

Covid-19 Guidance – November 2020

On 4 November 2020, Parliament passed into law The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No. 4) Regulations 2020. These are in force from 5 November to 2 December 2020. As well as the Regulations, the Government has updated its Guidance for the safe use of places of worship to reflect current circumstances.

Mass and Communal Worship

The Regulations preclude gatherings for communal worship, including the celebration of Mass. However, it is important to stress that this does not represent a return to the previous lockdown earlier in the year. In the current Regulations, places of worship are permitted to remain open for certain purposes, and to attend a place of worship is listed as a reasonable excuse to leave home.

The purposes for which a place of worship may remain open are listed in Paragraph 18(8) of the Regulations. Most notably, the Regulations allow places of worship to remain open for “individual prayer” which is defined as “prayer by individuals which does not form part of communal worship.” It is important that a generous provision is made to open our churches for substantial amounts of time. Priests are encouraged to maintain a presence in their open churches, making themselves available to talk with those who attend for individual prayer. It is advised that stewards should be present where parish priests feel this is necessary to maintain safety measures in accordance with venue risk assessments.

Churches may be used for Mass and other services to be streamed, without a congregation present. Musicians, singers and those helping with the provision of live streaming services may participate in online services, as long as they usually form part of the service that is being broadcast and are essential to its delivery.

Charitable Outreach and Group Activity

Churches are permitted to continue to be open to offer support and charitable outreach, including the provision of food banks or other support for the homeless or the vulnerable, as well as for education purposes. Numbers are limited to 15 people in attendance.

Funerals, Wedding and Life Cycle Events

Funeral Masses and funeral services may continue to be celebrated, with an attendance of up to 30 people (not including those who are required for the celebration). Weddings are only permitted when one of those getting married is seriously ill and is not expected to recover. Such weddings are limited to 6 people excluding the priest

or deacon celebrant. Although lifecycle events are not explicitly mentioned this is implied in the restrictions and therefore are not allowed. Baptism, like weddings should be carried out in extreme risk of death.

Social Distancing and Other Measures

It is important that the routines of cleanliness and social distancing to which we have become accustomed, and which have made our churches places of real Covid security, are maintained. Face coverings should continue to be worn in churches, unless individuals are exempt. The maximum number of people allowed in a church for prayer will be determined by its size, seating arrangements and the requirements for social distancing in accordance with venue risk assessments.

Clergy and parishioners are encouraged to read the Regulations and Guidance and make mature judgments about how best they are to be applied in particular contexts.

Some priests may have heightened vulnerability owing to age or medical condition: in making their judgements, they should consider their own circumstances and wellbeing, as well as the safety of others. These days are not easy, but during the time the Regulations are in force it is vital that the best and effective use of our churches is made, for the good of the faithful and wide.

Employment Support

Workers in any part of the UK can retain their job, even if their employer cannot afford to pay them, and be paid at least 80% of their salary up to £2500 a month.

The flexibility of the current CJRS will be retained to allow employees to continue to work where they can.

Employers small or large, charitable or non-profit are eligible and because more businesses will need to close, they will now be asked to pay just National Insurance and Pensions contributions for their staff during the month of November – making this more generous than support currently on offer.

The Job Support Scheme will not be introduced until after Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ends

Meeting Others

You must not meet socially indoors with family or friends unless they are part of your household - meaning the people you live with - or support bubble. You can exercise or visit outdoor public places with the people you live with, your support bubble, or 1 person from another household You cannot meet in a private garden.

Nursing Homes End of Life

There is a note in the latest guidance that advises providers of care home services to be clear about their policy on visiting and in particular: Any imposed visitor restrictions should have regard to exceptional circumstances such as end of life.

Visits to a COVID-positive resident should only be made in essential circumstances (for example end of life

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-national-restrictions-from-5-november#weddings-civil-partnerships-religious-services-and-funerals>

More information is available via our guideline fact sheets on our diocesan website.

Best Wishes. Please do be in contact if you need further information or clarifications. csmith@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk Tel: 07741 328304