



Diocese of Plymouth
From the Office of the Bishop

Covid-19 Route Map: Step 4 Guidance

*Re-issuing of the original **General Principles** and the arrangements for the **Celebration of Holy Mass** (from 19th July 2021), to the Diocese of Plymouth in November 2021.*

Given the changes that came into force in public places yesterday, the Guidance below is basically the same as for July, except I now believe the wearing of Masks/ Face coverings (other than for those who have a medical condition) is Mandatory in all places of Worship in the Diocese.

Please be sensitive to local situations.

General Principles

This guidance has been prepared following discussions with officials from Public Health England and HM Government Places of Worship Task Force. Key to implementation of this guidance is the Government's understanding of moving away from centralised detailed regulation to prudent local judgements adopting a continuing cautious approach to easements. The key watchwords for the future steps are discernment of local prevailing conditions and careful consideration of what mitigations are needed in the light of these.

The following general principles apply:

1. *Prevailing Local Conditions*

All places of worship should always consider the prevailing local conditions for the virus. Special consideration should be given to rates at which people are being vaccinated in the locality, the prevalence of new variants of the virus, the local rates of hospital admissions and any local public health advice. These data can be obtained from the Director of Public Health at the local authority

(in England)or the local Environmental Health Department, and it is important to have knowledge of these figures.

2. **Mitigations**

It is important to mitigate against the risks of virus transmission.....

Churches should continue to provide **hand sanitiser at entrances and exits** and **face coverings** are strongly recommended to be worn by those in church. General cleaning to a good standard, using commonly available cleaning fluids and detergents, with attention to frequent touchpoints is the standard to continue. This is consistent with the advice from Public Health England. While the virus can land on surfaces and can infect people if they touch those surfaces and then touch their mouth, nose or eyes, this risk is significantly lower than the risk from aerosol or droplet spread which is mitigated against with good ventilation and a face covering.

There are key actions which churches and parishes have been doing, and should continue to do.....

3. **Social Distancing and Capacity of Churches**

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Care has to be taken to ensure that churches continue to be places where people feel safe to gather to worship. Each local community should examine the local conditions regarding the virus, and adopt an attitude of care for the people who desire to attend Mass. Suggestions to help this include (but are not limited to):

- a. In large churches, designating **an area of the church where there will be set places, socially distant from each other**, and where those seated there will be required to wear a face covering.
- b. In places which cannot do this, considering whether one Mass over the weekend schedule would continue providing a reduced capacity with social distancing.
- c. Producing simple cards with a phrase such as "Please leave a Space" which people can pick up on entry to church and put beside them so that a space can be left to allow for distancing.

The adoption of methods such as these will build confidence in the people that the church remains a safe place to enter and worship.

Each church should continue to assess the local situation regarding the virus and adapt as necessary to the local conditions. This may mean that in areas of very high transmission, churches may have tighter measures than in areas of lower transmission.

4. **Congregational Singing**

Indoor congregational singing is permitted. The use of cantor groups and other choirs is now permitted.....face coverings should be worn by members of the congregation whilst singing together, until infection levels reduce.

The Celebration of Holy Mass

The following is recommended for the celebration of Holy Mass.....within the churches and communities in England and Wales:

- A. **At this time, it is not recommended that Holy Water stoups are refilled.** Should people wish to receive holy water, it is recommended that a container with a tap is provided so that small bottles can be filled which can then be taken home.
- B. **All usual ministers for the celebration of Holy Mass can be deployed such as servers, cantors, readers and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.**
- C. The offertory collection can be resumed in church with baskets and pouches, however, it is encouraged to promote online or contactless giving in the churches if possible
- D. **It is recommended that the physical Sign of Peace remain suspended** as it is not an integral part of the Mass, and its omission will help to reduce physical contact between people during the celebration.
- E. **Holy Communion will continue to be under one kind** and the ministers will continue to sanitise their hands beforehand and wear a face covering whilst distributing. **Communion is recommended to be distributed in the hand** but those who wish to receive on the tongue may do so. There should be care on the part of the minister to avoid physical contact with the hand or the tongue of the communicant when distributing Holy Communion. In the event of contamination the minister should sanitise their hands before further distribution.
- F. **Concelebration is permitted** and Holy Communion by the concelebrants should be by intinction (including the principal celebrant), and the consumption of the remaining sacred species and cleansing of the chalice should be performed by the principal celebrant alone.

In addition to the above, which were the nationally distributed Guidelines in July, I would also recommend the following in this Diocese:

- **Wearing of Masks/ Face Coverings is Mandatory again in Places of Worship.**
- **The Homily is kept short; to 5 mins maximum (I shall try to observe this myself!)**
- **The Procession of Gifts, from the Body of the Church/ the People, does not take place for now.**
- **Notices are kept to a bare minimum.**

Thank you.

**+Mark O'Toole
Bishop of Plymouth**