

COVID-19 Advice for the conduct of Confirmation services

Issue Date	Version	Issued by
7 th August 2020	4	The House of Bishops Recovery Group
Update from version 3: this document has been updated to reflect the change in the law requiring face coverings be worn in places of worship from 8 th August. A new question 3 had been added on this topic, and question 4 updated.		

The Recovery Group has been set up to support the Church of England as government guidance changes through the COVID-19 pandemic. This document has been prepared with information available by the issue date. It will be kept under review and updated as the situation develops, 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](#).

Please note that this advice is currently issued in draft form, awaiting confirmation of the exact wording of government guidance for places of worship on the use of face coverings. It will be issued in final form only after this guidance is issued.

The following advice is intended to assist clergy in preparing for a confirmation service, which may include baptism and/or other rites of initiation. It is not exhaustive but addresses essential issues that should be considered. In many cases confirmation will take place in a service of Holy Communion. This guidance will need to be read alongside that for public worship in general and (if relevant) that for Holy Communion, both of which can be found [here](#).

1. What should I do before the Confirmation?

- It is important that interaction with the candidates must be done as safely as possible. This might mean meeting via video link or talking on the telephone. If face-to-face meetings are held, please follow the [government guidance](#) on working in other people's homes and ensure that everyone adheres to physical distancing requirements and that numbers are limited, preferably to a minimum. Such meetings should not be held in the home of anyone who is self-isolating or who is in a vulnerable group.
- It is important to be careful about sharing documents, books, photos etc. and to remember to wash hands thoroughly before and after the meeting.
- The health implications for those in a vulnerable group should be discussed and if some people in these groups intend to be present at the confirmation, their welfare should be of paramount importance. Actions will include advising other attendees that there is a vulnerable person attending, reminding them to take particular care in observing physical distancing and refraining for attending themselves if they feel unwell. If someone from a vulnerable group intends to be present, they should be advised to travel to the church in the safest way possible, preferably in a car by themselves or with someone from their household.

2. How many people can attend the Confirmation service?

- Government guidance has limited the numbers at ‘life cycle events’ (such as confirmation) up to 30 people, where they are held outside of regular worship. If the confirmation is held within a regular act of worship then the physical restrictions of the building need to be assessed for how many it can hold safely with physical distancing. Guidance on how to do this can be found [here](#). This should be taken into account when planning the service and inviting families and guests.
- These restrictions mean that gatherings will inevitably be small, and it is likely that in most dioceses additional services will be required to accommodate the number of candidates, where normally confirmations are large and include many if not all to be confirmed in a deanery. It is recommended that dioceses hold more confirmation services where only a few candidates are confirmed at a time.

3. Should face coverings be worn?

- Face coverings are currently mandatory on public transport and in a range of indoor venues including Places of Worship and church halls. While there are exemptions (please see our [guidance document on face coverings](#)) **this is a legal requirement**.
- Those who are leading services or events in a place of worship, and those who assist them (for instance by reading, preaching, or leading prayer) do not always need to wear a face covering, although one should be worn especially if physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- These exemptions are made to enable communication, particularly with those who rely on lip-reading, facial expressions or clear sound; they do not exempt clergy and other leaders from wearing face coverings in other situations or during other activities.

4. What special steps should be taken during the Confirmation?

- Where baptism and confirmation are celebrated together, it is not advised to have more than one baptism as part of the service.
- Given the restrictions on numbers attending, clergy might wish to consider ways in which others may be able to join the service, perhaps through an audio or video link. If this is not possible a recording of the service might be appropriate.
- An organist may play during the service, but singing is not currently advised.
- It is important for clergy to be mindful of their own personal hygiene – please wash your hands before and after, and avoid using communal Bibles etc.
- Face coverings should be worn by everyone, especially where physical distancing cannot be observed e.g. if a member of clergy and a candidate are gathered at the font.
- Care should be taken to ensure that physical distancing can be observed, not only with respect to seating and positioning of the ministers, candidates, and congregation, but also in terms of entry and exit control, WC provision, and hand sanitising. The capacity of any church or cathedral will therefore be dependent on its ability to provide adequate social distancing as well

as its overall size. All public health advice must be followed. Appropriate cleaning of the venues will be required after each service.

- As a consequence of these restrictions, it may not be appropriate for members of the congregation to move about during the service (for instance, to the font).
- It may be preferable that candidates come to the place of confirmation individually, rather than as a group.
- The laying-on of hands is a significant act at the centre of the Confirmation and will have great significance both to the candidate and to those who support them. It is also the moment at which the greatest care must be taken with safety precautions, for the bishop lays hands upon the head of the candidate (not nearby or above it). He or she should therefore sanitize hands before and after each candidate. Special care must be taken to minimise the number of participants in this action, to keep the contact brief, to ensure distance between those taking part, and to ensure that hands are clean and uncontaminated.
- In some churches candidates are anointed with oil. This is an optional component of the service. If anointing is done, oil should be applied with a single-use implement which can be thoroughly cleaned or disposed of.
- If a candle is given as part of the ceremony, the presenting person should sanitize their hands before and after doing so.

If a candidate is being baptized as part of the service:

- The bishop or minister should sanitize their hands before and after the Signing with the Cross on the candidate.
- Water should be poured over the candidate's head using an appropriate implement to pour the water such as a shell. Unfortunately, baptisms by immersion cannot be safely conducted at present.
- No one should sign themselves with the baptismal water or be sprinkled with the water after the baptism.

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