

# COVID-19 RISK ASSESSMENT

## FOR CORPORATE WORSHIP AT

### WISEWOOD METHODIST CHURCH

#### Revision 03 – 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2022

	28 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	Previous document withdrawn and replaced by separate Risk Assessments for Corporate Worship and Use of Community Rooms.
Revision 01	7 <sup>th</sup> September 2021	Minor text changes and link to additional Methodist Church guidance. Restrictions on access to kitchen and other rooms and use of toilets eased.
Revision 02	27 <sup>th</sup> February 2022	Updated in accordance with latest Government and Methodist Church guidance.
Revision 03	14 <sup>th</sup> March 2022	Reference to NHS Test and Trace removed. Risk assessment simplified.

#### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this risk assessment is to consider the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on the use of Wisewood Methodist Church premises for corporate worship, and to determine what protocols and regimes should be continued to reduce and minimise any dangers to the health and wellbeing of those both leading and attending for worship.

Use of the Worship Area and Community Rooms by community groups is considered in a separate document.

This document reflects the latest [Government guidance for Places of Worship](#) and [Methodist Church Covid 19 guidance](#), both updated on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022

Latest Government guidance advises the wearing of face coverings ‘in crowded and enclosed spaces where you may come into contact with other people you do not normally meet’. Additionally, ‘social distancing in a place of worship is now a personal choice. People are encouraged to respect other attendees and those working who may wish to adopt a more cautious approach’. The guidance also states that: ‘simple and effective personal hygiene behaviours can also reduce the risk of catching or spreading COVID-19’.

With regards to ventilation, Government guidance states that ‘When worship takes place inside or in other enclosed spaces, consider how the space can be continually well ventilated, before, during and after’.

Latest Methodist Church guidance states the following:

*The Government is still encouraging safer behaviours to reduce the risk of infection. Churches may still wish to consider these to help those using their buildings feel safe and welcome:*

**1. Consider letting fresh air in if possible:**

*Try to maintain adequate ventilation to rooms, where possible and practical. See - [Ventilation of indoor spaces to stop the spread of coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).*

## **2. Consider wearing face coverings in areas of high risk:**

*It may be suitable in crowded or enclosed spaces, particularly if ventilation is poor, to wear face coverings, particularly where you share spaces with people you do not normally meet.*

## **3. Considerations if feeling unwell:**

*Anyone experiencing Covid-19 symptoms should still consider taking a test and staying at home and avoiding contact with others if the test is positive. Particularly if working in higher risk environments or with those who might be vulnerable.*

## **4. Consider how to encourage ongoing good hygiene practice:**

*It may be helpful to continue to provide hand sanitiser in convenient areas for everyone to use; keep established practices of cleaning surfaces touched regularly and rooms with high use by different groups such as toilets and kitchens. Similarly, continue to encourage good hygiene when considering handling shared objects, communal resources and food & drink.*

In summary, although no longer legal requirements, both the wearing of face coverings and social distancing are still advised on our premises, as is the substantial ventilation of all occupied spaces. Hand sanitizers will still be located at various points around the building, and rooms may be antiseptically cleaned using the 'fogger' when timescales permit (after 'fogging' the room should not be accessed for a minimum of one hour).

## **MINISTERS AND PREACHERS**

- **ACCESSING THE VESTRY** (while the NHS Vaccine Hub is operating at Wisewood, the vestry is not generally available)  
See General Notes. Time spent in the vestry to be kept to a minimum, wearing face coverings and observing social distancing; vestry window to be opened whilst it is occupied.
- **FITTING MICROPHONES AND HEAD-SETS**  
Equipment will be delivered to the preacher in the worship area by the sound operative ensuring social distancing and left for the preacher to fit themselves.
- **ACCESSING THE TOILET**  
See General Notes. Preacher is advised to use the toilet by the rear fire escape door.
- **ACCESSING THE WORSHIP AREA**  
Preacher escorted by steward wearing face coverings and ensuring social distancing.
- **LEADING WORSHIP** (see separate notes for Holy Communion)  
Preacher to access the dais and either immediately occupy the pulpit or sit behind the lectern. The preacher, steward and readers should remove their face coverings when speaking from either the pulpit or lectern. The preacher should bring their own bible etc. for use in the service. Drinking water will be provided for the use of the preacher.
- **IMMEDIATE POST SERVICE**  
Wear a face covering and maintain social distancing with limited or no physical contact. Collect personal effects from the pulpit area and/or vestry. The preacher may wish to join other people in the hall for after-service coffee.

## **CHURCH STEWARD ON DUTY AND READERS**

- **WORSHIP AREA**  
Only one church steward will be directly involved in the service, starting the service by lighting the candle, giving particular notices, and introducing the preacher. The steward may also be one of the

readers or the only reader. The steward and any readers should wear a face covering (except when speaking from the lectern) and maintain social distancing. A reserved space will be left on the front right-hand pew for the steward (and possibly the reader). Separate arrangements will be made for special services, e.g., carol service where there are multiple readers.

- **USE OF LECTERN**

Social distancing to be maintained between the person using the lectern and any other person in attendance.

## **MUSICIANS, MUSIC, AND SINGING**

Government and Methodist Church guidance permit congregational singing. Where possible, face coverings should NOT be removed for congregational singing. See also General Note 6.

The organ or keyboard can be played during the service and also before and/or after the service.

The playing of brass and wind instruments may take place in worship.

## **POWERPOINT/SOUND OPERATORS**

- **SETTING UP THE EQUIPMENT**

- Face covering should be worn when moving about the worship area ensuring social distancing at all times.
- Equipment will be delivered to the preacher in either the vestry or the worship area ensuring social distancing and left for the preacher to fit themselves.

- **USING THE SOUND DESK**

- Once seated at the sound desk, the operator should continue to wear a face covering.
- Only one person is to be seated at the sound desk unless both parties are from the same household, in which case, both are to take the above precautions.

## **OFFERING STEWARDS**

This function has been dispensed with as there is a risk of tactile contamination. The congregation should be encouraged to make use of Standing Orders or Bank Transfers. Any monies or envelopes that are brought are to be placed on a collection plate located on the table at the rear of the Worship Area. The offering can be acknowledged in the service in a prayer of blessing, but the plate should remain at the rear of the worship area until the end of the service. It should then be taken to be counted by 2no. church stewards or designated person(s) in the vestry, if it is available for use, or another appropriate place and then deposited in the safe or taken by the responsible person to be deposited at the bank.

## **PORCH (RECEPTION) STEWARD(S)**

The existing Porch Steward rota has been suspended and a new rota of "RECEPTION STEWARD" created whose function and protocol is described below.

- **WELCOMING AND MONITORING THE CONGREGATION**

A reception steward wearing face covering to be located in the foyer. There will be no routine handing out of any written material including notices. The steward is to encourage the congregation to move as quickly as possible into the worship area maintaining social distancing and wearing face coverings.

## **CONGREGATION**

- **ACCESSING THE BUILDING AND TOILETS**

See General Notes.

- **ACCESSING THE WORSHIP AREA**

Where possible, wear a face covering and maintain social distancing when moving around the building. Face coverings should be worn at all times in the worship area.

- **THE ACT OF WORSHIP**

Seating is organised to enable social distancing between individuals or households. Where possible, face coverings should be worn during the service. Generally, there will be no papers or hymn books to be handled; bibles will be available in the pews. When printed content is needed to aid members of the congregation with visual impairment or items to be given out as part of the service, these should be printed immediately in advance of the service. Children will be asked to stay with parents or an adult member of their household. If there is more than one service on a Sunday or the worship area is to be used for another purpose within 72 hours of a service, antiseptic cleaning of the space by 'fogging' should take place after the morning service. After 'fogging' the room should not be accessed for a minimum of one hour.

- **EXITING THE WORSHIP AREA AND PREMISES**

Face coverings should be worn throughout, and social distancing maintained.

- **ACCESSING THE TOILETS**

Numbers of people in the toilet areas at the same time should be limited to prevent crowding. See General Notes on antiseptic cleaning of the premises.

## **WHEELCHAIR USERS and MOBILITY SCOOTER USERS**

Mobility scooters can either be parked under the front canopy or alternatively in the foyer if there is space and the mobility scooter user is from the same household as anyone else using the holding area, or if the holding area is not required by another person. Alternatively, the mobility scooter can be driven directly into the worship area and parked along the rear wall in the designated spaces for wheelchair and mobility scooter users, providing that social distancing can be maintained.

- **ACCESSING THE WORSHIP AREA**

To maintain social distancing wheelchair users and their household will be seated at the rear of the worship area, if required a holding area for wheelchair users and their household will be established in the foyer while they wait their turn to enter the worship area. Wheelchair users will be amongst the first to leave the worship area.

- **ACCESSING THE TOILET**

See General Notes on usage and cleaning of the premises.

## **HOLY COMMUNION**

When Holy Communion takes place, the following guidance from the Methodist Church is to be reflected and acted upon in a way that works safest for our context - <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/reflecting-on-faith/faith-and-order/holy-communion-responding-pastorally-in-the-light-of-covid-19/>.

The Minister will work with the stewards and communion stewards to ensure Holy Communion is safe and still as worshipful as possible. For the preparation of the elements, it is advised that gluten free wafers are used for bread, as they do not need to be handled. For wine, cups are to be spaced around the communion cup tray so that people will not need to pass or touch another cup other than the one they are offered (this works best when alternating the cups around the tray), the cups should be filled using the communion wine filler bottle and the cups should not be touched. When elements are prepared, those preparing them should wash and sanitise their hands before preparation and wear a mask or face covering. The elements should be set out on the communion table and covered before the congregation arrive. After the service, the unused elements should be 'put to ground' (put in the bin/down the sink) they **MUST NOT** be

reverently consumed or returned to the container/bottle. The washing up of the glasses and the plate, must be done with washing up liquid and whilst wearing a mask or face covering; those washing up must ensure they wash their hands thoroughly afterwards for their own safety.

The congregation should be advised about the procedures for taking Communion at the beginning of the service or before starting the Communion prayers by either the Minister or the steward on duty.

There should be no physical contact during sharing the peace. Before starting the Communion prayers, the Minister and others distributing should sanitise their hands. During the prayers, the elements are to remain covered and if they are to be lifted during the prayer, they must either be empty vessels or not used during the distribution. Before the distribution, the Minister and those assisting should put on their mask/face coverings. The elements should be distributed by two people from the dais, socially distanced, one holding the bread and the other the wine. Communicants will pick up an individual wafer and cup, taking care not to touch any other elements, they will not be handed to them.

Subject to current Covid guidance, collection plates for the Benevolent offering may be passed around the congregation. Alternatively, a collection plate labelled for the Benevolent offering may be placed with the other collection plates at the rear of church before the start of the service.

Members of the congregation taking Communion should approach the dais as instructed by the communion stewards as follows:

Those seated on the left-hand side of the worship area (looking from the entrance towards the pulpit) should approach first, starting with those seated on the front row of pews. When directed by communion steward A, people should stand and move to their left to exit the pew into the **left-hand side aisle** and then move forward towards the left-hand end of the dais. They should then approach the centre of the dais where those distributing the elements are standing. Having collected the elements, they should then return down the **central aisle**, as directed by communion steward B, to their pew and sit down to wait.

Once everyone in the left-hand block of pews is seated, anyone on the left-hand side at the back of church in wheelchairs, etc. may approach the dais via the central aisle to receive the elements.

When all of the people seated on the left-hand side have received the elements, the process should be repeated with those seated on the right-hand side, again starting with those on the front pews. When directed by communion steward B, people should stand and move to their right to exit their pew into the **right-hand side aisle** and then move forward towards the right-hand end of the dais. They should then approach the centre of the dais to receive the elements before returning down the **central aisle** to their seats as directed by communion steward A.

Social distancing should be maintained at all times.

Once everyone is seated, anyone with limited mobility may approach the dais via the central aisle to receive the elements, or the elements may be brought to them where they are seated.

The communion stewards, organist, and Minister should then take their elements.

If members only want to receive Communion in one kind (i.e. just the bread), then that is acceptable within our traditions. If members do not want to receive Communion, they should remain in their seats or leave during the Communion hymn.

Once everyone has received the elements, these should be consumed as directed by the Minister. The remaining elements will be covered before the final prayers; communicants should place their empty glasses in a safe place in the pews to be collected by the communion stewards after the service.

## **JUNIOR CHURCH**

A separate Covid-19 strategy for implementing Junior Church has still to be formulated. In the meantime, no Junior Church will take place.

**USE OF VESTRY** (while the NHS Vaccine Hub is potentially operating at Wisewood, the vestry may be accessed but is not otherwise available for use)

- Limit the number of people in the vestry at any given time, all wearing face coverings and ensuring social distancing. Time spent in the vestry to be kept to a minimum; vestry window to be opened whilst it is occupied.

## **PRAYER GROUP**

- Group to meet in an available community room, foyer or in the Worship Area, and to make use of hand sanitizers and to observe social distancing and wear face coverings indoors.

## **CLEANING AND GARDENING TEAMS**

- Teams to make use of hand sanitizers and to observe social distancing and wear face coverings indoors. Teams to carry out their duties on designated day.

## **GENERAL NOTES**

In our drive to minimize Covid-19 transmission via social and tactile contamination the following protocols and regimes have been established:

1. Access into the building via the main entrance with observance of social distancing together with the wearing of face coverings.
2. Hand sanitizers are available at key points throughout the building with a request that they be used by everyone.
3. Where possible, face coverings should be worn by everyone in the foyer, corridors, and toilets, unless they are exempt. Face coverings should also be worn in the worship area and community rooms. They may be removed when seated in the hall to partake of refreshments.
4. No written notices will be handed out and the congregation will be encouraged to move as quickly as possible into the worship area.
5. In the worship area, access preferably to be down the central aisle. Spaces on the front right-hand pew to be left for use by the preacher, steward and reader, if required. Wheelchair and mobility scooter users will be accommodated at the rear of the worship area.
6. Where singing takes place, it should follow the Government's latest [Covid 19 – guidance for the safe use of places of worship](#) and [Methodist Church guidance](#), both of which were last updated on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022.
7. Windows in the worship area should be open during the service to improve cross ventilation. Vertical blinds in front of the open windows should be left open to avoid limiting air flow.
8. If it is anticipated that any activity will last longer than fifteen minutes, then any ventilation in the room in which it is taking place should be implemented immediately upon entering the area and continued for as long as possible after the end of the activity.
9. Refreshments may be served in the hall after the service. Face coverings may be removed when seated and preferably groups at tables should be a maximum of six people.

10. Toilets in the foyer and the disabled toilet are available for all building users, although access down the corridor may entail giving way to someone already in the corridor in order to maintain social distancing. The toilet immediately by the rear fire exit door is reserved for those involved in services. Members of the congregation are advised to be mindful of other people using the toilet areas at the same time to prevent crowding.
11. Toilets have soap dispensers and paper towels, along with hand sanitizers for use on entering and leaving the toilet area. Open waste bins are provided. Antiseptic spray and wipes are available in the toilet cubicles for use on the sanitaryware both before and after use. The toilet lid should be down before flushing the toilet. Where toilets have mechanical extract, the fan should be left on continually and any window left shut to avoid short circuiting of the air movement. Where toilets only have opening windows, these will be left open.
12. Surfaces that can reasonably be expected to have been touched during occupation of the building should be cleaned before and after each use of the building by the users. Where necessary, the 'fogger' should be used to disinfect specific areas and items of furniture, etc. After use of the fogger, the room should not be accessed for a minimum of one hour.
13. When use of any of the rooms has finished, all open windows and external doors must be securely closed and locked by the users.
14. Informative and directional signage will be employed to help users to safely negotiate the premises. The building should be checked weekly by the church stewards or property stewards to ensure that informative and directional signage is still in place.
15. The church stewards will act as Covid-19 Co-ordinators.
16. No-one who currently has Covid-19 symptoms should attend the building. Latest NHS guidance should be followed – see '<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/if-youre-told-to-self-isolate-by-nhs-test-and-trace-or-the-covid-19-app/>'.
17. In the event of someone developing Covid-19 symptoms within 48 hours of having visited the building, one of the church stewards should be informed as soon as possible. Information on cleaning is available on the government website '<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>'.
18. Further information is available on the government website '<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-living-with-covid-19/covid-19-response-living-with-covid-19#living-with-covid-19>'.

It should be appreciated that whilst this proposed regime is still somewhat alien to our usual experience of corporate worship, it has been arrived at as a result of trying to follow current Government and Methodist Church guidance, and a desire to make our corporate worship as safe from Covid-19 infection as is possible.

Advice on these matters is frequently changing and will, of necessity, require constant monitoring and the making of changes to our protocols. Similarly, changes will have to be made in the light of our own experiences in using the building, and this can only be successful with the complete co-operation of all concerned. This risk assessment is a 'live document' and will be presented to each Church Council as the Managing Trustees to show of any amendments or updates undertaken.