

COVID-19: Guidance for the safe use of multi-purpose community facilities

Please note: This guidance is of a general nature and should be treated as a guide. In the event of any conflict between any applicable legislation (including the health and safety legislation) and this guidance, the applicable legislation shall prevail.

1. Introduction

Community centres, village halls, and other multi-use community facilities support a wide range of local activity. However, their communal nature also makes them places that are vulnerable to the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

This information is for those managing multi-use community facilities. It signposts to relevant guidance on a range of different activities that can take place in these spaces, in line with the [government's roadmap](#) to ease the existing measures to tackle COVID-19.

Until 4 July, community centres will be closed except where they are used to provide the following permitted activities:

(a) essential voluntary activities or urgent public support services (including the provision of food banks or other support for the homeless or vulnerable people, blood donation sessions or support in an emergency), or

(b) early years childcare provided by a person registered on the Early Years Register under Part 3 of the Childcare Act 2006, or

(c) to host an indoor market

The government will allow community centres and other multi-use community facilities to open on 4 July.

Managers of community facilities will have discretion over when they consider it safe to open for any activity permitted by legislation and may decide to remain closed if they are not able to safely follow the advice in the relevant guidance, to make the space COVID-19 secure.

Many community facilities are also workplaces and those responsible for the premises should therefore be aware of their [responsibilities as employers](#). The government is clear that no one is obliged to work in an unsafe workplace.

Organisations also have a duty of care to volunteers to ensure as far as reasonably practicable they are not exposed to risks to their health and safety and are afforded the same level of protection as employees and the self-employed. See government information on [coronavirus volunteering and how to help safely](#). Volunteers and other individuals who are shielding should continue to follow the government's [advice on shielding](#).

Each community facility should apply relevant guidance listed here, locally, depending on circumstances, including its size and type of activities it hosts, its users, how it is organised, operated, managed and regulated.

You should also consider the security implications of any changes you intend to make as a result of COVID -19.

Some key principles relevant to owners, operators and managers of multi-use indoor community facilities are highlighted below.

2. Core principles for safely reopening community facilities

Community facilities are used for a range of purposes, and relevant guidance on specific activities is signposted below (section 3). However, there are general principles that managers of community spaces should follow in making their space COVID-19 secure, and safely re-opening for permitted activity.

Any reopening plans should be consistent with:

- [core public health guidance](#) regarding health, hygiene, and [social distancing](#)
- [safe workplace guidelines](#), to ensure employees are safe to return to work

Anyone with control of non-domestic premises (such as a community centre, village or community hall) has legal responsibilities under health and safety law, and must take reasonable measures to ensure the premises, access to it, and any equipment or substances provided are safe for people using it, so far as is reasonably practicable.

To help decide which actions to take prior to re-opening the building for permitted activity, a **COVID-19 risk assessment should be completed**, taking account of the core guidance on social distancing and the points set out below. This will be in addition to any risk assessment which is already in place for the community facility. See guidance on [completing a risk assessment](#).

Users and hirers of a community facility have responsibility for managing risks arising from their own activities when they have control of premises and should take account of any guidance relevant to their specific activity or sector.

2a: Social distancing and capacity

Measures should be in place to ensure all users of community facilities follow the guidelines on social distancing, including **strict adherence to social distancing** of 2 metres or 1 metre with risk mitigation (where 2 metres is not viable) are acceptable. You should consider and set out the mitigations you will introduce in your risk assessment.

The size and circumstance of the premises will determine the maximum number of people that can be accommodated while also facilitating social distancing. In defining the number of people that can reasonably follow 2 metres distancing (or 1 metre with risk mitigation), the total floorspace as well as likely pinch points and busy areas should be taken into account (e.g. entrances, exits) and where possible alternative or one-way routes introduced.

From 4 July, users of community facilities should limit their social interactions to 2 households (including [support bubbles](#)) in any location; or, if outdoors, potentially up to 6 people from different households. It will be against the law for gatherings of more than 30 people to take place.

However, premises or locations which are COVID-19 secure will be able to hold more than 30 people, subject to their own capacity limits, although any individual groups should not interact with anyone outside of the group they are attending the venue with – so in a group no larger than 2 households or 6 people if outdoors.

Where gatherings have more than 30 people, those operating venues should take additional steps to ensure the safety of the public and prevent large gatherings or mass events from taking place. At this time, venues should not permit indoor performances, including drama, comedy and music, to take place in front of a live audience.

A risk assessment should determine the maximum capacity of a hall or hire space while able to maintain social distancing according to the relevant guidelines. It should also identify points of high risk in the building and mitigating actions to address the identified risks. Centre managers should also consider what changes might be needed to enable safe access to the building. These may include:

- **Making use of multiple exit and entry points:** to introduce a one-way flow in and out of the premises, with appropriate floor markings or signage. Any changes to entrances, exits and queues should take into account the need to make reasonable adjustments for those who need them, such as people with disabilities.
- **Managing the arrival and departure times** of different group so as to reduce the pressure at exits and entrances.
- **Queue management:** the flow of groups in and out of the premises should be carefully controlled to reduce the risk of congestion. It may be necessary to introduce socially distanced queuing systems.

You should make users aware of, and encouraging compliance with, limits on gatherings. For example, on arrival or at booking. Indoor gatherings are limited to members of any 2 households (or support bubbles); while outdoor gatherings are limited to members of any 2 households (or support bubbles), or a group of at most 6 people from any number of households.

Further guidance on how to manage visitors and customers can be found in the [BEIS guidance on workplaces](#).

Individual businesses or venues should consider the cumulative impact of many venues re-opening in a small area. This means working with local authorities, neighbouring businesses and travel operators to assess this risk and applying additional mitigations. These could include:

- Further lowering capacity – even if it is possible to safely seat a number of people inside a venue, it may not be safe for them all to travel or enter that venue.
- Staggering entry times with other venues and taking steps to avoid queues building up in surrounding areas.
- Arranging one-way travel routes between transport hubs and venues.
- Advising patrons to avoid particular forms of transport or routes and to avoid crowded areas when in transit to the venue.

Local authorities should avoid issuing licenses for events that could lead to larger gatherings forming and provide advice to businesses on how to manage events of this type. If appropriate, the government has powers under schedule 22 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 to close venues hosting large gatherings or prohibit certain events (or types of event) from taking place.

2b: Cleaning

All surfaces, especially those most frequently touched, should be cleaned regularly, using standard cleaning products. If you are cleaning after a known or suspected case of COVID-19 then you should refer to the specific [guidance](#).

Sufficient time needs to be allowed for this cleaning to take place, particularly before reopening. Frequently used objects, surfaces or spaces, including for example doorways between outside and inside spaces should be given particular attention when cleaning.

Where possible, non-fire doors and windows should be opened to improve ventilation in the premises. Other measures that will usually be needed are:

- signs and posters to build awareness of good handwashing technique, the need to increase handwashing frequency, advice to avoid touching your face and to cough or sneeze into a tissue which is binned safely, or into your arm if a tissue is not available;
- providing hand sanitiser in multiple locations, such as reception areas, in addition to washrooms
- setting clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets to ensure they are kept clean and social distancing is achieved as much as possible; and
- providing hand drying facilities (paper towels or electrical dryers)

2c: Hygiene and face coverings

On entering and leaving a community facility everyone, including staff, should be asked to **wash their hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds using soap and water** or to use hand sanitiser if hand washing facilities are not available.

If you can, you should wear a [face covering](#) in enclosed public spaces where social distancing isn't possible and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet, such as a community facility. This is most relevant for short periods indoors in crowded areas.

Evidence suggests that wearing a face covering does not protect you. However, if you are infected but have not yet developed symptoms, it may provide some protection for others you come into close contact with. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you and your household must isolate at home; wearing a face covering does not change this.

Face coverings do not replace social distancing. Even if a face covering is used, staff and users of the space should continue to wash hands regularly and maintain social distancing. If users of the space choose to wear one, it is important to use face coverings properly and thoroughly wash hands before putting them on and taking them off.

Please note, a face covering is not the same as the surgical masks or respirators used by healthcare and other workers as part of personal protective equipment. These should continue to be reserved for those who need them to protect against risks in their workplace, such as health and care workers, and those in industrial settings, like those exposed to dust hazards.

Face coverings should not be used by children under the age of 3 or those who may find it difficult to manage them correctly – see a [list of individuals this might apply to](#).

You should be prepared to remove your face covering if asked to do so by police officers and staff for the purposes of identification.

2d: Vulnerable people

Certain groups of people are at increased risk of severe disease from coronavirus (COVID-19), including all people aged 70 or over. Such individuals are advised to stay at home as much as possible and, if they do go out, to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside of their household.

2e: Toilets

Public toilets, portable toilets and toilets inside premises should be kept open and carefully managed to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

Steps that will usually be needed:

- Using signs and posters to build awareness of good handwashing technique, the need to increase handwashing frequency and to avoid touching your face, and to cough or sneeze into a tissue which is binned safely, or into your arm if a tissue is not available.
- Consider the use of social distancing marking in areas where queues normally form, and the adoption of a limited entry approach, with one in, one out (whilst avoiding the creation of additional bottlenecks).
- To enable good hand hygiene consider making hand sanitiser available on entry to toilets where safe and practical, and ensure suitable handwashing facilities including running water and liquid soap and suitable options for drying (either paper towels or hand driers) are available.
- Setting clear use and cleaning guidance for toilets, with increased frequency of cleaning in line with usage. Use normal cleaning products, paying attention to frequently hand touched surfaces, and consider use of disposable cloths or paper roll to clean all hard surfaces.
- Keep the facilities well ventilated, for example by fixing doors open where appropriate.
- Special care should be taken for cleaning of portable toilets and larger toilet blocks.

- Putting up a visible cleaning schedule can keep it up to date and visible.
- Providing more waste facilities and more frequent rubbish collection.

2f: Noise

All venues should ensure that steps are taken to avoid people needing to unduly raise their voices to each other. This includes – but is not limited to – refraining from playing music or broadcasts that may encourage shouting, including if played at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult. This is because of the potential for increased risk of transmission – particularly from aerosol and droplet transmission.

We will develop further guidance, based on scientific evidence, to enable these activities as soon as possible. You should take similar steps to prevent other close contact activities – such as communal dancing.

2g: Track and Trace (collecting customer data)

The opening up of the economy following the COVID-19 outbreak is being supported by NHS Test and Trace. You should assist this service by keeping a temporary record of your customers and visitors for 21 days, in a way that is manageable for your business, and assist NHS Test and Trace with requests for that data if needed. This could help contain clusters or outbreaks.

Many businesses that take bookings already have systems for recording their customers and visitors – including restaurants, hotels, and hair salons. If you do not already do this, you should do so to help fight the virus. We will work with industry and relevant bodies to design this system in line with data protection legislation, and set out details shortly.

2h: Travel and parking

Car parks are permitted to be open and managers of premises and councils should consider practical measures such as changing the car park layout to help people socially distance. Decisions to reopen car parks are to be made locally.

Face coverings are now [mandatory on public transport](#), apart from those who meet the [exceptions](#). Guidance on social distancing relevant to transport, parking and the public realm can be found below.

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): safer public places – urban centres and green spaces](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): safer travel guidance for passengers](#)

3. Permitted activities in multi-use community facilities: signposting to relevant guidance

Community facilities such as community centres and village halls are used for a wide range of local activities and services – from childcare provision to hosting social and recreational clubs. In line with the government's recovery roadmap, different activities are subject to specific reviews and guidance on when and how they are permitted to resume. Where a premises delivers a mix of services, only those services that are permitted to be open should be available.

Those managing community facilities, and those using community facilities for the following activities, should take account of the relevant guidance below:

3a: Early years and youth provision

Community facilities which serve as premises for early years provision and childcare have been allowed to open for this purpose from 1 June. Providers of these services in community facilities should follow the relevant government guidance:

- [Planning guide for early years and childcare settings](#)

- [Actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus outbreak](#)
- [Implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings](#)

From 4 July, community facilities can also open for the provision of other services for children and young people, however they should ensure that people from different households can socially distance from anyone they do not live with or who is not in their support bubble, and should not facilitate indoor sports or fitness activity.

3b: Voluntary sector and other service provision

Community facilities are currently able to open for essential voluntary activities and urgent public services, such as food banks, homeless services, and blood donation sessions. Any provision should be conducted in line with the core principles of social distancing and shielding for clinically vulnerable people set out above.

3c: Recreation, leisure and social gatherings

From 4 July, clubs or groups that use community facilities can begin to meet again and facility managers should follow these COVID-19 secure guidelines to facilitate that.

Premises or locations which are COVID-19 secure will be able to hold more than 30 people, subject to their own capacity limits, although any individual groups should not interact with anyone outside of the group they are attending the venue with – so in a group no larger than 2 households or 6 people if outdoors.

People meeting in a club or group context at a community centre should be encouraged to socially distance from anyone they do not live with or who is not in their support bubble. In general, people are being advised to only:

- meet indoors in groups of up to 2 households
- meet outdoors in a group of no more than 2 households (including your support bubble) or in a group of up to 6 people from different households.

Community facilities should therefore not facilitate large gatherings or celebrations. See [guidance on weddings](#). We recognise the importance of social clubs for some individuals and recommend that these can proceed with caution in venues that have been made COVID-19 secure.

Before 4 July, these activities are not permitted.

Community facilities should not permit live performances, including drama, comedy and music, to take place in front of a live audience. This is important to mitigate the risks of droplets and aerosol transmission – from either the performer(s) or their audience. There will be further guidance setting out how performing arts activity can be managed safely in other settings, for instance rehearsing or broadcast without an audience.

Indoor community facilities should also not permit sports activities that would typically take place in a gym, sports venue, or a fitness or dancing studio – these venues have not yet been permitted to open.

3d: Meetings and civic functions

We continue to recommend that where meetings can take place digitally without the need for face-to-face contact, they should continue to do so. Where community facilities need to be used for physical meetings, these meetings should be managed within the social distancing guidance and principles set out above.

The principles set out in the 'Safer workplaces' guidance apply, including but not limited to:

- meetings of civic, political or community groups (e.g. parish council meeting, ward meeting of political party; charity board of trustees)
- MP or councillor surgery/drop-in sessions. The government is discouraging unnecessary physical attendance at meetings. Where necessary to take place physically, participants should maintain 2 metres (or 1 metre with risk mitigation) separation throughout
- public meetings and local consultations (e.g. planning)

Local authorities in England have some powers to hold public meetings virtually by using video or telephone conferencing technology.

Further information is available: [Working safely during coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Offices and contact centres](#).

3f: Retail and shop facilities

See the [guidance relevant to shops and retail settings](#), including indoor markets, which may also apply to some activities in community facilities

3g: Places of worship

Where community facilities feature office space, see the relevant [guidance for office spaces](#).

3i: Outdoor space

Where community centres feature outdoor space, see the [guidance for safe use of outdoor public spaces](#).

4. Enforcement

Where the enforcing authority, such as the HSE or your local authority, identifies employers and building operators who are not taking action to comply with the relevant public health legislation and guidance to control public health risks, they are empowered to take a range of actions to improve control of workplace risks. For example, this would cover employers and building operators not taking appropriate action to ensure social distancing, where possible.

Failure to complete a risk assessment which takes account of COVID-19, or completing a risk assessment but failing to put in place sufficient measures to manage the risk of COVID-19, could constitute a breach of health and safety law.

The actions the enforcing authority can take include the provision of specific advice to employers and building operators to support them to achieve the required standard, through to issuing enforcement notices to help secure improvements. Serious breaches and failure to comply with enforcement notices can constitute a criminal offence, with serious fines and even imprisonment for up to 2 years. There is also a wider system of enforcement, which includes specific obligations and conditions for licensed premises.

Employers and building operators are expected to respond to any advice or notices issued by enforcing authorities rapidly and are required to do so within any timescales imposed by the enforcing authorities. The vast majority of employers and building operators are responsible and will join with the UK's fight against COVID-19 by working with the government and their sector bodies to protect their workers and the public. However, inspectors are carrying out compliance checks nationwide to ensure that employers and building operators are taking the necessary steps.