

## **LIVERPOOL ROAD METHODIST CHURCH COVID 19 RISK ASSESSMENT**

### **COVID19**

COVID19 virus lodges in the human body's airways and lungs. It then penetrates the cells and reproduces. It is caught by breathing in the virus as a liquid aerosol. This is the best information available and is the basis of governmental guidance. However, there is a body of opinion that the virus may spread through small particles in the air which, if correct, affects the social distancing safeguard (see later) and the assessment of our gathering as a congregation in the enclosed space of the church. However, WHO do not see this as a viable means of dispersal unless there is some form of aerosol generation - which is not the case in our church.

The problem, for some, is the body's reaction to the virus which can be fatal. However, not everyone reacts like this and some who are infected are barely aware of it (asymptomatic). The symptoms are well publicised and include fever, dry cough, high temperature, sore throat, loss of taste and smell and, in more severe cases, difficulty breathing.

Thus safeguards are centred around avoiding the virus as it is exhaled, potentially infecting someone else and removing it from potentially contaminated surfaces such as hands and door handles.

The well known safeguards are:

1. Social distancing - a nominal 2 metres or 1 metre with other safeguards where 2 metres is not possible (referred to throughout as 2m)
2. Hand cleanliness - 20 seconds in detergent and water or hands cleaned in hand sanitiser having at least 60% alcohol content for 20 seconds
3. Face covering - to control the spread of droplets on the breath, potentially containing virus. This is about protecting others rather than the wearer although it undoubtedly has an effect that way as well.
4. 72 hours being the maximum virus survival time outside a body - 48 hours is the minimum advised.
5. Cleaning potentially contaminated surfaces - the depth of cleaning varies depending on both time and potential contamination.

There are a number of secondary safeguards that can also be employed:

1. Coughing into a disposable handkerchief (tissue) and disposing of in a sealed plastic bag or coughing into one's elbow to keep the exhalate off hands to minimise potential virus spread. Hand washing afterwards is recommended.
2. Shouting and other such high breathing activity should also not happen. Wind instruments may be played and individual singers leading worship may lead subject to having suitable safeguards in place e.g. distancing and / or screens / shields. Distance (3 metres) is the most suitable in our circumstances.
3. Not deliberately exhaling strongly towards another person
4. Keeping a record of attendees to facilitate track and trace in the event that someone present has

COVID 19.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

The purpose of a risk assessment is to show that the hazards have been identified and suitable and sufficient safeguards put in place. This is in pursuit of the obligation in Health and Safety law to reduce risks so far as is reasonably practicable - more commonly known as ALARP (As Low As Reasonably Practicable).

The Methodist Church has provided a risk assessment template - completed at Appendix. Unfortunately, it does little to move the risk assessment forward.

HSE in its publication Reducing Risks, Protecting People expects that the minimum standard for controlling risk should be "authoritative good practice". This authoritative good practice is that developed from the safeguards shown in the previous section. Thus it should be possible to implement these for each of our buildings.

It is important to stress that this specific risk assessment is in addition to the general risk assessment for our church and where there are conflicts, a sensible and reasonable balance needs to be struck.

***It is a key assumption that those showing COVID 19 symptoms do NOT attend activities.***

## **OUTSIDE AREAS**

Social Distancing: This will be the main safeguard. It will require -

a) Signage for the flow of people and 2m segregation in both the car park and walkways. Clear guidance on the walkways to segregate flows of individuals and requiring distancing at entrances and exits whilst controlling flows at "pinch points".

There will also need to be designated routes to entrances and exits for disabled and people with low mobility (see buildings).

Routine cleaning for handrails and door handles is highly recommended. This would be best after each heavy use. Dilute bleach with a little detergent is a preferred cleaning agent.

## **CHURCH BUILDING**

Social Distancing: This will require -

a) a one way system through the church. Enter through the front double doors, down the side aisles and return up the centre aisle. Disabled entrance through the vestry door and exit through the organ side door. There will need to be suitable signs and markings to ensure the correct flow of people.

b) making the 2m spacing obvious in the foyer, aisles and pews

c) suitable entrance and exit signage to ensure correct flow of people.

d) reserving the lower vestry for preparation and storage to minimise two way traffic in the adjacent corridor. The upper vestry for preachers to await their entry to the main church building. Reserving the chancel side door for any choir or musicians and having the preacher or leader enter through the door in the main church area using the steps from the lower to the higher area - not the side steps to maintain the 2m spacing to anyone else in the chancel. The door into the main church should be held open to avoid having to use the potentially contaminated handles.

e) chairs, if used, such as to keep a 2m separation between households

f) the computer for the projector could be in the South transept leaving the sound desk area single occupancy or a single operator for both sound and computer.

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g) toilets should be cleaned down after every use by the user and, if required, a distanced queuing system invoked. The toilet seat should be put down before flushing. Signage should be in place to that effect.

h) there should be no paper notices to avoid transmitting the virus on paper (perhaps projecting them before the service would suffice with e mail as back up).

i) to avoid people congregating in a small area refreshments after service should not happen

j) notices about 1 metre and optional 2 metre distancing in the foyer, corridor and main church building.

Face covering for everyone who is capable of wearing one. Face masks will be available by the hand sanitising stations for those who do not bring their own (see later). Each person should take theirs home in and reuse them. For those who cannot use face coverings should exercise 2 metre distancing.

For security, doors should be left open as far as possible after having been put into a "held open" state by the door stewards - although that may not be reasonable during the colder months.

The door stewards should be provided with written instructions on what is expected as people enter and leave.

The 2m rule does not apply to those who are from a single household but others need to be at least 1 metre away from any of them.

***Communion and baptism services in their commonly understood format will not be possible and they are assumed not to take place.*** A further assessment covering communion is expected in the near future. Funerals are covered by government guidance limiting to 30 attendees not including those needed to run the service otherwise, the safeguards here also apply.

Hand Cleanliness: This will require -

a) hand sanitising stations at each of the entry doors. This is not reasonably practicable at the vestry entry door which should be held open and that station needs to be just inside the main church building - anyone using the chancel should also use this station. The preacher or leader will have a can either use this or the dedicated station in the upper vestry. There should be signs telling people that a 20 second "wash" is required and showing how this should be achieved. Hand sanitiser is the best alternative to keep the area clean and dry.

b) tissues should be used in case of sneezing or other similar needs. These should be taken home after use to ensure the tissue(s) are not a source of virus.

c) similarly, each toilet should have a hand dryer or paper towel and a waste bin to collect used paper towels. Fabric towels should be removed.

d) if offerings are taken the collection plate should be handled with freshly washed hands or gloves, the gathered collection placed in the safe for at least 72 hours and hands washed again before leaving the premises. Access to the count should be accessed through the vestry door and leave by the organ door.

Cleaning: Given the only planned activities are the Sunday Church services and Iona on a Thursday morning then -

a) the evening service in the chancel should not be held until restrictions relax further.

b) Iona services should observe the same precautions as everyone else but avoid using the vestry side door - see offerings.

c) if the church is to be used for another activity not covered in this assessment other than cleaning

and general maintenance, then that activity should have its own written risk assessment.

There is no need to deep clean as the length of time between services is 72 hours or more.

Face covering: This is only relevant if 2 metre social distancing cannot reasonably be maintained. Given that singing (a major element in Methodist services) is not currently permitted, then this is no great problem.

Recording Attendees: A simple sign in sheet for each service at each hand wash station would be sufficient. This should be kept sealed in a plastic bag for 21 days, once complete, before being disposed of, if not required for track and trace. Otherwise, scanning the QR code provided at each wash station is also acceptable.

## HALLS

This is more complex for a number of reasons:

a) we are not in control of the building users and cannot reasonably be responsible for their actions. However, we can put some constraints upon them which should include:

- complying with segregated entry and exits
- requiring users to demonstrate an adequate written risk assessment
- putting an additional requirement (through their licence(s)?) to deep clean after their activities unless there is at least 48 and preferably 72 hours between their activities and the next activity. A certification that this has been done is required.

b) there are multiple entrances and exits which need to be designated to optimise the flow of people and minimise pinch points.

c) the toilets are not optimally sited for social distancing.

We need to provide signage for the entrances and exits, hand washing and 2m segregation (the car park and walkways have already been dealt with above).

Entries and exits:

New Room - the entrance should be through the right door opposite the New Room inner door. The exit should then be through the lounge outer door. Those needing toilet facilities will need to make the round journey outside to the disabled toilet by the New Room or to the main toilets by the Primary Room. Return through the New Room entrance above. Hand sanitiser should be provided at the entrance which also provides for other areas accessed this way.

Main Hall: Entry through the single door foyer and the closer of the two entry doors to the hall itself. Exit through the door closest to the New Room and the facing outer door. The door towards the boiler room at the front of the hall should be used as a toilet exit and re-entry through the other door at that end of the hall with due consideration that it is also the normal entrance. Hand sanitiser should be provided in the foyer (also covers everything else accessed through this foyer).

Toilets: There needs to be a way to tell if the toilet is engaged and this should apply to each toilet as consistent 2m distancing is close to impossible within each room. The toilets have hand dryers which should be used. Toilets should be cleaned after each use and the toilet seat should be put down before flushing. Signage to that effect is provided.

Primary Room: The people routing for this facility is not as neat and well ordered as the New Room and Main Hall. It is currently used for storage and photocopying. It should not be used for anything else until the stored items are relocated. If needed, the main entrance is on the same corridor as the toilets and the entrance to the main hall. The segregated exit would have to be through the store at the end of the room and the exit route through the BB room. Locking afterwards may be

problematic. Toilet access would be through the main entrance with due consideration for social distancing. Leave 72 hours between each use. This will need a log in sheet to ensure the 72 hours is adhered to. The photocopy sheet will suffice.

**Beginners Room:** This room has been allocated to Birkdale community hub and library. Access will be under their control. In the unlikely event church members need to access this room they should liaise with Birkdale community hub and library until COVID restrictions are lifted.

**Lounge:** This has been cleared pending use as a store for the Food Pantry. The Food Pantry should have its own risk assessment to cover use of this space (and the adjacent former office).

**Former Office:** Used for the Food Pantry. Its use should be covered by the Food Pantry Risk Assessment which should be in compliance this assessment.

**New Room Store:** Can only accommodate one person comfortably. Entrance and exits as per New Room. Avoid use where possible, particularly when the New Room is in use. Leave 72 hours between each use. This will need a log in sheet to ensure the 72 hours is adhered to.

**Primary Room Store:** Entrance through the door in the hallway. Exit as primary room. Only 1 person at any one time and avoid use as far as possible. Leave 72 hours between each use including use as an exit for the Primary Room. This will need a log in sheet to ensure the 72 hours is adhered to and the sheet will need to be completed each time the Primary Room is used.

**Kitchens:** Although it is doubtful that COVID19 can be spread through food, it would be prudent to minimise kitchen use. The doors will need suitable notices. Those wishing refreshments during their activities should provide their own and for others from their household only. As a matter of prudence, only paper towels should be in the kitchen - no fabric towels / tea towels.

**Workshop:** Those using the workshop should either wash hands for 20 seconds in soap and water at the entrance sink or wear gloves. Disposable gloves should be binned after use. Reusable gloves should be sealed in a plastic bag and left for at least 72 hours before reuse. Last use which should be marked on the plastic bag. If there is more than one person in this room, then face masks and 1metre distancing should be practiced. It would be prudent to carry out only necessary maintenance whilst restrictions continue.

Access to areas not covered in this assessment e.g. boiler room should be covered by a written scheme of work which should be kept for at least 21 days.

## **GENERAL**

In order to optimise the premises to reduce the virus chances of infecting anyone the following are good practice:

- a) store away furniture and other articles that are not essential e.g. Service Books
- b) use plastic chairs in preference to the upholstered ones where there is frequent use to ease cleaning
- c) use a projector in preference to distributing paper to meetings of more than a few.
- d) focus cleaning on areas that are in regular hand contact e.g. door handles, light switches.
- e) singing is an integral part of Methodist church services and if it continues to be prohibited, then a balanced view on how to move forward would be required. There are similar constraints for some of our church organisations and some users of our premises.
- f) waste that is potentially COVID 19 contaminated should be double bagged and kept sealed for 72 hours before disposal. Regular waste should be treated normally.
- g) completion of Cleaning Record Sheets, placed in key areas, to note time and date of last cleaning

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- h) those who feel unwell should be discouraged from attending. If someone gets into difficulty, they should be attended by one or two people, preferably with medical experience, wearing face covering and gloves whilst a decision is made about calling an ambulance.
- i) Fire evacuation rehearsals should be avoided and fire precaution tests carried out when buildings are empty.
- j) as far as reasonably practicable, buildings / rooms should be ventilated opening windows and doors.
- k) for those who may have difficulty complying with these precautions and are accompanied by someone to assist, they should be treated as those from the same household.

### **DISCUSSION**

This risk assessment has tried to be comprehensive and takes account of relevant guidance that is freely available. What it does not show is how the safety measures / precautions should be implemented. This is a matter for the property stewards. However, the implementation would be expected to follow accepted good practice as the precautions are likely to be required for quite some time - expect at least a year as a matter of prudence.

Plainly, as indicated before, the COVID19 situation is changing quite rapidly and this is reflected in the authoritative good practice emerging from the government. This results in the following:

- a) this risk assessment may become out of date if authoritative good practice changes.
- b) it may also change if the Methodist church significantly changes its approach.

Thus, reviewing this risk assessment should be driven by either of these events rather than by time, as is more common. Now that places of worship are permitted to open, this risk assessment is being regularly reviewed.

### **CONCLUSION**

This assessment forms a basis for opening our church premises.

**APPENDIX - Risk assessment table**

|                                     |             |  |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|--|
| <b>Name &amp; Address of Church</b> | <b>LRMC</b> | <b>Assessment under taken by:xxxxxxxx</b>                                      |
| <b>Area of Building Assessed</b>    | <b>All</b>  | <b>Date of Initial Assessment: July 20<br/>Date to be Review: Event driven</b> |

| <b>Hazards/ Risks</b><br><i>Think about the areas where contact takes place</i> | <b>Persons Affected</b><br><i>Think of anyone who comes in contact</i> | <b>Likelihood</b><br>1 =<br>2 =<br>3 =<br><b>Severity</b><br>1 = Low (minor injury)<br>2 = Medium (serious injury)<br>3 = High (fatality) | <b>Risk Rating</b><br>1-2 = low<br>3-4 = medium<br>6-9 = high<br>priority | <b>Additional Covid-19 Controls – Reducing Risk</b><br><i>Think of which prevention strategy that could be used in each scenario to reduce the spread of Covid-19</i> |
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| Church | Attendees |  | ? | ? | <b>See Under COVID 19 section</b> |
| Halls  | Attendees |  | ? | ? | <b>See under COVID19 section</b>  |