

From July 19th many of the legal restrictions surrounding public activity will be lifted, and with that government regulations on places of worship will also be changed. **We will no longer be asking you to sign up in advance of coming to church**, however will be encouraging you to 'check in' using the NHS app and QR codes in the church building.

For many this will be a moment of great joy and release, and I am sure most of us are eager to be back together in a way closer to the 'normal' we were used to. However, we recognise for some there will still be worry and concern around Covid-19 and the risks of meeting in larger groups.

With that in mind it is important to note that **for the foreseeable future we will continue to live stream our morning services on YouTube** so anyone who feels more comfortable continuing to worship from home will be able to do so.

For those who are considering coming back to the building we wanted to outline some of our approach to morning meetings at Hope Church from July 25th. We do not plan to restrict anyone from doing anything that we are now legally able to do, or enforce anything that is not a legal obligation. Broadly this means that we plan to sing together, allow mingling in the building and we will not have a limit of people in the building. However we will be asking all those who plan to come to seriously consider the way that they behave in order to make others who may feel worried or anxious about coming back to feel more comfortable, and we will be doing certain things to make the building as safe a place as possible.

What we will do

Ventilation

One of the key factors in creating a low-risk environment is ventilation, and we are blessed to have a large, spacious room with a very high ceiling and large windows. So each Sunday all windows that can be will be wide open. You may wish to wear a few more layers than usual if you tend to get cold in the building.

Sanitation and cleanliness

We will have hand sanitiser at the front door and at various locations throughout the building and would ask you to use this sanitiser on arrival and regularly throughout the morning. We will also have anti-viral disinfectant in the toilets that we would ask you to use if you use the facilities. We will also have a cleaning team who will sanitise touch-points throughout the building before and after the service.

Welcome and after church refreshments

As before we will arrange a team to welcome you to church with a smile and hello, however for the moment we will be asking them to refrain from physical contact. So please don't be offended when they don't greet you with a hug or handshake, this is something we are asking them to do. After church we will serve tea and coffee from a table in the main hall and encouraging people to drink and socialise in the main hall and outdoors so some distancing can be observed.

What we will ask you to do

In line with scriptural principles we are asking that each person come back to church with grace and humility, considering not only their own wants, but what will best help others feel comfortable as well. While we will not be enforcing anything that is no longer a legal obligation, and while some of the suggestions below may not be something you want to do, we would ask that each person consider how their actions might be a help or hindrance to others.

Testing

Lateral flow tests are available to all people for free from the NHS online, from GP surgeries, and from local pharmacies, and they are incredibly easy to get hold of. We would **strongly encourage** all people to get hold of these tests and take a test on the Saturday evening or Sunday morning before coming to church. We will not be asking to see or even know the result, however we know that if all (or even the majority) get into this habit we can all feel more comfortable that the risk of transmission is low.

Wearing Masks

The government have stated that masks, while not obligated, are encouraged and expected in crowded indoor spaces and when singing in large groups, **so we will be asking that people wear masks when we sing together**. At all other times mask wearing will be down to people's personal discretion, some will feel more comfortable wearing a mask or may choose to wear a mask because of the feelings of others, and should feel completely free and able to do so. Those who choose not to wear masks will need to be gracious towards those who do and those who do will need to refrain from judgment of those who don't

Distancing and physical contact

While it would be very difficult to maintain anything like the seating distances we have been during the pandemic we will not be linking the chairs as they were before the pandemic. We will set up the chairs to fill the room but ask that when you arrive you begin by leaving a chair's distance between yourself and anyone from another household, unless you and another person discuss and decide that you are happy to sit directly next to each other - please do not sit directly next to someone without first checking they are ok with that.

When it comes to moving around the building, particularly before and after the service, we would ask that you are aware of other people's space and consider that some may still be uncomfortable being very close to others, and others may wish to refrain from physical contact for now. So don't go straight in for the hug or handshake, instead consider confirming with others what they are most comfortable with in these early days.

While we take these steps carefully and with great consideration of each other, we also take them with great expectancy. God desires that his people meet together to worship His name, hear from His word and encourage and bless one another in the sharing of our gifts and in fellowship. We have missed this so much, and though it may not at first seem to be all it once was, it is a step toward it that we welcome and look forward to taking. Please pray for us, and for each other, as we move forward together as a church family.