

The House of Bishops met via Zoom this afternoon, as it has done regularly throughout the current pandemic, and continued to review advice to clergy on the Church's efforts to limit the spread of the coronavirus, to protect the vulnerable and health services.

In a discussion led by the Bishop of London, Dame Sarah Mullally, who chairs a group examining how the Church of England might proceed once the current restrictions for COVID-19 are relaxed or lifted, the House of Bishops recognised that there have been some welcome signs of improvement in the current situation, including a reduction in new cases and hospital admissions giving evidence for hope.

While church buildings remain closed for public worship, in line with Government advice, the Bishops agreed in principle to a phased approach to lifting restrictions, in time and in parallel with the Government's approach, with three broad stages as infection levels improve:

1. An initial immediate phase allowing very limited access to church buildings for activities such as streaming of services or private prayer by clergy in their own parishes, so long as the necessary hygiene and social distancing precautions are taken
2. Subsequently access for some rites and ceremonies when allowed by law, observing appropriate physical distancing and hygiene precautions
3. Worship services with limited congregations meeting, when Government restrictions are eased to allow this

The Bishops agreed that the decision on the timing of when to implement the revised advice on ministers or worship leaders praying and streaming from their church buildings should be made by individual Diocesan Bishops, depending on their local situation.

The Bishops were clear once again that this is guidance – not an instruction or law – and that it will be constantly reviewed depending on the national situation.

National [Church of England guidance](#) will be updated in the coming days with further advice on how the staged process could be implemented and with factors and information for dioceses to consider.

Bishop Sarah said: "We are hugely grateful for all that our churches and clergy have been doing to support the Government's message to stay at home, to support the NHS, and to save lives.

"While it is clear there will be no imminent return to normality, the emphasis is now turning towards how and when aspects of social distancing can be eased, although we remain mindful of the potential risks of a second wave of the virus.

"Nevertheless, it now makes sense for us to start to look ahead to the potential easing of restrictions so that our clergy and churches can be prepared."

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