

Advice on Christmas bubbles

Issue Date	Version Number	Issued by
2 nd December 2020	1	The House of Bishops COVID-19 Recovery Group

Between 23rd and 27th December, people across England are allowed to form ‘Christmas bubbles’. The rules for this can be found on the [government website](#). There is no upper limit to the number of people who can be in a bubble, provided only three households are included.

The government has said that people in a Christmas bubble can meet in private homes, public outdoor spaces, and places of worship. This means that for this five-day period it will be legal for groups larger than one household to attend church.

Apart from this change, all other rules applicable to the tier you are in still apply – so Christmas bubbles can not mix with other groups, and if people are attending who are not in a Christmas bubble they will continue to need to abide by the rules around distancing from other households.

Rules on [wearing of face coverings](#) and [restrictions on congregational singing indoors](#) still apply throughout the Christmas period. The limit on numbers attending Christmas services is the same as for all other services – that is, the number of people who can safely be in the building whilst maintaining a 2m distance between households.

Here are some tips that might help you plan:

1. When planning services and events for the period between 23rd and 27th December you should ensure that the possibility of larger groups attending has been included in your risk assessment. Bear in mind that there is no requirement to ensure Christmas bubbles sit together, only that they do not interact with anyone outside their bubble. For example if your church has alternate pews or rows of seats roped off then do not feel you should amend that in order to sit bigger groups all together.
2. Where it is possible to do so, using a booking and seat-allocation system will help to ensure that different Christmas bubbles and households can stay 2m apart from each other. Let everyone know that attendance must be booked and, if applicable, that they should expect to sit in designated areas. You can use an online system like [Eventbrite](#), which is free to use for free events and has an optional seat allocation function.
3. If you do not have a booking system, consider how you will manage if larger groups turn up and there is not space to accommodate them. Good signage, a defined waiting area (which might be outside), and a way of counting people into your church will all help.

4. If you do not have a booking system, consider basic hygiene practices that will make it possible to re-arrange seating if larger groups turn up – for example, have signs asking people not to move seats themselves, and assign someone to be responsible for arranging seating, with disposable gloves and sanitiser available to protect them.

It is important to note that the rules on Christmas bubbles meeting indoors only apply to specific circumstances – of which places of worship are one. People cannot meet their Christmas bubble in any indoor settings other than those laid out in law; visiting places such as a pub, hotel, shop, theatre, or restaurant continue to be restricted to the numbers laid out for different tiers.

It is not your responsibility to check if people are abiding by the rules laying out who can be in their household bubble. So long as you have clear processes in place to enable distancing and good hygiene within your church, accompanied by a completed risk assessment and an [NHS Test and Trace](#) poster displayed, you will be doing what you need to do.