leading prayer) do not always need to wear a face covering, although one should be worn especially if physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- These exemptions are made to enable communication, particularly with those who rely on lip-reading, facial expressions or clear sound; they do not exempt clergy and other leaders from wearing face coverings in other situations or during other activities.

4. What special steps should be taken during the Confirmation?

Given the restrictions on numbers attending, clergy might wish to consider ways in which others may be able to join the service, perhaps through an audio or video link. If this is not possible a recording of the service might be appropriate.

The Government has advised that:

- Where singing or chanting is essential to an act of worship, this should be limited to one person wherever possible. Exceptionally, where it is essential to the service, up to three individuals should be permitted to do so. Strict social distancing should be observed and the use of Plexiglass screens should be considered to protect worshippers, and each other.
- Communal (congregational) singing should not take place indoors or outdoors. This applies even if social distancing is being observed or face coverings are used.

In addition:

- It is important for clergy to be mindful of their own personal hygiene – please wash your hands before and after, and avoid using communal Bibles etc.
- Face coverings should be worn by everyone, especially where physical distancing cannot be observed e.g. if a member of clergy and a candidate are gathered at the font.

- Care should be taken to ensure that physical distancing can be observed, not only with respect to seating and positioning of the ministers, candidates, and congregation, but also in terms of entry and exit control, WC provision, and hand sanitising. Members of households should avoid social mixing including at parts of the service where physical distancing is difficult. The capacity of any church or cathedral will therefore be dependent on its ability to provide adequate social distancing as well as its overall size. All public health advice must be followed. Appropriate cleaning of the venues will be required after each service.
- As a consequence of these restrictions, it may not be appropriate for members of the congregation to move about during the service (for instance, to the font).
- It may be preferable that candidates come to the place of confirmation individually, rather than as a group.
- The laying-on of hands is a significant act at the centre of the Confirmation and will have great significance both to the candidate and to those who support them. It is also the moment at which the greatest care must be taken with safety precautions, for the bishop lays hands upon the head of the candidate (not nearby or above it). He or she should therefore sanitize hands before and after each candidate. Special care must be taken to minimise the number of participants in this action, to keep the contact brief, to ensure distance between those taking part, and to ensure that hands are clean and uncontaminated.
- In some churches candidates are anointed with oil. This is an optional component of the service. If anointing is done, oil should be applied with a single-use implement which can be thoroughly cleaned or disposed of.
- If a candle is given as part of the ceremony, the presenting person should sanitize their hands before and after doing so.

If a candidate is being baptized as part of the service:

- The bishop or minister should sanitize their hands before and after the Signing with the Cross on the candidate.
- Water should be poured over the candidate's head using an appropriate implement to pour the water such as a shell. Unfortunately, baptisms by immersion cannot be safely conducted at present.
- No one should sign themselves with the baptismal water or be sprinkled with the water after the baptism.

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