



The
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Church

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Updated guidance from the Synod Moderators in light of “Plan B” being implemented

With the Prime Minister confirming that England will move to the Government’s “Plan B” in light of the spread of the Omicron variant, the Synod Moderators are updating their guidance issued last week as follows.

- The wearing of face coverings in church will become mandatory in England, bringing England into line with existing restrictions in Scotland and Wales. Medical exemptions will, we understand, continue to apply, but in light of the rapid spread of the latest variant we would ask members to consider whether they have a genuine medical reason not to wear a face covering, rather than a preference.
- Whilst we await detailed regulations, there may be an exemption to wearing face coverings “for singing.” This may be only applicable to choirs/worship groups as they lead congregational singing. We do not believe that members of congregations should remove masks to sing. All of the scientific evidence thus far has been of increased risk of transmitting Coronavirus whilst singing; **we urge and expect congregants to continue to wear face coverings whilst singing unless medically exempt.**
- Wherever possible, in-person meetings should cease for the time being and online meetings take place instead. Assembly Executive has agreed new Standing Orders to give good order to online meetings as well as those in hybrid and in-person form, which Synods and local churches should follow “in so far as they are applicable”. Those Standing Orders are available online [here](#).
- Ministers and others involved in pastoral care should consider carefully whether it is appropriate to offer in-person pastoral visiting rather than making use of telephone and video calls and written material. You will know best the people and their situation and there will be some situations when it is still better to visit in person. “Routine” visiting in-person may be better avoided for the time being. Where in-person visiting does take place we encourage you to take a Lateral Flow Test before the visit to show whether you are likely to be infected and thus in danger of passing on Covid, and to follow the well-known precautions – limit close contact, use a face covering, provide ventilation, practice good hand hygiene. Whilst many will be in the (good) habit of increasing visiting around Christmastime, the need for added caution, especially with those known to be vulnerable by illness and infirmity, should be obvious.
- From Monday 13th December the Government has encouraged people in England to “work from home if you can,” again coming into line with advice in Scotland and Wales. Given the risk of upsetting your own Christmas plans and those of others, it would seem sensible, where it is possible, to follow this advice, and we commend it to all. Some work still needs to take place in offices and church buildings and can’t be carried out from home. Where this is the case, be careful to follow the precautions noted above.
- The close contact and duration of coffee mornings, lunch clubs and the like are also a cause for concern. We do not feel the situation warrants a blanket closure, but Elders’ Meetings

must review the risk mitigation measures in place, including physical distancing and ventilation. “Hospitality” settings are exempt from face covering regulations, but there are undeniable increased risks of viral transmission when people are sitting close to one another without face coverings. What would be the impact on your church and community if your activity became a “super-spreader” event, against the benefits to wellbeing for continued socialising? Do everything reasonably possible to minimise risks to yourselves and others, which in some contexts will mean suspending some social and missional gatherings. The watchwords remain, “**Love one another.**”

The Synod Moderators
December 9th, 2021