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It would be very helpful if members could let us know of anything that appears to indicate developments of policy or practice on the part of Government or other matters of general concern that should be pursued.

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FAITH & SOCIETY

COVID-19: new Government guidance on reopening places of worship in England

For action

Today, 29 July, the Government issued its guidance on reopening places of worship in England: [COVID-19: Guidance for the safe use of places of worship from 4 July](#). It will come into effect from **4 July 2020** alongside the relevant associated changes to the [Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#).

Until 4 July you should continue to refer to the current guidance online [here](#), which also sets out the [current Regulations](#). The new guidance remains under review and may be updated in line with the changing situation.

Critically, the Government appears to have modified its position on limiting numbers:

'From 4 July, gatherings of more than 30 people will be permitted but only in certain public places as set out in law. This will include places of worship and their surrounding premises. There are, however, activities where it is advisable to restrict numbers to 30 within a place of worship for public health reasons. This guidance sets out those activities as well as how to ensure your place of worship is COVID-19 secure.

Whilst engaging in an activity in the place of worship or surrounding grounds, **all parties should adhere to social distancing guidelines. From 4 July, 2 meters or 1 meter with risk mitigation (where 2 meters is not viable) between households are acceptable.**' [emphasis added]

The following table sets out where it is advisable to limit the number of people within a place of worship due to the potential for increased spread of COVID-19.

Activity	Advised gathering limit
Communal worship, including led prayers, devotions or meditations by a Minister of Religion or lay person.	<p>Limits for communal worship should be decided on the basis of the capacity of the place of worship following a risk assessment.</p> <p>Social distancing should be strictly adhered to.</p>
Marriage ceremonies	<p>Marriage ceremonies should have no more than 30 people in attendance, and social distancing should be strictly adhered to. See more detail in the COVID-19: Guidance for small marriages and civil partnership.</p>

Funerals	Funerals should have no more than 30 people in attendance , and social distancing should be strictly adhered to. See more detail in the COVID-19: guidance for managing a funeral during the coronavirus pandemic .
Other life cycle ceremonies: defined as 'Religious ceremonies to mark rites of passage, which are separate, self-contained ceremonies as opposed to marking a life cycle event or rite in the course of routine communal worship'.	Other life cycle ceremonies should have no more than 30 people present , unless they take place during routine communal worship. Social distancing should be strictly adhered to.

The guidance applies to places of worship when being used for a religious purpose or in preparation for a religious purpose.

Where a place of worship's premises is used by other user groups, only those activities permitted by law should take place. Businesses which cannot yet operate are [listed here](#) (such as indoor fitness, indoor soft play, indoor performances in front of a live audience).

The guidance includes detailed advice on issues such as 'Food and Drink' (which includes the elements at the Eucharist), singing, chanting and the use of musical instruments, the use of water for ablutions and baptism, supervision of young people and children attending places of worship, and much more. We urge you to read the detailed guidance very carefully indeed.

[Source: MHCLG, 29 June 2020]