

Keeping church buildings clean

Version Control

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22 nd May 2020	1	The Archbishops' Council, Cathedral and Church Buildings Division
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This document will be kept under review and updated as events develop, with each update issued as a new version. The current version will always be available to download from the Church of England website via the [Coronavirus FAQs page](#).

This version contains a new question on deep cleaning, and updated simplified advice on general cleaning.

This advice is based on the [government guidance on opening places of worship](#) (issued 12th June), and guidance issued by Historic England. None of the advice was written specifically for churches, so needs to be interpreted based on the local context and situation.

This advice should be read alongside the government guidance and the [Church of England's advice on opening church buildings](#).

General Questions

I have heard that we need to deep clean our church building before we re-open, or disinfect it between uses. Do we need to do this?

If your building has been closed and nobody has been in it for at least 72 hours, it is unlikely the virus is present. Your building will therefore not need to be disinfected for the virus. This includes fogging or misting treatments of biocidal solutions for disinfection. The contents of these treatments may adversely react with fixtures and fittings in the church building. Please see the [Risk Assessment template](#) for more information on opening your church building.

What do we need to do to keep the church buildings clean?

For routine cleaning, frequently clean those areas that are used using your usual cleaning products. Pay particular attention to objects and surfaces that are touched regularly, and to busy areas. For advice on cleaning historic parts of churches please see below.

What if someone with symptoms has attended the church building?

If you are cleaning after a known or suspected case of COVID-19 then refer to the [specific guidance](#).

Is there any way we can reduce the amount of cleaning we need to do?

You may want to consider restricting access to certain parts of the church to reduce the area of cleaning required.

To reduce the amount of cleaning of door handles you may want to consider propping open doors if this is appropriate.

How often should we clean?

This will depend on the local situation and your local risk assessment. You will want to consider things like footfall, the nature of your building, whether you have restricted access to some parts, the need to clean those parts that are more frequently used more often e.g. door handles, toilets. If a church is closed for more than 72 hours, this will reduce the need for cleaning.

Who can clean?

Anyone who is considered vulnerable and with an underlying health condition should be encouraged to stay at home and not assist in cleaning at this time. Whilst churches are only open to ministers for private prayer and live streaming, only the minister or a household member should be regularly entering the church, other than for maintenance or building work. At this time, cleaning should be proportionate and depend on the use of the building.

Once others are allowed to enter individual prayer, then cleaning will become essential. Numbers going in to clean should be kept to a minimum, and social distancing complied with at all times.

What about cleaning the historic elements of church buildings?

If historic fixtures and fittings have been restricted from access, they should not need to be cleaned. If they form part of the accessible areas that will be touched by the general public, such as pews, the following advice should be followed.

Historic England advises the following when cleaning historic parts of buildings:

Metal/wood/stone/glass/ceramic/modern painted surfaces can be cleaned with a dilute solution of non-ionic conservation-grade detergent or sensitive washing up liquid and distilled water, rinsed with distilled water and dried immediately with white paper towel or soft cotton cloth. Follow manufacturer's instructions for dilution, application and contact times (a minimum contact time of 20 seconds is currently advised by PHE) for all detergents.

Getting hold of conservation grade materials may be difficult. If you can't get hold of conservation grade materials, try to use products with as few additives as possible but that will still clean a surface, such as detergents with no added perfumes and no harsh chemicals. The Ecover range, for example, has few harsh chemicals but will be effective if used correctly. Other examples include Boots Sensitive, and SurCare Sensitive Washing Up Liquid.

Distilled water is preferable. This is water that contains no salts, so that there are no residues or corrosives to interact with delicate surfaces. However, distilled water may be difficult to obtain, so in these circumstances tap water or filtered tap can be used instead.

If there is no water source in the church, bringing in spray bottles filled up at home may be useful. Spray the cloth with the detergent and not the object, to ensure the detergent goes exactly where it is meant to.

If this is not possible then cleaning wipes can be used instead, but be aware this is not a good solution for delicate surfaces, and wipes with alcohol in them should be avoided. Use of wipes is not recommended for long-term use on historic or varnished surfaces, but will work as a temporary measure to keep frequently-touched areas such as doors clean.

Metal surfaces can also be cleaned with industrial denatured alcohol (IDA), such as methylated spirits or isopropanol.

Do NOT use any household detergents or disinfectants containing **chlorine** (1000 ppm dilution) on any historic surface since these could cause permanent damage.

Cleaning materials should be disposed of appropriately

Seek advice from [a Conservator](#) before undertaking any cleaning to more fragile historic surfaces.

What should we do about general hand hygiene: hand washing, sanitation facilities and toilets?

Signs and posters can help build awareness of good hand washing technique, the need to increase hand washing frequency, avoid touching your face and to cough or sneeze into a tissue which is binned safely. Try not to stick posters and signs to historic fabric - use free standing signs or noticeboards.

What about toilets?

Ensure toilets are kept clean, use liquid rather than a bar of soap, and where possible, provide paper towels as an alternative to hand dryers in hand washing facilities.

If regular cleaning of toilets is challenging you may need to think about shutting them or limiting access.

What about upholstery and soft furnishings?

Available information suggests that unless they have been soiled soft furnishings do not need to be cleaned other than as part of your usual cleaning processes, which may include vacuuming with a soft brush attachment

Should we wear personal protection equipment (PPE)?

The Government advises that additional PPE is not generally beneficial. This is because COVID-19 is a different type of risk to the risks you normally face in a workplace, and needs to be managed through social distancing, hygiene and not through the use of PPE. Unless you are in a situation where the risk of COVID-19 transmission is very high or there is a problem with mould or bat droppings (which would have required the use of PPE in any case), the role of PPE in providing additional protection is extremely limited.

What about face coverings?

The evidence of the benefit of using a face covering to protect others is weak and the effect is likely to be small, therefore face coverings are not a replacement for the other ways of managing risk, including minimising time spent in any form of contact with anyone outside your household, maintaining social distancing, and increasing hand and surface washing.

Further advice can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://historicengland.org.uk/coronavirus/historic-places/cleaning-historic-surfaces/>

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