

## Keeping Church Buildings Clean

Issue Date	Version	Issued by
2 <sup>nd</sup> December 2020	3	The House of Bishops Recovery Group
Updates from version 2: This version contains new questions on deep cleaning, and updated simplified advice on general cleaning.		

This document will be kept under review and updated as events develop, with each update issued as a new version. The current version will always be available to download from the Church of England website via the [Coronavirus FAQs page](#).

This advice is based on the government's [guidance on cleaning in non-healthcare settings](#) (updated 16 October 2020) and [guidance on the safe use of places of worship](#) (updated 6 November 2020). Advice on cleaning of historic surfaces is based on the guidance issued by Historic England (24 July 2020) and the Canadian Conservation Institute (24 July 2020), neither of which was written specifically for churches, so this advice needs to be interpreted based on the local context and situation.

This advice should be read alongside the government guidance and the Church of England's advice on [opening cathedrals and church buildings to the public](#).

### 1. When should we clean, and when should we clean & disinfect?

The PHE guidance is clear to clean where no one has symptoms of, or confirmed COVID-19, and to clean and disinfect after an individual with symptoms of, or confirmed COVID-19 has left the setting or area.

The infection risk from a COVID-19 contaminated environment decreases over time. It is not yet clear at what point there is no risk from the virus, however, studies suggest that, in non-healthcare settings, the risk of residual infectious virus is likely to be significantly reduced after 48 hours.

In situations where someone has symptoms of COVID-19, they advise storing personal waste for 72 hours as an additional precaution.

This guidance follows PHE advice in that if appropriate cleaning is not possible, a time period of 48 hours should be allowed. However, churches can choose to extend that period of time if there are any specific concerns.

## Cleaning where no one has symptoms of, or confirmed COVID-19

### 2. We have not re-opened yet. Do we have to deep clean our church building before we do?

If your building has been closed and nobody has been in it for at least 2 days, it is unlikely the virus is present. Your building will therefore not need to be disinfected for the virus. You can follow your routine cleaning procedure. Please see the [Risk Assessment template](#) for more information on opening your church building.

### **3. We only open our church building once a week (when not in lockdown). Do we need to deep clean every week?**

If your building has been closed and nobody has been in it for at least 2 days, it is unlikely the virus is present. Your building will therefore not need to be disinfected for the virus. You can follow your routine cleaning procedure. Please see the [Risk Assessment template](#) for more information on opening your church building.

### **4. How often and what should we clean?**

This will depend on the local situation and your local risk assessment. You will want to consider things like footfall, the nature of your building, whether you have restricted access to some parts, access to hand washing and hand sanitising facilities, and the need to clean those parts that are more frequently used more often (such as door handles, light switches, remote controls, electronic devices, kitchens and toilets).

If a church building is closed for **at least 2 days**, this will reduce the need for cleaning. If you are opening every day, you need to clean the frequently touched areas when you open the church every morning or evening. The PHE recommends that as a minimum, frequently touched surfaces should be wiped down twice a day. Clean non-heritage surfaces that are frequently touched (door handles, light switches, kitchens and toilets, etc.) using your usual cleaning products.

For historic surfaces, consider if you can remove them or reduce access to them, to reduce the amount of cleaning needed. When this is not possible and these surfaces do need to be cleaned frequently, please see the advice below about cleaning historic elements.

### **5. How can we reduce the amount of cleaning we need to do?**

Regular cleaning plays a vital role in limiting the transmission of COVID-19, therefore cleaning does need to be done more frequently. To make cleaning easier, think about how your building is being used. Reduce clutter, remove difficult to clean items or reduce access to them, to make cleaning easier.

You may want to consider restricting access to certain parts of the church to reduce the area of cleaning required. Alternating access to certain areas (such as pews) on a weekly basis may also reduce the amount of cleaning you have to do. To reduce the amount of cleaning of door handles you may want to consider propping open doors if this is appropriate. You can also consider providing cotton gloves that are disposed of in a bin, and laundered daily. If you are worried about heritage surfaces being touched regularly, some type of temporary non-damaging cover that is laundered, cleaned or replaced daily could be considered, with attention to causing any potential trip hazards and avoiding any fragile surfaces.

### **6. What should we do about general hand hygiene: hand washing, sanitation facilities and toilets?**

Signs and posters can help encourage good hygiene practice: such as increasing the frequency of hand washing, avoiding touching your face, and coughing or sneezing into a tissue which is binned safely. Try not to stick posters and signs to historic fabric - use free standing signs or noticeboards. Please avoid locations where there will be high 'glare' and ensure the poster is on a flat surface so that QR codes can scan properly.

## **7. What signage should we provide for the public?**

For visitors, it is necessary to place a sign on or near the door and upon entry to the church requesting that the public use the hand sanitiser provided, wear a face mask inside the church, and avoid touching any historic furnishings.

## **8. Should we wear face coverings?**

Government advice is that face coverings should be worn at all times whilst inside the church.

## **9. What kind of hand sanitiser should we provide?**

There is some evidence that excess hand sanitiser can damage sensitive heritage surfaces if it hasn't fully dried on your hands. Current advice is that water-based hand sanitisers are better, although they can take longer to dry.

## **10. What about toilets?**

Ensure toilets are kept clean, use liquid hand soap rather than a bar of soap, and where possible, provide paper towels as an alternative to hand dryers in hand washing facilities.

If regular cleaning of toilets is challenging, you may need to think about shutting them or limiting access.

## **11. Who can clean?**

Anyone who is considered vulnerable and with an underlying health condition should not assist in cleaning. Numbers going in to clean should be kept to a minimum, and social distancing complied with at all times.

## **12. What about personal protection equipment (PPE) for cleaning?**

A face covering is now required inside the church, and cleaning gloves, as always, are recommended. The Government advises that additional PPE over and above what you would usually use is not necessary. Unless you are in a situation where the risk of COVID-19 transmission is very high or there is a problem with mould or bat droppings (which would have required the use of PPE in any case), additional PPE is not necessary.

## **13. Do we need to disinfect the church between uses?**

No. You shouldn't need to disinfect unless there has been a known or suspected case of COVID-19.

## **14. What about cleaning the historic elements of church buildings?**

If historic fixtures and fittings have been restricted from access, they should not need to be cleaned more regularly. If they form part of the accessible areas that will be touched by the general public, for example pews, the following advice should be followed. Please also refer to the more detailed [Historic England](#) advice on cleaning historic features of buildings.

For metal, wood, stone, glass, ceramic, and modern painted surfaces, these can be cleaned with a dilute solution of non-ionic conservation-grade detergent or sensitive washing up liquid and distilled water, rinsed with distilled water and dried immediately with white paper towel. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for dilution, application and contact times (a minimum contact time of 20 seconds is currently advised by Public Health England) for all detergents.

Getting hold of conservation grade materials may be difficult. If you can't get hold of conservation grade materials, try to use products with as few additives as possible but that will still clean a surface, such as detergents with no added perfumes and no harsh chemicals. The Ecover range, for example, has few harsh chemicals but will be effective if used correctly. Other examples include Boots Sensitive, and SurCare Sensitive Washing Up Liquid.

Distilled water is preferable. This is water that contains no salts, so that there are no residues or corrosives to interact with delicate surfaces. However, distilled water may be difficult to obtain, so in these circumstances tap water or filtered tap can be used instead.

If there is no water source in the church, bringing in spray bottles filled up at home may be useful.

Try not to spray surfaces directly. Spray the cloth with the detergent and not the object, to ensure the detergent goes exactly where it is meant to, and to prevent staining.

If none of the above options are possible, then cleaning wipes can be used instead, but be aware this is not a good solution for delicate surfaces, and wipes with alcohol in them should be avoided. Use of wipes is not recommended for long-term use on historic or varnished surfaces, but will work as a temporary measure to keep frequently-touched areas such as door handles clean.

Metal surfaces can also be cleaned with industrial denatured alcohol (IDA), such as methylated spirits or isopropanol.

**Do NOT** use any household detergents or disinfectants containing **chlorine** (1000 ppm dilution) on any historic surface since these could cause permanent damage.

Cleaning materials should be disposed of appropriately, wrapped up and binned daily. Waste does not need to be wrapped separately unless an individual in the setting shows symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19.

Seek advice from [a conservator](#) before undertaking any cleaning to more fragile historic surfaces.

### **15. What about upholstery and soft furnishings?**

Available information suggests that unless they have been soiled, soft furnishings do not need to be cleaned other than as part of your usual cleaning processes, which may include vacuuming with a soft brush attachment.

### **16. What about using a fogger to disinfect the church?**

Fogging should not be used instead of cleaning. Although fogging may be useful for disinfection in non-heritage settings such as kitchens or bathrooms, fogging systems are not recommended for use on historic interiors, including historic floors. The World Health Organisation has questioned their efficacy in disinfecting complex interiors that have not been fully cleaned first. They may also leave harmful residues on historic fixtures, fittings and floors.

## Cleaning where there has been a person with symptoms of, or confirmed COVID-19

### 17. What if someone with symptoms has attended the church building?

If there is a known or suspected case of COVID-19 then cleaning and disinfection will be necessary; or closing for **at least 48 hours**. Public Health England has [specific guidance](#) on this. Any objects handled by the person where cleaning is not possible should be quarantined for at least 3 days.

Given the damage that may be caused through the use of disinfectants on historic surfaces, closing for **at least 3 days** where there has been a suspected or confirmed case may also be a preferable course of action for historic church buildings.

### 18. Further advice can be found at

- Public Health England  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>
- Historic England  
<https://historicengland.org.uk/coronavirus/historic-places/cleaning-historic-surfaces/>