

## COVID-19 Advice for clergy conducting weddings

Issue Date	Version	Issued by
16 <sup>th</sup> June 2021	6.3	The House of Bishops Recovery Group
Updates from version 6.2: in line with updated Government guidance on wedding ceremonies <b>from the 21<sup>st</sup> June</b> we have updated the numbers who can attend a wedding. Please remember all other measures at step 3 of the Government roadmap for places of worship still apply.		

*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](#).*

Our intention is to ensure that weddings can be as joyful and fulfilling an experience as possible while continuing to follow best public health practice and government guidance. This document has been drafted to reflect that. Where the marriage is within the celebration of Holy Communion this advice should be read with '[Conducting Public Worship](#)' and the advice on Holy Communion should also be followed.

### 1. Who can attend the service?

Following the Government's four step roadmap out of lockdown we are currently at step 3 but the Government has made an allowance for weddings so that the number of attendees at a place of worship is the same as the risk assessed number for other worship services.

In step 3 groups of 6, or larger groups where everyone present is from the same two households (or linked support bubble), can sit together. Everyone else will need to observe appropriate physical distancing at all times.

### 2. What about the length of the service?

In keeping with government guidance, we advise that the service should be kept concise while still consistent with the nature of the occasion, focusing on those parts of the marriage that are required in order to be legally binding under the law of England and Wales.<sup>1</sup>

Legally, if anyone wishes to lodge an objection to the wedding, they are entitled to do so, and provision must be made to enable them to make their point while observing physical distancing. While this is likely to be a very rare event, it emphasises the importance of having someone present to control access to the building during the service.

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of the Church of England, this means, for instance, the parts of the Marriage Service included in the Structure on p.103 of *Common Worship: Pastoral Services* read with the Notes to that service.

### 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.**

There are valid exemptions for some individuals and groups to not wear a face covering in these settings. In particular, those who are leading services or events in a place of worship. Those exemptions also cover the bride and groom at a wedding and those officiating/leading the wedding. This exemption does not apply to those observing the wedding, who should wear face coverings consistent with the requirements for any other public space.

### 4. What special provisions should I make during the service?

The church building must be risk assessed and appropriate physical distancing and Public Health hygiene practices put in place so that the ceremony is conducted in a safe way – please see the guidance for [public worship](#).

Please note that the minister does not have to touch the rings at the Giving of Rings, nor does he or she have to touch the couple's hands as part of a prayer or blessing.

Where rings are touched by anyone other than the bride and groom alone, hands should be washed or sanitized before and after. The rings should be handled by as few people as possible.

During the service, those participating should not project their voices to minimise risk of droplet spread and the use of face coverings is encouraged.

The organist may play for the ceremony.

At Step 3 of the Government's guidance a greater emphasis has been placed on personal responsibility for close contact with family and friends. If the bride is to be 'walked down the aisle' it will be a personal choice with family and friends if they are accompanied and by whom. The Government are encouraging people to exercise caution. Please see [guidance on meeting friends and family](#) for more information.

Good public health hygiene should be observed throughout with hand sanitizers available at the door. If the church is to be used again within 48 hours it should be cleaned after the service following the guidelines [here](#).

### 5. What about singing and music in the ceremony?

The Government's [guidance](#) on marriages recommends that:

- Professional performances can take place, and while there is no limit on the number of professional performers that can perform, the number should be determined by how many the venue can safely accommodate with social distancing measures in place between the

performers and guests. Performances should follow the guidelines as set out in the [performing arts guidance](#).

- Amateur choirs, bands, or musicians may also perform in a group of up to 6 indoors. Outdoors, they may perform in multiple groups of up to 30.
- Communal (congregational) singing should not take place.
- People should avoid singing, shouting, raising voices and/or playing music at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult or that may encourage shouting. This is important to mitigate the potential for increased risk of transmission - particularly from droplets and aerosol transmission.

## 6. What about signing the register?

All those signing the register should sanitize their hands before signing, complete all the signatures necessary for them and then sanitize them again. Apart from the bride and groom, all those signing should maintain physical distancing if practicable and, where available, individual pens for each signatory can be used.

## 7. What about legal aspects of weddings?

The following should cover most situations, but if in doubt, please consult your surrogate or the diocesan registrar:

- Please make sure that you know where you stand on the banns being read – and on the necessity for attendance to establish a connection if this was required. A Common Licence or a Special Licence may be appropriate in some cases, or a postponement of the wedding for others.
- If a couple want to cancel their wedding, the statutory fees will not be payable and must be refunded in full if already paid. Alternatively, they might wish to postpone their wedding to a mutually convenient date. If issues arise with regard to repayments including deposits, the DBF portion of the statutory fees and any other payments made prior for the marriage, advice should be sought from the diocesan registrar.
- You might wish to suggest that if the wedding goes ahead with restricted numbers, there could be a blessing in the year ahead with all guests present.

## 8. Can the couple have a wedding reception?

Wedding receptions and other celebrations for weddings and civil partnerships can continue to take place, but only in a COVID-19 secure venue and the numbers are limited by the capacity of that venue.

Specific Government [guidance](#) is available on wedding receptions.

### **9. What is the advice about booking future weddings?**

Given the on-going uncertainties about how measures to tackle COVID-19 will progress during 2021 it would be prudent to ensure that when booking weddings couples are advised that we do not know how the future lifting of restrictions at step 4 of the Government's roadmap will be completed. It is not possible at this time to say if physical distancing will still be necessary or the wearing of face coverings for attendees.

It is therefore recommended that you write to or email the couple to make clear that while we will do all we can to make sure the day goes as planned, we are not in control of the circumstances. Couples may wish to postpone their weddings and indeed the church may have to cancel dates that have been booked. In these circumstances the provision of extras such as music and bell ringing can only be provisional and couples may wish to consider taking out insurance.

### **10. Can blessing couples after a civil ceremony go ahead?**

Yes, following the same guidance above for enabling a wedding to go ahead in a safe way.

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