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COVID-19: guidance for the safe use of places of worship and special religious services

> and gatherings during the pandemic (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july>)

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Guidance

Celebrating religious festivals during coronavirus (COVID-19)

Updated 26 March 2021

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This publication is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/celebrating-religious-festivals-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

This guidance is of a general nature and should be treated as a guide and used alongside the guidance for the safe use of places of worship.

National lockdown

On 4 January the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown for all of England. There is different advice for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These restrictions:

- require people to stay at home, except where you have a reasonable excuse permitted by law
- prevent people gathering with those they do not live with, except for specific purposes
- close certain businesses and venues

Where possible, when visiting a place of worship you should stay local and avoid travelling outside your local area, meaning your village or town, or part of a city.

Under the national lockdown, places of worship remain open for communal worship. This is now one of the very few legal exemptions that allow larger numbers of people to gather. It is therefore crucial that places of worship and those attending comply with both law and the COVID-19 Secure guidance, including not mingling with other households.

The single most important action we can all take is to stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives. See [further information](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home#detailed-guidance-on-the-national-lockdown) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home#detailed-guidance-on-the-national-lockdown>) on national lockdown restrictions.

Key principles

We recognise that detailed government guidance may be difficult to apply to unique situations, events or places. There are some key principles that can help us make decisions that ensure we take part in special religious services

and cultural gatherings safely.

Wherever possible, we recommend the use of digital technology to record and transmit or livestream acts of worship that can be joined by the community virtually, and limiting any in-person gathering.

We know that it might be disappointing to be unable to celebrate significant moments in the same ways as we usually would, but it's important to remember that the virus is still with us and spreading fast, and we need to do all we can to protect ourselves and our family and friends.

Celebrating religious festivals in your home or with family

During the national lockdown, you should not be mixing in the home with anyone that is not part of your household or support bubble.

When celebrating religious festivals, you should ensure you consider the risks around the transmission of the virus. Those risks increase whenever different households mix.

If you have family members who do not normally live with you (and are not part of your legally permitted support bubble) they need to be treated as a separate household.

A household is a person or a group of people who live together in the same accommodation.

A support bubble is a support network which links 2 households. You have to meet certain [eligibility rules](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household#who-can-make-a-support-bubble) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household#who-can-make-a-support-bubble>) to form a support bubble and therefore, not everyone will be able to form one. See further information on [support bubbles](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-a-support-bubble-with-another-household>).

Celebrating religious festivals at your place of worship

Communal worship or prayer can be attended by as many people as the place of worship can safely accommodate, in a way which complies with [COVID-19 secure guidance \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/offices-and-contact-centres\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/offices-and-contact-centres) and the law. This means that people from different households (or support bubbles) must not mix when participating in communal worship.

This guidance highlights the key principles for events and acts of worship that take place both indoors, and outdoors within the grounds of a place of worship and should be used alongside the [guidance for the safe use of places of worship \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-2-december\)](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-from-2-december) .

The key principles for those visiting a place of worship to celebrate a religious festival include:

- Follow the mitigations that places of worship have put in place, for example using booking systems, changes to entrances and exits or staggered arrivals.
- Consider watching any services that are broadcast online to avoid large gatherings, especially for those who need to stay at home or are able to mark the event at home.
- You must not mingle with anyone outside of your household or support bubble.
- Adhere to social distancing, meaning people should be 2 metres apart or more than 1 metre apart as well as taking extra steps to stay safe (such as wearing face coverings) to reduce the risk of transmission.
- Wear a [face covering \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own) (unless you are exempt) – you must also wear these if you travel on public transport and a range of other places required by law.

- Make sure you provide your contact details to the place of worship to support the NHS Test and Trace service designed to track and help prevent the spread of COVID-19. This can be done through the NHS Test and Trace App.
- Make sure only you touch your belongings, for example shoes if removed.
- Take home any personal items brought in to aid worship, such as a prayer mat, prayer beads, or any ritual items associated with the festival.
- People should leave promptly after prayers/worship and should not mingle with each other following a service.

Key principles for places of worship include, but not limited to:

- Continue to stream worship or other events to avoid large gatherings and to continue to reach those individuals who are self-isolating or particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.
- Remove communal resources such as prayer mats or prayer books. Single use alternatives should be removed after use and disposed of by the worshipper.
- Speak into a microphone to lead devotions or sermons to avoid shouting. Avoid sharing microphones between different speakers.
- Singing 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 Plexi-glass screens should be considered to protect worshippers, and each other.
- Avoid congregational singing or audience participation in line with [guidance for the performing arts \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts).

In addition, when an event or act of worship is taking place outdoors in the grounds of a place of worship:

- The law allows for multiple groups to gather or pray in a place of worship's grounds.

- People must continue to adhere to social distancing between households.
- A risk assessment must be conducted and COVID-19 Secure measures implemented.
- The number of people who are able to gather will therefore be dependent on the size of the space available.
- A risk assessment should also consider the security of worshippers. This may require involving local partners such as the police.

Venue managers should refer to the [guidance on the safe use of places of worship](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-from-2-december) (<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-from-2-december>) to ensure that all possible steps are taken to secure the safety of the public.

People who are symptomatic

Self-isolate if you have coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms

Anyone showing [symptoms of COVID-19](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>) - a new continuous cough, a high temperature or a loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell - should not attend a place of worship or grounds an event (even if they remain in their vehicle throughout). They should self-isolate at home immediately with other members of their household. They could consider any other available ways to mark the event, such as watching this online.

These rules apply to people working as well as those attending the place of worship event.

They should also:

- not invite anyone to their your house
- not leave home
- not prepare food for others

If you or someone you're with is clinically extremely vulnerable

This guidance is for people who are well. There is separate guidance for those who are [clinically extremely vulnerable](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>) and those around them should also be mindful of this.

Singing, chanting and the use of musical instruments

COVID-19 spreads from person to person through small droplets, aerosols and through direct contact. Singing, playing some musical instruments, shouting and physical activity increases the risk of transmission through small droplets and aerosols. Safeguards should be put in place to minimise opportunities for the virus to spread.

- 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 Plexi-glass screens should be considered to protect worshippers, and each other.
- Communal singing should not take place. This applies even if social distancing is being observed or face coverings are used.
- Chanting, shouting and/or playing of instruments that are blown into should also be avoided in communal worship and in rehearsals.

- Where communal singing plays a big part in worship, and recordings are available, we suggest you use these as an alternative to live singing. If a place of worship hosts a professional group for rehearsing you should follow the [performing arts guidance \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts).
- Avoid playing recorded music at a volume that may result in people using raised voices or shouting to communicate when arriving or leaving for worship.
- Spoken responses during worship should not be in a raised voice.

Fresh air plays a crucial role in reducing transmission. Venues should try to improve ventilation whenever possible.

Gathering in other public or private outdoor places

Coronavirus cases are rising rapidly across the country and outdoor gatherings are not permitted during the national lockdown.

Acts of worship should also not take place away from the place of worship or its surrounding grounds.

You must:

- follow the [national restrictions \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home)
- follow social distancing rules around other households

You must not leave, or be outside of your home except where necessary. See further information on those [exemptions where you may leave your home \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home).

