



Verwood Road Evangelical Chapel

COVID-19 risk assessment for services at Verwood Road Chapel after the lifting of national restrictions

National restrictions ended on the 19th July 2021. From this date, churches must undertake their own risk assessments to determine what restrictions if any need to remain in place. Case numbers locally are fairly high (as at Oct 2021), with national concern for the winter period, and we are therefore updating our risk assessment for the chapel.

The vaccination roll-out has greatly reduced the risks of both catching COVID and getting any serious complications if it is caught. Our most at risk people are currently being offered their booster-jabs. This is the governments "Plan A". We need to learn to live with the virus.

At the same time, there remains the risk of catching COVID, despite being double-vaccinated. With a number of elderly and clinically vulnerable people attending services, there is a need for some basic caution. Part of this caution is to reassure people who may be more cautious.

National evidence suggests the key mitigating actions against the virus are:

1. Good ventilation, together with space and social distancing – including limiting the total numbers at an indoor setting to avoid any "crowding", plus limiting the amount of time people are together indoors
2. Hygiene – especially hand sanitization
3. Self-isolation if there are any symptoms or close contact with someone with COVID (eg family members).
4. Face covering. Masks are a contentious issue. There is evidence that they can prevent spread, provided they are worn correctly (which is often not the case). They can also give a signal that the wearer is taking the issue seriously, and they are therefore important in terms of reassurance (or lack of). The government's "Plan B" may require face masks in indoor spaces, but until then masks remain optional.

As a leadership at VRC, our aim is to:

1. Encourage people to be responsible for themselves and take the level of risk that they are comfortable with.
2. Respect others and in particular allow space for those who are more cautious.
3. Make sure the services and other meetings are arranged in such a way as to enable people to feel safe and stay within the level of risk they have decided is appropriate for them.

Our actions are therefore as follows:



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Key action	Mitigating actions to continue	Reason
Ventilation, spacing, limiting “crowding”	All windows open (including Sunday School and overflow areas)	As now. Maintains good ventilation. (People need to be aware that it may be colder.)
	Limit the length of the service to strictly 1 hour maximum.	Limits time spent indoors. Those who are anxious can then talk outside (or leave if they prefer)
	Use the ‘Sunday School’ room as an overflow area with chairs spaced-out. (We then need to create an alternative space for parents with young children with a speaker system for the service to be relayed)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We have increasing numbers attending, so the extra space helps avoid “crowding” in the main hall 2. Those who are more cautious can use the overflow area to ensure adequate distancing
	Open the external doors to the overflow area at the end of services as a second exit route	Allows those who are more cautious to leave without having to go through a crowded area around the main exit.
	All small group activities or one-off events to have limit on numbers	Particularly important to keep the numbers in the coffee lounge area within acceptable limits. Number limit to be determined as part of the usual risk-assessment for the group or activity.
	Tea/coffee after the service is strictly “at your own risk”. (Will be suspended if deemed necessary)	Those who perceive the area to be crowded don’t have to stay, those who are not worried can still have tea/coffee as now
Hygiene	Hand sanitizer in and out	As now
	Careful clean of toilets before every service	As previously undertaken to ensure good hygiene
	Communion - strict hygiene on preparation (incl. masks). Bread pre-cut and spaced on the plates to avoid any multi-touch.	As now. Maintains good hygiene
Self-isolation & testing	No attendance if you have any symptoms or if you have a close contact (eg family member) with COVID	As now
	Elders to take weekly tests (minimum is to test before each Sunday morning service)	Gives confidence for pastoral work and enables elders to greet people on Sundays without concerns.
Masks	Mask wearing will remain optional at present, but may be strongly encouraged if cases increase further or if we are required to do so as part of the governments “Plan B”	There are polarized views in the membership. Wearing a mask is unpleasant and distracting, but it gives confidence for some, and can help prevent spread of the virus if worn properly.