

## **4. Guidance for individual prayer within a place of worship**

From 13 June places of worship will be permitted to open for individual worship.

### **Permitted use**

Individual prayer within a place of worship is defined as a person or household entering the venue to pray on their own and not as part of a group, led prayer or communal act. They should be socially distanced from other individuals or households. Collective or communal prayer and regular scheduled services are not permitted at this time as set out in Regulations. This includes a Minister of Religion or lay person leading devotions or prayer of any sort.

Those in charge of running a place of worship should engage and communicate with worshippers and the wider community to explain what activity is permitted and what is still prohibited.

### **Principles**

Individuals or members of the same household may enter the building to make personal prayers and it is strongly advised that social distancing is maintained with other households. The fewer the people inside the building at any one time, the lower the risk of transmission.

Individual prayer should be carried out such that adherence to social distancing of 2 metres (3 steps) all round can be maintained between individuals or those from separate households. A household is a person or a group of people who live together in the same accommodation.

Individuals should stay alert at all times. They should not gather in groups, except with members of their own household, inside or outside the building. Steps should be taken to reduce the social interaction between people outside of an individual's household to reduce the transmission of the virus.

In addition to the key principles and guidelines set out in [section 3](#), it is strongly advised that:

- Individuals should be prevented from touching or kissing devotional and other objects that are handled communally. Barriers and/or clear signage should be put in place where necessary.
- Individuals should also avoid touching property belonging to others such as shoes which, if removed, should be placed and collected by their owner while adhering to social distancing principles.
- Books, reusable and communal resources e.g. prayer mats, service sheets or devotional material should be removed from use. Single use alternatives can be provided as long as they are removed by the worshipper. Items owned by the individual to aid worship e.g. a prayer mat or religious text, may be brought in but must be removed again.
- No food or drink is made available.
- Activities such as singing and/or playing instruments should be avoided, with the exception of organists who are able to use buildings for practice with appropriate social distancing. The government is continuing to work on scientific and medical advice around how such activities can best be managed safely and further guidance will follow on this shortly.
- Any pre-requisite washing/ablution rituals should not be done at the place of worship and shared washing areas should be closed.
- Where possible faith leaders should discourage cash giving and continue to use online giving and resources where possible minimising contact around transactions. Regular cleaning and hygiene should be maintained, and gloves worn to handle cash offerings where giving continues.

## **Restrictions on capacity**

Restrictions should be set locally to limit the number of people permitted to enter the place of worship for individual prayer at any one time, so that a safe distance of at least 2 metres (3 steps) can be maintained between individuals and households.

The size and circumstance of the premises will determine the maximum number of people that can be accommodated whilst also facilitating social distancing.

In defining the number of people that can reasonably follow 2 metres distancing, 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.

A risk assessment should be carried out to identify points of high risk in the building and mitigating action.

It is recommended that places of worship close to individual prayer during the time normal services would be taking place and continue to stream this regular worship or prayer services (which individuals are not currently permitted to attend) to avoid over-crowding.

Venue managers might want to consider advertising set days or times when places of worship are open for individual prayer solely for those particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, e.g. those over 70 or clinically vulnerable.