

Dear friends

We wanted to email you with a correction to our previous Coronavirus Update sent 10 June.

The correction is regarding what Test and Trace will consider to be a 'close contact' should someone who has attended a church service or event then test positive. The details previously given were what we used to work on, but the new variant has seen a change in the process.

The new advice, which has come directly from NHS Test and Trace is as follows:

- Anyone who was within one metre of someone for a minute or more will be considered a close contact. This includes if someone was sat facing the same way (i.e. not face to face) and even if someone has a face mask. This minute does not need to be 60 consecutive second and can be throughout the whole day.
- Anyone who was up to two metres away for 15 minutes or more will be considered a close contact. This again includes those wearing face coverings and it is not only 15 consecutive minutes but 15 minutes in total throughout the whole day.
- People more than two metres but who have been in the same room as each other (not main worship area of a church but smaller room) for more than 15 minutes will all be considered a 'close contact'. According to the Test and Trace team this can be contested if the room can be shown to be suitably large and if it was very well ventilated etc. but it would have to be contested whilst the individual was in self-isolation.
- For those meeting outside, someone would have to be within two metres for "a significant amount of time" to qualify as a close contact.

Other information the Test and Trace team shared:

- The above information is relevant for those who attended church up to 48hours prior to either developing symptoms or testing positive.
- The NHS Test and Trace App is the best way someone can know whether they are a contact or not as it uses Bluetooth to identify this. It is also the best way a person can contest an order to self-isolate because it can be used as precise evidence of location which is accepted over and above anecdotal evidence of where people were sitting.
- The QR code system which works with the NHS app is the best way to log attendance.
- Local paper test and trace systems should include times in and times out where possible. They should also note where people sat. This level of detail will avoid any confusion or lack of clarity which could lead to whole congregations being asked to self-isolate. This is something which was mentioned as a real prospect in Lancashire at the moment, particularly if the Test and Trace team could not establish who does and who does not count as close contact.
- Face masks are essential. If someone has a medical exemption to wearing a face mask this should be supported and not challenged. Those without a medical exemption should wear a face mask in a place of worship.

This new information points to two things.

First, think big where space is involved! It is better to be outside where possible and practical. Meetings in rooms with lower ceilings than the main church building should be short and the room well ventilated.

Second, churches who have moved to 1m+ instead of 2m distancing (and there are many churches who have, faithfully following the best advice available) must consider this in their risk assessments as any seating at less than two metres will be immediately considered a close contact and anyone occupying those seats near a person who tests positive will have to self-isolate.

This will read like a tightening of restrictions, but we thought that it was important that you should have clarity on what will be considered a close contact and what information will be sought from the Test and Trace team.

As always, if you have any questions which cannot be answered by the advice compendium found on the Blackburn Diocese website, please contact the team on coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org

We hope the fact that we corrected this so quickly gives you confidence that everything else that we have written is 100% proven fact. We generally want to avoid the word infallible but.....

And have a blessed weekend.

Your Coronavirus Task Group