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Guidance

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

Updated 30 November 2020

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This is national guidance 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.

From Wednesday 2 December, the government have introduced new local restriction tier systems in England (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-restriction-tiers-what-you-need-to-know) which set out what you can and cannot do in each tier.

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.

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 (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19). 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 (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/heritage-locations). Volunteers and other individuals who are shielding should continue to follow the government's advice on shielding (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).

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 (https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-

guidance) regarding health, hygiene, and social distancing (https://www.gov.uk/government /publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing-after- 4-july)

- safe workplace guidelines (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19), 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 (https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/risk-assessment-template-and-examples.htm).

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.

A fire risk assessment should be undertaken if your building or space is repurposed, for example when there is any change in use or type of use.

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 which may include:

- if an enclosed area, owners and operators should identify an advisory limit on the maximum number of users able to use the community facility
- in indoor spaces, wear a face covering, unless you are exempt
- move outdoors, where it is safer and there is more space
- if indoors, make sure rooms are well ventilated by keeping windows and doors open

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.

Support groups (such as victim support and mental health groups) can take place in gatherings of groups of 15 (subject to capacity) in a COVID-19 secure community facility if organised by a business, a charitable, benevolent or philanthropic institution or a public body to provide mutual aid, therapy or any other form of support to its members or those who attend its meetings.

If partaking in permitted activities users of COVID-19 secure community facilities should limit their social interactions with anyone they do not live with. It is important for all parties to maintain socially distant, 2 metres or 1 metre with actions taken to reduce the risk of transmission (where 2 metres is not viable) between households. For example, use of face coverings and encouraging

good hand hygiene on entering premises and throughout the visit.

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.

Further guidance on how to manage visitors and customers can be found in the BEIS guidance on workplaces (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/offices-and-contact-centres).

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, and a power under Regulation 6 of the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2020 to restrict access to a public place.

2b: 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.

In England, face coverings are currently required by law to be worn in the following settings: shops, supermarkets, indoor transport hubs, indoor shopping centres, community facilities, banks,

building societies, post offices and on public transport.

On entering a community facility users will be required to wear a face covering, and will be required to keep it on, unless covered under a 'reasonable excuse'. If users need to eat or drink something, or if they have a health or disability reason to not wear one. Face coverings can be removed if users are undertaking exercise or an activity where it would negatively impact their ability to do so. See guidance on wearing face coverings (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#when-you-do-not-need-to-wear-a-face-covering).

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 (https://www.gov.uk/guidance /coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers#exemptions-face-coverings).

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

Please be mindful that the wearing of a face covering may inhibit communication with people who rely on lip reading, facial expressions and clear sound.

2c: 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.

2d: 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.

2e: 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.

2f: Track and Trace (collecting customer data)

Continued opening up of the economy and public services is reliant on NHS Test and Trace being used to minimise transmission of the virus. In order to ensure that businesses and local services are able to remain open, we will be mandating that organisations in designated sectors must:

- Ask at least one member of every party of customers or visitors (up to 6 people) to provide their name and contact details.
- Keep a record of all staff working on their premises and shift times on a given day and their contact details.
- Keep these records of customers, visitors and staff for 21 days and provide data to NHS Test and Trace if requested.
- Display an official NHS QR code poster so that customers and visitors can 'check in' using this option as an alternative to providing their contact details.
- Adhere to General Data Protection Regulations.

Community centres and village halls must collect information for all activities and events taking place within the venue. This should be collected by the person who hires the space. The venue must display an official NHS QR code poster which can be used for every activity that takes place there.

Any designated venue that is found not to be compliant with these regulations will be subject to financial penalties; starting at £1,000 and rising up to £10,000 upon repeat offences.

It is vital that relevant venues comply with these regulations to help keep people safe, and to keep businesses open.

Designated venues will need to keep records of customers, visitors and staff for a period of 21

days and make them available when requested by NHS Test and Trace or local public health officials to help contain clusters or outbreaks.

You can find out more about these requirements (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/maintaining-records-of-staff-customers-and-visitors-to-support-nhs-test-and-trace) here.

2g: 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 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications /staying-safe-outside-your-home/staying-safe-outside-your-home#face-coverings), apart from those who meet the exceptions (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers#exemptions-face-coverings). 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 (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safer-public-places-urban-centres-and-green-spaces-covid-19/4-management-of-urban-centres)
- Coronavirus (COVID-19): safer travel guidance for passengers (https://www.gov.uk/guidance /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.

Different activities are subject to specific reviews and guidance on when and how they are permitted to resume. Where a premise delivers a mix of services, only those services that are permitted to be open should be available

In areas subject to COVID alert level: Medium restrictions, when meeting friends and family you do not live with (or have formed a support bubble with) you must not meet in a group of more than 6, indoors or outdoors.

At COVID alert level: High, and COVID alert level: Very High, you must not meet with friends and family indoors in any setting, unless they are part of your household or support bubble. You must also not meet with people outside of your household or support bubble in a private garden or in most outdoor public venues. Events are subject to wider rules around social mixing dependent on an area's local COVID alert level.

This means that, in a COVID-19 secure venue or public outdoor place, there can be more than 6 people in total present from multiple households. In COVID alert level: Medium areas, social interaction and shared activity must be limited to groups of 6. In COVID alert level: High, and COVID alert level: Very High areas, social interaction and shared activity must be limited to groups of the same household or support bubble.

COVID-19 secure community facilities are permitted to run the following activities in adherence to restrictions on gathering, closing times, social distancing and the wearing of face coverings:

- Providers, organisers and managers of leisure, entertainment and close contact services operating in a community facility must ensure customers observe local alert restrictions, and ensure appropriate social distancing, through signage, layout, and managing customer entry.
- Those operating close contact services in a community facility, which includes, hairdressing, any treatments on the face such as eyebrow threading or make-up application - will be required by law to wear face masks and visors when providing these services.
- Businesses operating in a community facility that sells food or drink (including cafes, bars, pubs and restaurants) must close services between 11pm - 5am and stop taking orders after 10pm.
- Indoor performances are permitted in community facilities. However, they must take into account an area's COVID alert level and follow performing arts guidance (https://www.gov.uk /guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts)
- Wedding receptions must only take place in the form of a sit down meal up to a maximum of 15 guests. See guidance on weddings (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships) and guidance on restaurants and other hospitality industries (https://www.gov.uk /guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/restaurants-offering-takeaway-or-delivery)
- Community facilities managers and providers must remind users to wear face coverings.
- Mandated services provided in community centres, and close contact services will be subject to the COVID-19 secure requirements in law and fines of up to £10,000 for repeated breaches.

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, childcare and youth facilities should follow the relevant guidance:

- Registered early years providers caring for children under the age of 5 should refer to the guidance for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures /coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures#who-this-guidance-is-for). Providers operating in a community facility should also follow government guidance on Implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings (https://www.gov.uk/government /publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/protective-measures-for-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak).
- Providers of activities and provisions for children and young people (between the ages of 5-18 and youth groups up to the age of 25) and should implement the protective measures for out-of-school setting guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/protective-measures-for-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-

covid-19-outbreak).

- Providers of youth services and activities should also refer to the National Youth Agency's guidance for managing youth sector spaces and activities during COVID-19 (https://nya.org.uk /guidance/) as well as their accompanying tools and resources to support safe service provision. Section 3c: Recreation, leisure and social gatherings to sets out what provisions and activities are permissible within a community facility.
- Providers of before or after school clubs, and other out-of-school activities operating within a community facility should also follow the protective measure for out of school settings guidance (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak). The guidance has been updated to include specific content on what measures providers should put in place to minimise mixing between different groups of children, and to reduce the risk of infection and transmission of the virus for children, staff and parents who attends these facilities.

Where possible, those attending a community facility should practice social distancing in line with the government's current staying alert and safe (social distancing) guidance (https://www.gov.uk /government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing) and to observe any mitigating interventions being implemented by the facilities manager. Parents and carers are encouraged to limit the number of settings their children attend as far as possible, and to ensure their children attend the same setting consistently.

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

COVID-secure community facilities are permitted to hold social groups, clubs and activities in groups are subject to wider rules around social mixing dependent on an area's COVID local alert level.

This means that, in a COVID-19 secure venue or public outdoor place, there can be more than 6 people in total present from multiple households. In local COVID alert level: Medium areas, social interaction and shared activity must be limited to groups of 6. In local COVID alert level: High, and local COVID alert level: Very High areas, social interaction and shared activity must be limited to groups of the same household or support bubble.

However, we strongly advise that activities where there is a significant likelihood of groups mixing and socialising (and where it will be difficult to prevent mingling and therefore breaking the law) should not take place in a community facility. These may include but are not limited to:

- formal or informal clubs and hobby clubs (e.g. women's institute, veteran's associations, freemasons, sewing clubs, book clubs, crafts clubs, reading groups)
- amateur choirs and orchestras
- informally organised sport activities on facilities grounds (professionally organised sport

activities are exempt)

Large wedding receptions or parties should not currently be taking place and any celebration after the ceremony should follow the broader social distancing guidance set out above. See guidance on weddings (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships).

Community facilities are now permitted to host socially distanced indoor and outdoor performances in line with the performing arts guidance (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts). Managers and organisers should consider and adopt the **mitigations set out in the guidance** to reduce the overall risk of the event. These include:

- taking steps to improve ventilation as far as possible and whenever possible, both through the use of mechanical systems and opening windows and doors
- taking steps to encourage audiences to support the overall safety of the event, including discouraging activities which can create transmission from aerosol and droplets (such as shouting, chanting and singing along) and seating individuals rather than allowing them to stand (to help maintain social distancing)

Both professionals and non-professionals can now engage in singing, wind and brass in line with the performing arts guidance (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts).

Indoor sporting facilities, fitness centres and dance studios can now open. For venues wishing to provide such activities, please follow this guidance on sports and leisure facilities (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-phased-return-of-outdoor-sport-and-recreation).

Where activities relate to children and young people between the ages of 5-18, they should follow the DfE guidance on protective measures for out-of-school settings (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak). This is relevant for providers running holiday clubs, after-school clubs, tuition or other out-of-school provision, including sports-related or dance activities.

3d: Retail and shop facilities

See the guidance relevant to shops and retail settings (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/shops-and-branches), including indoor markets, which may also apply to some activities in community facilities.

3e: Places of worship

See the guidance for places of worship and faith activity (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic).

3f: Office spaces

Where community facilities feature office space, see the relevant guidance for office spaces (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/offices-and-contact-centres).

3g: Outdoor space

Where community centres feature outdoor space, see the guidance for safe use of outdoor public spaces (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safer-public-places-urban-centres-and-green-spaces-covid-19).

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.

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