

Dear Friends,

This is a single item briefing in response to a number of requests for guidance following Government announcements in the light of the new Omicron variant of Covid-19.

Face Coverings in Church

There is no greater privilege than being able to gather in person to worship as the body of Christ, so it is important that we prayerfully consider when and how we respond to the government's recent change in guidance around face coverings.

The Omicron variant of COVID-19 appears to be more infectious than previous variants including the Delta variant, which is currently the most prevalent in the UK. In the light of emerging data, the government has introduced the mandatory wearing of face coverings in shops and on public transport. The new rules apply to staff and customers in a wide variety of settings from post offices and banks to hairdressers, pharmacies and vets. The government has also strongly advised that secondary school pupils wear masks in communal areas and that staff and visitors at all schools and childcare settings wear them.

All the scientific evidence suggests that transmission of COVID mainly happens indoors where people are close together. Wearing face coverings over the nose and mouth reduces the spread of coronavirus droplets from coughs, sneezes and while speaking. The main purpose of wearing a face covering is to protect others although there is some evidence they also offer some protection to wearers.

In light of the change in government guidance the task group is recommending that churches review their risk assessments and seriously consider reintroducing the wearing of masks during indoor, in-person public worship.

This is not a legal requirement and so cannot be enforced by parishes, but we are strongly encouraging this course of action until further notice. As previously, those leading services or reading may wish to remove their face covering to enable effective communication, particularly for those who rely on lip reading.

In addition, churches may feel it appropriate to reinforce the message about hands – face - space – ventilation by encouraging the use of hand sanitiser when entering and leaving the building. Once again, the importance of ensuring as much ventilation as possible in the church building during and after a church service should not be underestimated.

Coronavirus Email Address

If you have questions or problems and can't find answers on the [advice compendium](#) please email: coronavirus@blackburn.anglican.org.

A prayer

We are not people of fear:
we are people of courage.

We are not people who protect our own safety:
we are people who protect our neighbours' safety.

We are not people of greed:
we are people of generosity.

We are your people God,
giving and loving,
wherever we are,
whatever it costs

For as long as it takes
wherever you call us.

Amen.

Yours,

Coronavirus Task Group