

# Information Sheet

## Re-opening Village and Community Halls post COVID-19 closure ISSUE 11 – July 2021

Those responsible for managing halls are advised to make sure they are on their local [ACRE Network](#) member's mailing list. Also, to keep monitoring their ACRE Network member website and social media channels for any updates or check the gov.uk coronavirus website. This will ensure they are alerted to changes in Government guidance.

ACRE has been working as far as possible with relevant Government departments so that hall managers have confidence they are working to "joined up" guidance. It aims to provide practical information to assist hall managers to comply with Government guidance and the Health Protection Regulations. Where any temporary local lockdowns come into force, those will take precedence over information contained here e.g., certain activities may be curtailed, or your hall closed.

Village and Community Halls are multi-purpose premises, so it is based on interpretation, as far as possible, of the Government's Roadmap Out of Lockdown and guidance subsequently published. However, it is not possible to go into the detail of all the relevant Government guidance and links are given in Section 6. Government Guidance for Community Facilities needs to be considered alongside other Guidance for specific activities such as that for grassroots sport and performance. At the time of writing not all such Guidance has not yet been updated for Step 4 (from 19 July) so the links should be checked after that date. This Sheet may be updated in accordance with any subsequent government guidance.

The term "managers" is used here to describe those responsible for managing a village hall, community centre, church hall, parish hall or similar multi-purpose community facility, whether volunteer trustees, committee members or paid staff. Please note that any advice or information provided here should not be taken as a substitute for professional legal or other advice.

### Changes in Version 11

#### Text changes

Summary of Step 4 on page 4

Information about social distancing and face coverings in Section 2.2

Removal of information in 2.8 regarding exercise and playgrounds

Change to information regarding catering 2.9

Section 3 – changes to reflect that some halls may be opening for the first time.

*There may be other small changes in terms of typos, layout and headings to aid clarity.*

*The Appendices are available to download separately.*

- **Appendix A:** Remains relevant for halls which have not previously re-opened

- **Appendix C:** The poster is amended to address changed guidance on social distancing and face coverings.
- **Appendix D:** has been substantially reduced to reflect Step 4 out of Lockdown and the implications for different activities.
- **Appendix E:** Changes are made to clauses 6, 8,9,11,14 and 17. Clause 15 is removed.
- **Appendix J:** Removed, please refer to any updated Government guidance
- **Appendix K:** Removed, please refer to any updated Government Guidance

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*Thank you to Louise Beaton, ACRE Board member and Community Halls Consultant for producing this Information Sheet for ACRE.*

*We are grateful to ACRE Network members and hall committees who have kindly shared their own documents for contribution to this Guidance. Also, to all members of the ACRE team for their support.*

*All [comments](#) regarding this Information Sheet are welcome.*

# 1. The Step-by-Step approach

The Government laid out its recovery plans in the Roadmap out of Lockdown. There are four steps in the process. Each step is contingent on all four of the following conditions being met:

1. The coronavirus vaccine programme continues to go to plan.
2. Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently reducing the number of people dying or needing hospital treatment.
3. Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospital admissions.

At Step 4, in summary, people will be asked “to make informed decisions and act carefully and proportionally to manage risk to themselves and others”. While legal restrictions will no longer apply, Government guidance will continue to be issued.

For village and community halls it appears that all community events and activities and private hires will be able to take place from 19<sup>th</sup> with risks managed by hirers e.g., through ventilation, encouraging social distancing, hand washing and use of hand sanitiser.

Nevertheless, the greater transmission associated with the Delta variant means it remains important to respect and be considerate of those who are more vulnerable and who may wish to take a more cautious approach. It will therefore be appropriate at some activities or events that measures (including wearing face masks and social distancing) are taken so that people who are clinically more vulnerable or not yet fully vaccinated can attend.

Good ventilation (or holding activities outdoors) is the best means of reducing risk of transmission so it will be important to take advantage of the better weather in order to enable more vulnerable people to enjoy activities with minimal anxiety.

While all use can resume, and smaller events where social distancing can continue to be achieved will be less risky, the questions now likely to arise are around whether, or when, to continue applying reduced capacity limits and whether to require other mitigation measures for larger or more “crowded” bookings e.g., to charge for additional cleaning afterwards. Reviewing the COVID-19 Risk Assessment and the notes in Appendix D may help.

Pending issuing of more detailed Government guidance it makes sense for halls to retain the physical measures already in place (e.g., QR poster, hand sanitiser stations, posters requiring face coverings on entry) and more frequent cleaning of regularly touched surfaces, so that people feel comfortable returning to the hall.

The COVID-secure capacity can be relaxed at Step 4 to a level which feels appropriate for different types of larger event, bearing in mind for example whether it’s an audience seated for a performance (less risky), a wedding reception with people dancing and singing (riskier) and whether provision can be made for the more vulnerable and non-double vaccinated.

## 2. Planning for re-opening

**2.1 The COVID-19 Secure Guidelines:** Trustees, managers and any staff need to be aware that the following 6 key points apply. These underpin COVID Secure status and this Information Sheet. Some

hirers may be particularly cautious about returning and it will assist everyone if you can make clear that arrangements reflect them:

- **A COVID-19 Risk Assessment should have been undertaken** before any village and community hall opens.
- **Minimise contact with individuals who are unwell.** Any person with symptoms should not attend the premises if they have symptoms or are self-isolating due to symptoms in their household.
- **Clean your hands often.** Sanitiser (or soap and water) should be provided at entry and exit points, sanitiser and/or running water, soap and paper towels or hot air driers in toilets and kitchens.
- **Respiratory hygiene.** Everyone (except children under the age of 7) can be encouraged to wear a face mask, avoid touching their mouth, eyes, and nose. Tissues need to be disposed of into a bin, then hands cleaned. A "**Catch it, Bin it, Kill it**" [poster](#) is available.
- **Regular cleaning of surfaces that are touched frequently:** including door handles, handrails, tabletops, sinks, toilet areas, kitchen surfaces. Ordinary domestic products can be used.
- **Maintain social distancing where possible:** Social distancing guidelines require at least 2 metres (3 steps) to be maintained where possible between individuals or groups, which can be no more than 6 people or 2 households, and, where not possible, 1metre plus other mitigation measures. Bookings can be accepted where social distancing can be maintained and contacts below 2m are minimised and transitory. See 2.2 below.

**You are not obliged to re-open immediately and it would be unwise to do so if you have not been through the process of carrying out a COVID-19 risk assessment. If you conducted a COVID-19 Risk Assessment in 2020, it should now be reviewed.**

**Appendix A** provides a checklist of tasks likely to be needed prior to re-opening, of which compliance with COVID-19 secure guidelines is just part.

Hall managers will need to engage with their regular hirers to ensure that the 5 COVID-19 Secure Guidelines requirements above are clearly understood. **Appendix B** provides pro-forma which can be used to find out from hirers which facilities are likely to be required when. Trustees appointed by organisations which use the premises have an important role to play in communicating these requirements to their members and in ensuring the special hire conditions which need to be applied are followed. See 2.5 below and **Appendix E**.

As part of opening after lockdown, self-certification should be displayed to demonstrate that halls are complying with COVID-19 Secure Guidelines. This will also help users feel confident about using the premises. See **Appendix C** for a sample certificate/poster.

**All halls** are still encouraged to display a QR code for NHS Test and Trace. This is covered in **Appendix M**.

## **2.2. Social Distancing, capacity and test and trace at Village and Community Halls**

**a) The Social Distancing requirements and larger events:** Reducing risk of transmission remains essential. Government Guidance on safe opening of community facilities previously advised that in an "enclosed area, owners and operators should identify an advisory limit on the maximum number of users able to use the community facility". While the strict 2m social distancing requirements will be removed at Step 4, the advice that "people should act carefully and proportionally to manage risk to themselves and others" needs to be borne in mind so as to achieve a view as to the maximum number of people that can be accommodated at larger events while also facilitating social distancing, particularly for

more vulnerable people. People may still prefer to sit in groups with others they are usually in contact with and have 1 – 2 m separation from other groups.

In order to achieve this, managers will need to work out a safe capacity and set limits on the number of people permitted to use a particular hall or room at any one time. A figure somewhere between 50% of the usual maximum capacity (which was permitted for performance events at Step 3) and 90% (to allow space for more vulnerable people) might be appropriate, but ventilation will also have a bearing – so the figure may need to be adjusted as the weather becomes colder.

The capacity set for fire safety purposes is usually based on the number of fire exits so this may not reflect the number that can be safely accommodated for COVID. Different layouts may allow different (higher) capacities for different activities. Stewarding may also assist.

At an event, it would be advisable to avoid people needing to interact with anyone outside the group they attend with: For example, each quiz table should have their own pens and paper and not swap the answers for scoring.

See also **Appendix D**

**b)** User groups may not know at the outset how many people are likely to attend activities. A booking system is not required but for larger events it may be a useful means of keeping within capacity, and facilitate recording contact details, as people are still encouraged to use NHS Test and Trace. It would be appropriate to ask groups to think about how they will deal with any excess, which may depend on the nature of their activity and the facilities at the hall e.g., garden committee room, some people joining in online either at home or via laptop in another room.

**c) Pinch points:** Arrangements should continue to be made to manage people at “pinch points” e.g., in toilets, kitchens and corridors

**d)** Implementing **a one-way flow** in and out of the premises should help avoid congestion, particularly where multiple activities are held at the same time. Usually, entry would be via the main entrance, with people leaving via fire exits. **For security**, fire exits would need to be closed by the last person to leave the building, who then leaves via the main entrance. Appropriate signposting will be needed. Any changes to entrances, exits and queues should, however, consider the needs of those with physical disabilities. It may not be possible to implement one-way flow internally, as people may have to cross an entrance hall to reach the toilets or kitchen, so it may be necessary to stagger access to such facilities e.g. a longer interval.

**e) Face Coverings:** While face coverings are no longer required inside village and community halls, it would be advisable to encourage their continued use in confined spaces and where more vulnerable people are likely to be present. The requirement for people to wear a face covering may help people feel more comfortable about attending activities, and they should be worn on arrival, leaving and when using communal areas such as corridors, toilets..”

Trustees and managers are not able to enforce wearing face coverings. However, hirers can be required to encourage those attending activities to do so and/or to comply with the relevant guidance for their sector.

**f) Consultation with regular user groups will be important** as some reorganisation may remain inevitable. Some groups may want to retain their usual “slots” while it may be necessary to hire the premises in different ways. For example, groups may need to use the main hall rather than a committee room to achieve social distancing, which may mean re-arranging timings for main hall use. A committee

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room may need to become a “kettle point” for any offices so that staff do not need to use the kitchen when a hire is in progress. Some groups may be able to continue running activities online to make way for others. **Appendix B** is a sample questionnaire for users, kindly shared by Witcham Village Hall, Cambridgeshire.

**g) NHS Test and Trace.** All groups are encouraged to assist NHS Test and Trace by having a system for keeping a temporary record of who attends for 21 days and to provide that data to NHS Test and Trace if needed. (It is not compulsory for people to provide information but could help contain outbreaks.) The Government Guidance for Places of Worship gives a sample consent form at the end. An NHS QR poster should also continue to be displayed at the hall. **See Appendix M**

### **2.3 Risk Assessment for COVID-19**

Village hall trustees must consider the COVID-19 Secure guidelines and should undertake their own COVID-19 Risk Assessment to ensure that their staff (cleaner, caretaker) and trustees are safe. It is advisable to review last year’s Risk Assessment before opening this year in case anything has changed. See **Appendix F** for an example.

The responsibility for risk assessment and implementation can be delegated to a competent individual or company. Bear in mind that Government guidance on performance says: “Risk assessment is not about creating huge amounts of paperwork, but rather about identifying sensible measures to control the risks in your workplace.” Going through a Risk Assessment process and working out the areas of greater and lower risk will hopefully enable a “common sense” approach to which hirers can adapt. It is rarely possible to eliminate risk entirely, your aim should be to do the best to minimise it.

Employers and organisations have a duty to consult workers and volunteers on health and safety so listening and talking to them about how you will manage risks from COVID-19 will show that you take their health and safety seriously.

### **2.4 Cleaning and encouraging good hygiene.**

All surfaces which are frequently touched should continue to be cleaned regularly using standard cleaning products. A decision will need to be made on how frequently cleaning should take place, based on an assessment of risk, and use of the building. Some halls have the resources (staff, finance) to clean regularly used surfaces and equipment before hirers arrive, which is ideal. If that is the case, the cleaner might post a sheet showing when the hall was last cleaned, as a comfort to users.

Many village and community halls, however, have part time or self-employed staff e.g., with other cleaning jobs, who work only a few hours per week, or no staff (users clean before and after activities), particularly halls serving rural areas which are used less frequently. This means that hirers let themselves in, are often responsible for putting out and stowing away the equipment they use and for cleaning the hall after use. Experience is that not all hirers clean up after themselves satisfactorily and trustees have expressed concern that not all hirers will comply with carrying out a higher level of cleaning on leaving so suggestions are given below.

a) **All halls** should:

- Provide sanitiser for hirers to put out at every entrance/exit and in meeting rooms. (Soap and water are acceptable but sanitiser often more practical).
- Post notices at every entrance/exit showing what is expected of users. Erect the “Catch It, Bin It,

Kill It" poster and posters encouraging frequent handwashing, see Section 6. If the poster at **Appendix C** is laminated, the time can be given when the hall was last cleaned, but this is not compulsory.

- Advise the cleaner/caretaker as to the extra cleaning required if someone is taken unwell on the premises with a suspected case of COVID-19. This requires disposable PPE and double bagging of PPE and cleaning materials afterwards, which must be stored for 72 hours securely prior to collection: See the link in Section 6 for decontamination in non-healthcare settings.
  - Advise hirers bringing or using their own equipment which is stored at the hall that they will need to clean for each session or before stowing it away or ask their group members to bring their own clean equipment and avoid sharing it.
- b) **Where a hall cannot arrange surfaces to be cleaned before every hire**, the appropriate way of discharging the trustees' responsibility and encouraging compliance is likely to be to:
- Require each hiring group to clean surfaces that their group might use **before** their own users arrive, to clean regularly used surfaces such as tabletops and sinks during the hire and to clean them again before they leave. Hirers could be asked to sign a record sheet confirming e.g. "I have cleaned before leaving all surfaces in the rooms used during hire", with the time.
  - For the hall to ensure the hall's usual cleaning routine is followed e.g., for floors, and to pay particular attention to cleaning hand wash basins, door and toilet handles and providing cleaning supplies for use by hirers. This means the cleaner/caretaker (or volunteers or another contractor) will need to provide and check/replenish hand sanitiser, cleaning materials (including cleanser, spray disinfectant, washing up liquid, cloths, or paper roll) and tissues and the hirer removes waste to outside bins before the hall is next used. Supplies of soap and paper towels must be provided at toilet and kitchen sinks. Make clear to hirers how often the cleaner attends.
  - Limit cleaning of some areas to staff and/or provide instructions to hirers, e.g., where there is a risk of damage or electrical apparatus is involved. For example, switches should be cleaned by cloth, not sprayed with disinfectant, rubberised, or glued surfaces and upholstered surfaces can be damaged by frequent sprays or vigorous rubbing.
- c) **Use of toilets:** Inside toilets do not have to be made available to the public (which may conflict with safeguarding requirements and social distancing) or kept open when the hall is not in use. It is not compulsory for any public toilets (e.g., serving playing fields) to be opened but where they are Government Guidance for public toilets should be followed.

## 2.5 Hiring Arrangements.

- a) Halls should continue to give priority to essential services, Pre-schools and schools and endeavor to arrange other hires around these. If that is not feasible without compromising COVID-19 Secure guidelines the hall may have to remain closed for other hirers.
- b) Instruct booking secretaries to allow longer between hires, to allow either the cleaner/caretaker to clean before their arrival or hirers to arrive up to half an hour earlier in order to pre-clean for their own use.
- c) The cleaner/caretaker will need to be given expected arrival times for each hirer or other arrangements made to check sufficient supplies of sanitiser, soap, paper towels and cleaning materials.

- d) Hirers will need to be given instructions, guidance and responsibility via special hiring conditions which should be attached to their usual hire agreement. These should be issued in writing and signed or accepted by the hirer in all cases. An electronic signature or email confirmation of the conditions is acceptable. See **Appendix E** for sample special hire conditions.
- f) Hirers should be encouraged to keep the hall well ventilated, opening doors (except internal fire doors) and windows as far as possible, and will need to remember to close them all for security on leaving. It may therefore be necessary for the caretaker or a volunteer to check the premises. Fresh air is preferable to mechanical ventilation. In colder weather windows should either be kept open a small amount or opened every 15 minutes for a short period in order to reduce the risk of a higher “dose” of the virus causing more serious illness, in the event that someone present is carrying it. Extractor fans should be used in toilets and kitchens, where fitted. This film has been produced:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-film-shows-importance-of-ventilation-to-reduce-spread-of-covid-19>.

Hirers can be encouraged to seat or stand people side-to-side, rather than face-to-face, whenever possible. Sedbergh People’s Hall, Cumbria, have issued photos to help their hirers work out how to arrange their meeting rooms. Barnham Community Hall, Sussex has issued a video. Drawings could be posted on noticeboards.

- g) Those who are clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 are no longer being advised to shield from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 but all those over the age of 70 or who are clinically vulnerable remain advised to limit their number of social interactions. Hirers should therefore be encouraged to have regard as to whether any people attending their activity are clinically vulnerable, potentially anxious about re-joining community activities and how they will address the need to keep them safe. This is important because although vaccinations reduce the risk of hospitalisation the new variants are a concern. This is reflected in the Special Hiring Conditions at **Appendix E**.
- h) Hirers should be provided with a copy of the hall’s COVID-19 Risk Assessment. You may wish to ask to see a copy of their own COVID-19 Risk Assessment. The sample at **Appendix G** can be shared with user groups, to help them think through preparing their own Risk Assessment. It is not compulsory that users complete their own – it is the premises and any play equipment which must be subject to a COVID-19 Risk Assessment.
- i) You and your hirers may wish to encourage those attending to bring their own Food and Drink e.g., water bottles for the time being, rather than making food and drink on the premises, to reduce work cleaning the kitchen. Users should also be encouraged to bring their own equipment where possible, e.g., crafts, keep fit, and can be encouraged to bring their own personal hand sanitiser, wipes, and tissues.
- j) Hirers should keep a note of the names and telephone number for everyone attending their activity and retain this for 3 weeks so that, in the event of a case, NHS Test and Trace can contact everyone the individual was in contact with. People are not obliged to provide their personal details. Information should be kept securely so as to comply with GDPR (e.g., a password protected phone or tablet, a locked filing cabinet) and then destroyed.
- k) Government guidance has asked venues to take steps to avoid people needing to unduly raise their voices to each other, e.g., playing music at loud volume so that normal conversation is difficult, so as to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus from aerosol and droplet transmission. This remains sensible advice and is addressed in **Appendix E**.
- l) Where part of the premises is leased to another organisation, or subject to an Occupation Licence,

that occupier would normally have the responsibility for the management of their facilities in accordance with the relevant Government guidance and will be expected co-operate with the hall managers to achieve safe use of communal areas.

## 2.6 Employees, self-employed people, and volunteers

a) Organisations have a specific duty of care to employees and, as they also have a duty of care to self-employed staff and volunteers, it is recommended that they are afforded the same level of protection as employees. Government guidance has been issued for Employers and that for offices and contact centres and 5 steps to working safely are the most appropriate for community halls (See links in Section 6). The key point for halls is that, in addition to carrying out the hall's ordinary risk assessment before re-opening, the hall should follow HSE advice for an Employer's Risk Assessment for COVID-19, in discussion with staff, which involves:

- Identifying what work activity or situations might cause transmission of the virus.
- Thinking about who could be at risk.
- Deciding how likely it is that someone could be exposed.
- Acting to remove the activity or situation, or if this is not possible, control the risk.

These points are addressed in the Sample COVID-19 Risk Assessment at **Appendix F**.

b) HSE guidance is that no one is obliged to work in an unsafe work environment and that in the risk assessment you should have particular regard to whether the people doing the work are especially vulnerable to COVID-19. If that is the case with your hall cleaner/caretaker, you may need to make alternative arrangements for the time being.

c) BEIS guidance and other references in Section 6 may help you address questions or concerns from employees or self-employed contractors about COVID-19.

d) If the hall has a resident caretaker, consider whether there are any implications when carrying out the COVID-19 Risk Assessment.

e) If staff are on the premises when the hall is used by others a record of staff working patterns should be kept for a period of 21 days to assist NHS Test and Trace contain outbreaks.

## 2.7 Performances

The arts industry has been badly affected by COVID-19 and will welcome efforts to accommodate performances. Key points in the Guidance issued by the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) are given in **Appendix J**. A report by Live & Local, testing the viability of rural touring arts, has been published by the National Rural Touring Forum, which successfully used this Information Sheet as the basis for running a pilot performance in a village hall in Lincolnshire.

The National Rural Touring Forum has advised promoters commit to advance sales only for rural touring arts, to avoid potential box office queues and facilitate social distancing.

## 2.8 Playgrounds, indoor exercise, and outdoor sports areas

See Section 6 for a link to the Government guidance.

Separate Government guidance is published for providers of outdoor sports and recreation facilities and for grassroots sports and gym and leisure facilities. See links in Section 6.

Sport and exercise should take place in accordance with guidance issued by the relevant governing body for the sport or activity to deal with COVID-19 risks. ACRE recommends village and community halls require hirers to comply with such governing body guidance, rather than try to adapt their own hiring conditions and policies for each type of activity. (Sports played as individuals, rather than in teams, such as badminton and table tennis are not subject to governing body guidance).

## **2.9 Catering**

Arrangements for catering will depend on the size and nature of the activity and the size and facilities of the kitchen. Common sense should be applied to achieve social distancing. For example, for short meetings people might be encouraged to bring their own water. For longer, small events, such as an art class, people might each use the kitchen to make their own refreshments and clean after themselves. Refreshments can be served from a hatch and table service will no longer be compulsory, even for alcohol sales. Pre-ordering at the start of an event, one person from each table collecting on a tray, may remain appropriate.

## **2.10 Procedures if someone becomes unwell with suspected COVID-19**

a) As a matter of good practice a space should be designated (eg kitchen, committee room) into which anyone will be moved who becomes unwell at the hall with suspected COVID-19 symptoms, so that they are away from other people until transport home or to hospital is available. They should be provided with tissues and a bowl of warm soapy water for handwashing and paper towels. Tissues and paper towels should be disposed of into a plastic bag, which is sealed and placed in a secure place for 72 hours before being disposed of into the general rubbish collection. See **Appendix H**. (The contents of a Covid-19 first aid box do not replace the need for an ordinary first aid box).

b) Other people that have attended the same activity should be asked for contact details if not already available and then to leave the premises. These details should be provided to NHS Test and Trace if requested.

c) A decontamination clean should be carried out in those parts of the premises they have used, in accordance with PHE guidance (see reference section). The minimum PPE to be worn is disposable gloves and an apron. Disposable PPE equipment including gloves should be disposed of into a sealed, labelled or marked plastic bag and placed in a secure place for 72 hours before rubbish is collected. The cleaner should wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds after removing PPE and launder all personal clothing worn on arrival home.

## **3. The re-opening of Pre-schools**

From 8<sup>th</sup> March Pre-schools and nurseries were able to welcome back all children below statutory school age.

For hall committees who hire to Pre-schools and nurseries within the building, this will mean a more careful re-opening of the hall to other hirers or members of the public in order to address the anxiety of pre-school staff, parents and other hall users.

It is best if cleaning and maintenance tasks are carried out when Pre-school are not on site, though that may not always be possible.

Where common areas serve other parts of a hall,, which are used by other hirers or the public at the same time as Pre-school is in place, such as entrance lobbies, corridors, kitchens, toilets, timing of

arrangements will clearly need to be discussed with the Pre-school. For example, cleaning and servicing of these areas might be carried out when Pre-school staff and children are elsewhere on the premises. Hirers' arrival and departure times may either have to be changed so that they do not coincide with the arrival and departure times implemented by Pre-schools, or a separate entrance/exit used e.g., fire exit or a separate waiting/queueing arrangement created outside.

Responsibility for cleaning door handles, basins and working surfaces by organisations or individuals not connected with the Pre-school will have to be established if common areas are used.

Where the space used by Pre-school during the day is used by another organisation later in the afternoon or evening, arrangements for cleaning within that area will have to be established.

## 4. Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: Will our hall have to re-open when the Government says it can?**

**A:** No but **make sure you notify the insurer, as unoccupancy terms are likely to apply.** If your hall remains closed your trustees still need to meet from time to time to monitor finances, security, and future plans, and review the decision not to re-open. Minute the reasons for closure, so that you can show that the matter has been carefully considered in the event of challenge. In taking such a decision you should consider the effect on vulnerable residents whom the hall is there to serve, their mental and physical wellbeing, your ability to provide safe premises and the financial implications for the charity. What is the impact on hirers if they cannot offer their activity - either for their users or their income?

**Q: Our hall has fan/hot air heaters. Is the airflow likely to cause a risk?**

**A:** If the system is a heat-recovery ventilation system, which maintains a constant supply of fresh air from outside, or otherwise draws air from outside the answer is no. If air is drawn internally but not near head height the risk reduced.

**Q: If an outbreak of COVID-19 is traced to our hall, will we, trustees, or staff, be held liable?**

**A:** If those responsible for managing the hall use reasonable endeavours to ensure the hall is cleaned and maintained in accordance with the COVID-19 Secure Guidelines, have prepared a COVID-19 Risk Assessment, **see Appendix F**, and have written records of the action taken this should reduce very substantially the risk of being held liable. Providing this is the case, and any insurer requirements met, any liability should be addressed in the usual way by the hall's public liability cover and legal expenses cover. Not only would a claimant have to prove the committee had been negligent and that they caught the disease at the premises, but they may also be held to bear responsibility themselves by putting themselves in harm's way.

**Q: Hirers want to use the hall but pay a reduced fee because their numbers will be lower, and they will be doing more cleaning. We cannot afford this, because we have fixed costs to pay and are having to arrange more cleaning too. Do we have to allow it to open at a reduced fee if it is going to cost us more than the income?**

**A:** It is up to trustees or committees responsible for managing charitable halls to determine what is in the best interests of their hall charity in the light of these exceptional circumstances and predicted financial situation. However, local businesses and self-employed people should pay the usual (market) rate. See also Section 5 as to grants and funding.

**Q: What do we do if someone wants to hire the hall for an event at which we think social distancing might not be observed, such as an 18th birthday party?**

**A:** An event such as an 18<sup>th</sup> birthday party can be held at Step 4. However, you are entitled to either refuse the booking or accept a booking for a future date with the caveat that it is subject to cancellation if

Government guidance at the time would not permit it, or it appeared requirements then in force would not be met. See **Appendix D**.

**Q: Where can we obtain a disposable apron and quantities of cleaning materials at low cost?**

**A:** Try your usual suppliers, supermarkets, pharmacy, DIY stores or internet shopping. For decontamination purposes, a plastic apron without sleeves is adequate but halls have found cheap overalls from DIY outlets a good alternative.

**Q: We are confused. When should sanitiser, soap and water or antibacterial wipes be used?**

**A:** Provide what is most appropriate. Sanitiser tends to be more easily dispensed at entrances and exits, whereas soap and water easily used in kitchens and toilets. For general cleaning disposable cloths used with and warm, soapy water, paper rolls or spray disinfectant are adequate. If you are concerned that sanitiser will disappear, large bottles may avoid the problem. You could require each hirer to put it out or provide their own. People can be encouraged to bring their own sanitiser, antibacterial wipes and tissues. Wipes must not be flushed down toilets, bins should be provided.

**Cleaning:**

**Q:** Our chairs have upholstered backs, seats, and arms, cleaning them between use would damage them and we are told sanitiser spray may leave a sticky residue. Should we buy plastic chairs instead? They are not so comfortable. Should we use a "misting device"?

**Q:** Our Pre-school asks if we should clean the walls before others use the hall, as children tend to touch them?

**Q:** Our yoga teacher asks if she needs to clean the floor after the class? They bring their own mats, but people tend to touch the floor, put their water bottle on it.

**Q:** The room used by our Pilates class has a carpeted floor. Should we disinfect the carpet between each use or replace it?

**A:** These are all a matter of risk assessment. The emphasis is on cleaning **frequently touched surfaces and cleaning hands regularly**. These surfaces all tend to be touched less frequently than, for example, tabletops, door, and toilet handles. Over summer, keeping doors and windows open to improve ventilation, coupled with vaccination, should reduce the risk. Rather than going to the expense of buying new, less comfortable chairs or a misting device or changing flooring you could consider asking hirers to ask people not to attend if unwell, ensure regular use of hand sanitiser, especially before getting out and stowing these chairs, to use plastic gloves, or rotating their use (so there is a day or two between use of each chair). Some fabrics are dry clean only, so a sanitiser spray should not be used on them. What benefits would a misting device have i.e. would it save wiping regularly used surfaces or staff time? How long is required before rooms can be used again, particularly by anyone with an allergy or asthma, might the chemicals affect them? Pre-schools are encouraging children to wash hands regularly and other hirers are unlikely to touch the same part of a wall as a small child. Those attending yoga and Pilates should bring their own mats, reducing contact with the floor. Unless there is a parent and toddler class using the hall after yoga or Pilates, it is unlikely other hirers will touch the floor. If someone developed Covid-19 symptoms who had recently been at the class, it would then be necessary to consider cleaning the carpet or closing the room for 72 hours.

**Q: Our cleaner/volunteers are aged over 70**, so were in the vulnerable category recommended to stay at home. What should we do?

**A:** It is essential to risk assess and discuss the situation with them in the light of their circumstances. They may still wish to minimise contact with others outside their household. For paid people loss of income will be an issue so perhaps you can arrange duties to avoid contact with others e.g. cleaning when no or few people are on the premises. For volunteers, social contact with other people may be very important after lockdown so it will be essential to ensure everyone maintains 2m social distancing and good hygiene.

**Q: Do we need to ask every hirer to complete their own Covid-19 Risk Assessment?**

**A:** This is not compulsory, but it may help everybody feel safer if they do so.

**Q: Do we need to clean the hall if it has not been used for 72 hours?**

**A:** The virus is not thought to survive longer than this on surfaces so from a risk assessment perspective, no. However, it encourages hirers to maintain a good cleaning routine if they are asked to clean regularly used surfaces before starting.

**Q: We are keen to avoid using disposable gloves and aprons for ordinary cleaning. Can we use washable/wipeable items?**

**A:** Yes. Disposable ones are only required if cleaning after a suspected case.

## 5. Finances

a) **Charitable Community Halls and Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs):** From 1<sup>st</sup> April the Restart grant became available which, like the previous Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant and Lockdown Payment, is based on Rateable Value (RV): Those halls with a RV of £15,000 or less will receive £8,000, those with a RV over £15,000 and under £51,000 will receive £12,000. The Additional Restrictions Support Grants remain available, which are discretionary grants, so a case for support will need to be made to the local authority. See section 6 for link.

Under the Extended Retail Discount (ERD) charitable halls should also receive 100% rate relief until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021.

Please contact your ACRE Network member if you have any queries about accessing such support.

b) **Church Halls and Parish/Town Council Halls:** A hall which is ineligible for the above support e.g., a church hall or parish council run hall, may seek the Additional Restrictions Support Grant support from their local authority, which is discretionary. **Applications should be made as soon as possible.**

c) **Social Clubs:** May apply for the discretionary Additional Restrictions Support Grant from their local authority.

**Forward Planning:** In view of the long-term effect on hire income it will be particularly important that managers revise budgetary projections to the end of the 2021/22 financial year in order to identify whether these grants will be sufficient to cover any deficit. This needs to be done at an early stage because, if its own free reserves are insufficient, the hall will need to allow time for approaches to be made elsewhere for financial support. Note that any restricted funds held by a charity are unlikely to be available for this purpose, such as donations or grants received for capital works. Financial support may be available from parish and town councils or from local charitable or National Lottery funds where a charity is facing financial hardship and risk of closure because of COVID-19. A crowdfunding campaign might be launched.

## 6. Government Guidance and other references

### Government roadmap and COVID-19 Secure Guidelines:

[COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021 \(Summary\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

### Guidance for the Safe Use of multi-purpose Community Facilities:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-multi-purpose-community-facilities>

[Enabling safe and effective volunteering during coronavirus \(COVID-19\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

### Guidance for the public on the phased return of sport and recreation

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/providers-of-grassroots-sport-and-gym-leisure-facilities>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation>

### Guidance for performing arts

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

### Guidance for the safe re-opening of outdoor play areas

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms>

**Guidance for Community Shops and Indoor Markets**<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/shops-and-branches>

### Guidance from the Dept for Education:

[Actions for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)  
[Keeping children safe in out-of-school settings: code of practice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care/safe-working-in-education-childcare-and-childrens-social-care-settings-including-the-use-of-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>

### Guidance for employers:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/5-steps-to-working-safely>

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

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/assets/docs/working-safely-guide.pdf>

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/assets/docs/talking-with-your-workers.pdf>

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

### Guidance for cleaning premises contaminated by suspected COVID-19:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>

### Poster certifying an employer has taken steps to ensure premises are COVID-19 secure:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5eb963fcd3bf7f5d39550303/staying-covid-19-secure-accessible.pdf>

**“Catch it, Bin it, Kill it” Poster:**

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/south/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/09/catch-bin-kill.pdf>

**Legionella risk:**

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/legionnaires/>

<https://legionellacontrol.com/guidance/regular-flushing-control-legionella/>

<https://www.cieh.org/media/4208/legionella-guidance-covid-19.pdf>

**Face Coverings:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-safe-outside-your-home/staying-safe-outside-your-home#face-coverings>

**Guidance for social distancing and vulnerable people:**

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Meeting with others safely \(social distancing\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs>

**Guidance for re-opening municipal public toilets**

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/896040/Joint\\_letter\\_Simon\\_Clarke\\_MP\\_and\\_Rebecca\\_Pow\\_MP](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/896040/Joint_letter_Simon_Clarke_MP_and_Rebecca_Pow_MP)

**Out of School settings**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protective-measures-for-holiday-or-after-school-clubs-and-other-out-of-school-settings-for-children-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/protective-measures-for-out-of-school-settings-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

**Guidance about government grant support for businesses**

[Check if you're eligible for a coronavirus Restart Grant \(grants available from 1 April 2021\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-restart-grant)

[Additional Restrictions Grant: guidance for Local Authorities \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/896040/Additional_Restrictions_Grant_guidance_for_Local_Authorities.pdf)

**Guidance about Outdoor Events**

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Organised events guidance for local authorities

**Ventilation** <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-film-shows-importance-of-ventilation-to-reduce-spread-of-covid-19>.