

ACRE Briefing for village and community halls COVID-19 update 16 December 2021

1. Key points

- a)** From 10th December 2021 face coverings became mandatory in village and community halls (subject to exemptions, below) as well as in shops and post offices, libraries, members' clubs, social clubs, places of worship, cinemas, theatres, indoor play areas. They must therefore be worn for these kinds of activities hosted at a hall. They are not required by people taking part in exercise, dancing or, in some cases, singing. For more information see: [Face coverings: when to wear one, exemptions, and how to make your own - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-exemptions-and-how-to-make-your-own)
- b)** The regulations include a requirement to put up signs telling people they must wear face coverings in your hall. Free download available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-poster>
- c)** The responsibility to comply with face coverings is the individual's, not the building owner or organiser of an activity.
- d)** The requirements for a COVID-19 passport (proof of double vaccination status), proof of recent negative COVID test or exemption only apply to certain indoor venues (which include conference centres, public halls, theatres, leisure centres, dance halls) at which 500 or more people are likely to attend an event, and to outdoor events likely to be attended by 4,000 or more people. At present it is unlikely they would apply to the majority of village or community halls. Were there indications that these attendance figures would be significantly reduced, ACRE would take up with Government the difficult implications of stewarding relevant events at community level.
- e)** Good hygiene practices, i.e., regular hand washing with sanitiser or soap and water, and, where practical, social distancing remain essential.

2. Face covering requirements

- a) Face coverings are required when entering and moving around in common areas of village and community halls (e.g., corridors and toilets) and at public or club events.**
- b) Government Guidance for specific sectors is gradually being revised.** Some (e.g., volunteering, performing arts) has the new information about face coverings added at the top, without applying it as relevant, saying that further guidance will be issued. Governing bodies for sport are expected to issue their own Guidance in due course. We have done our best to interpret the position here, pending further information.

- c) Face coverings are not required by those involved in activities involving exercise or dancing (e.g., keep fit, Pilates, dance classes or wedding receptions) or taking photos of people.**

The face coverings guidance explains:

"Face coverings are also not required in premises or a part of a premises where the main activity is eating, drinking, exercising, or dancing. This might include venues being used to host wedding receptions or some music events as well as restaurants, pubs, bars, and nightclubs. This is because it is not practical for people to wear a face covering when eating or drinking, and it is not recommended that face coverings are worn when undertaking strenuous activity, including exercising and dancing."

- d) Where private events are held (such as a wedding reception) face coverings are not required within the room used for the event.**

However, people can nonetheless be encouraged to wear them, and organisers may wish to encourage those attending to do lateral flow tests beforehand to protect vulnerable guests. The face coverings guidance, quoted above, still applies to that part of the building that is open to the public during the event.

- e) The Government Guidance for Out of School explains that face coverings are not required in education or childcare settings:**

"Adults and children attending out of school settings or wraparound childcare in community premises where there is a mandatory requirement to wear a face covering (for example community centres, youth centres, public libraries, and places of worship) are exempt from doing so when they are in a private activity room or private classroom, or where the premises has been hired out for the sole use of the provision. However, adults and children aged 11 and above must comply with any other legal requirements on the use of face coverings in these premises when they are in communal areas."

f) While face coverings are not at present required in hospitality settings the advice remains that they should be worn in crowded and enclosed spaces where people come into contact with those they do not normally meet.

This is in order to try and control the spread of the highly transmissible Omicron and Delta versions of the virus. Consequently, organisers of activities should be asked to encourage those attending to comply with that advice. For example, where an interval bar for a play or film opens into the room where the play or film is held (at which a face covering is specifically required except when eating or drinking), it is advisable that face coverings are required when queueing at the bar, or that a pre-ordering system is set up.

g) Singing

The regulations permit the removal of face coverings for singing in the following situations: as part of a choir, service, performance, or rehearsal for a performance.

h) Exemptions apply:

These include:

- children under the age of 11,
- people who cannot wear them for certain reasons involving physical or mental health or distress,
- people speaking to or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expressions to communicate,
- to avoid the risk of harm or injury to yourself or others.

i) The workplace guidance

This explains that staff within settings covered by the regulations are required to wear face coverings when they are in a part that is open to the public and when they are likely to come into close contact with members of the public (such as serving in a community shop), but not if in a “non-public facing” role (e.g., working in a parish office, a cleaner). However, staff working in areas where face coverings are not legally required (e.g., hospitality, gyms) can choose to wear a face covering. So those catering for an event at a hall are not required to wear them but can choose to do so.

3. Ventilation

The results of research into 31 pilot large events this summer are reflected in the requirements for face coverings and COVID-19 passports etc. They showed that risk of transmission increases with prolonged and repeated exposure to poor quality air, insufficient ventilation, reduced social distancing or limited compliance with face coverings.

The ventilation aspects are relevant to community venues and events because the underlying point is that Risk Assessment should be tailored to each venue: mitigations include adequate ventilation, face coverings and reducing crowding (as given in the ACRE Briefing of 22nd September). The "ventilation strategy" over winter might, for example, include opening windows at the top during activities, opening more windows and doors towards the end of aerosol generating activities (e.g., exercise or dance), creating air change before the next activity.

The footnote to the research says: "*For mitigation against COVID-19, indoor spaces recording CO₂ values that regularly exceed 1500 ppm indicate poor ventilation and are considered a priority for improvement. CO₂ values consistently lower than 800ppm in an occupied space indicate that the space is well-ventilated, thus spaces where aerosol generating activities occur (such as singing, aerobic activity or dancing) are encouraged to adopt a ventilation strategy capable of maintaining CO₂ values at or below 800ppm.*"

CO₂ Air Quality Monitors are available, such as the following, which is suitable for a maximum of a 300sqm room (note: This is not a product recommendation, merely an indication of what is available, being NDIR CO₂ monitors as recommended by HSE) [CO₂ Air Quality Monitors | test-meter.co.uk.](https://www.test-meter.co.uk/)

4. Testing and use of QR codes

The requirements on self-isolation and testing have changed. Contacts of those who have tested positive are no longer always required to self-isolate, but to take daily rapid (lateral flow) tests. While the use of QR codes on posters at premises is currently not mandatory they can still be encouraged.

5. Frequently asked Questions

Q: Should our village hall committee return to meeting online? Do we need to wear face coverings if we meet socially distanced in our large main hall?

A: If your governing document allows it, you can decide whether you would rather meet online, or encourage any non-vaccinated or vulnerable people to join online a meeting held at the hall in person. In the current circumstances this would be reasonable even if not technically permitted by your governing document. Face coverings are advisable although possibly not strictly required, being a private meeting of voluntary workers, not open to the public (Government Guidance on volunteering and for office workers). If removed, other mitigation measures such as ventilation and social distancing are recommended.

Q: Should our Parish Council return to meeting online? Do councillors and clerk need to wear face coverings?

A: Parish Councils (and other local authorities) are currently required to meet in public. Face coverings need to be worn as their meetings are open to the public. However, communication is important at such meetings to avoid misunderstanding so where it could be difficult for councillors, members of the public or press to hear accurately face coverings can be removed temporarily by those speaking (see exemptions above). If available a PA system might be used.

Q: Our village hall has a wedding booked for 3rd Jan. We have capacity to accommodate 80-100 guests, with dancing. What should we advise the wedding couple regarding face masks on their big day, and will they and their guests be required to wear masks if they want to dance?

A: When the hall is being used for the wedding reception it is serving as a hospitality venue, so face coverings not required in the rooms being used for the reception, dancing, catering purposes. However, the Guidance encouraging people to wear them in more confined spaces should still be followed, so they should be encouraged in the corridors and toilets, and particularly if any other group will be using the hall at the same time.

Q: How does the face covering requirement apply to the Christmas panto?

A: Face coverings need to be worn by the audience, except when eating or drinking (or with exceptions). Government guidance for the Performing Arts has not yet been revised. However, it would make sense that performers do not wear face masks, otherwise the audience may not hear or see expressions properly. However, risk assessment should be carried out in accordance with the Performing Arts Guidance, and it would be prudent that a PA system is used, and the first row is placed further back from the stage to allow for aerosol dispersal.

Q: Does a community hall hosting an event like a tea dance count as a 'dance hall'? Can face coverings be removed? Is a COVID-19 passport or lateral flow test needed?

A: Yes, face coverings can be removed by those taking part in dancing. As participants tend to be older, they should be encouraged to wear them when otherwise moving around the premises. A COVID-19 passport or lateral flow test is not required if fewer than 500 people are likely to attend and the dance does not take place between 1am and 5am – which seems unlikely!

Q: Our hall is used as a place of worship and occasionally for wakes. How does the face covering requirement apply?

A: The Guidance for Places of Worship explains that face coverings can be removed by those leading a service or giving a reading and by those attending a service when singing. They can be removed by those attending a wake in the room where refreshments are served as the room is serving as a hospitality venue at that time.

Q: Will further financial assistance (like the lockdown grants and rate relief) be available if our hall's income is affected by cancellations?

A: The only information available so far is that the Government has re-issued the Guidance to local authorities about the Covid Additional Relief Fund (CARF). Those halls or organisations which do not qualify for the usual mandatory or discretionary charity rate relief would appear to be eligible (e.g., Church Halls, Social Clubs).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-additional-relief-fund-carf-local-authority-guidance>

Please contact your local ACRE Network member for support and advice for your village hall. You can find details by clicking on the relevant area of this [Map](#)

Notes:

1. Any advice or information provided here should not be taken as a substitute for professional legal or other advice.
2. This represents the information available at 16th December 2021.