



# DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

**Rt Rev Robert Byrne CO**  
**Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle**

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## Protecting the Health of Our Clergy and Congregations 30 March 2022

As you will know, the Government has removed its 'Plan B' COVID restrictions. Following this, I have taken both clergy and lay advice in considering our diocesan Covid controls whilst also giving consideration to the latest guidance published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW) on 26<sup>th</sup> January, a link for which is included below:

<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2022/01/Covid19-Guidance-for-Churches-January-2022.pdf>

The Catholic Bishops' Conference published guidance for Lent and Easter 2022, a link for which is included below:

<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/parish-guidance-for-lent-and-easter-2022/>

After sharing this guidance, clarifications have been sought on our COVID controls in churches, halls and meeting spaces. I therefore confirm the Diocesan position on the most pertinent points to be:

- **Risk Assessment** - there is no longer a requirement to carry out a formal COVID risk assessment before opening your church, hall or meeting space
- **Conditions of Hire** - there is no longer a requirement to issue the COVID related Conditions of Hire documentation for your hall or meeting space
- **COVID symptoms** - people displaying any symptoms of COVID should stay at home
- **Vaccinations** - are the best way to control the spread of COVID. We can show that we care for each other by getting vaccinated and attending for the booster dose when it becomes available
- **Ventilation** - it is still important to ventilate our buildings. This has the effect of diluting and dispersing viral particles
- **Hand sanitiser** - should be available for use at places of entry and exit to our buildings
- **Face coverings** - those who wish to wear a face covering may do so during the celebration of Mass. The same would also apply to those attending our halls and meeting spaces
- **Social Distancing** - there is no requirement for social distancing but we should continue to be sensitive to the wishes of other people





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- **Cleaning** - usual pre-Covid forms of cleaning are sufficient. More regular cleaning of touch points is no longer required
- **Congregational Singing** - indoor congregational singing can continue to take place with a **general encouragement that face coverings are worn**
- **NHS Test and Trace** - there is no longer a requirement to keep a record of attendees
- **Kitchens** may be used as normal

It is important that we continue to be mindful of our local prevailing conditions in terms of viral infection and transmissions and local adaptations should be put in place.

It is also important to consider the demographic of our parish communities, appreciating that some people continue to be more vulnerable to infection than others. In those circumstances we may wish to adjust the level of controls accordingly so that people feel comfortable.

Should you require further clarification on any of this please contact the Property Department on 0191 243 3303 or [property@diocesehn.org.uk](mailto:property@diocesehn.org.uk)

