

Following Monday's statement by the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, detailing **new restrictions** in England to control the spread of Covid-19, The Bishop of London, Sarah Mullally, who chairs the Church of England's Covid Recovery Group, said:

"The Prime Minister's words tonight underline the severity of the situation for the country, as the virus continues to spread rapidly. At a time like this, the Church is here to offer comfort and spiritual support to everyone. We have a duty to care for each other, but particularly those who are vulnerable or who may be most at risk.

"The Government has chosen not to suspend public worship in England at this time and we will continue to follow the guidance and ensure that churches remain as safe as possible. The Government guidance on the safe use of places of worship makes clear that those attending a place of worship must not mingle with anyone outside their household or support bubble.

"However, some may feel that it is currently better not to attend in person, and there will be parishes which decide to offer only digital services for the time-being. Clergy who have concerns, and others who are shielding, should take particular care and stay at home.

"I would urge everyone in our churches to pray for those on the front line in our public services - the NHS and those working in social care, for schools and many others on whom we depend; and for parents and carers of children at this anxious and stressful time.

"There is hope. The vaccination programme is underway and, as Christians, we have a deeper hope in God that comforts us beyond fear itself. As we have been remembering this Christmas Season, even in the midst of our darkest fears, that hope brings light."

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