

FACE COVERINGS AND CHURCH SERVICES

Much has been reported in the press in the last twenty-four hours about the decision by the Northern Ireland Executive to remove the mandatory requirement for face coverings to be worn during religious services in places of worship. Please be aware that although the former regulations are now being moved to guidance only, face coverings will still be legally required when entering and exiting the building. It is also strongly advised that they are worn whilst singing or moving around inside the church premises. This new guidance only applies to acts of worship.

The clear guidance from the Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Advisor remains that face coverings should continue to be worn, therefore parishioners are strongly encouraged to continue wearing face coverings, for the time being, when attending church services as the benefits, particularly in the regard to the welfare of others, outweigh the risks. Congregational singing also considerably increases the risk of the spread of the virus so wearing a face-covering is a necessary mitigation against that risk.

By wearing a face covering we are showing our support and consideration for other members of the congregation, particularly the more vulnerable and those with underlying health concerns. Individually and collectively, we are also then continuing to play our part in preventing transmission of the virus.

Guidance remains that social distancing of 2 metres is recommended within church services. The closer we are in proximity to others, then the higher the risk. The risk of transmission is therefore higher at one metre compared to two metres. The highest risk environments for the spread of the virus are indoor, crowded, poorly ventilated spaces where people are in close proximity to others for a period of time.

Please continue to ensure that all necessary mitigations and safety measures are in place and that risk assessments are regularly updated.