

Government roadmap for lifting COVID-19 restrictions identifies reopening of places of worship as ambition from July 2020



The Government has published [guidance](#) and a [FAQs](#) document to provide information on the Government's roadmap for how and when the UK will adjust its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidance mainly relates to England. Additional guidance for those in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland can be found through the following links: [Scotland](#), [Wales](#), [Northern Ireland](#).

The roadmap confirms a three-step approach to lifting the lockdown, although the progression to each step will be conditional on scientific advice and risk assessments:

- Step 1, from 13 May
- Step 2, no earlier than 1 June
- Step 3, no earlier than 4 July

The ambition at Step 3 is to open at least some of the remaining businesses and premises that have been required to close, including public places, with places of worship explicitly referenced.

To be able to re-open places of worship, the premises will need to meet the COVID-19 Secure guidelines. Some venues which are, by design, crowded and where it may prove difficult to enact distancing may still not be able to re-open safely at this point, or may be able to open safely only in part. Nevertheless, the Government will wish to open as many businesses and public places as the data and information at the time allows. In order to facilitate the fastest possible re-opening of these types of higher-risk businesses and public places, the Government will carefully phase and pilot re-openings to test their ability to adopt the new COVID-19 Secure guidelines. The Government will also carefully monitor the effects of reopening other similar establishments elsewhere in the world, as this happens. The Government will establish a series of taskforces to work closely with stakeholders in these sectors to develop ways in which they can make these businesses and public places COVID-19 Secure.

In a statement in response to the Government's announcement on easing the lockdown in England, the Bishop of London [said](#): *"We note from the Government's COVID-19 Recovery Strategy that churches could be open from July as part of the conditional and phased plan to begin lifting the lockdown. We look forward to the time when we are able to gather again in our church buildings. We are examining what steps we will need to take to do so safely and are actively planning ahead in preparation. We strongly support the Government's approach of continuing to suppress the transmission of the virus and accordingly, we recognise that at this time public worship cannot return in the interests of public health and safety."*

The Government stated that there is no change to guidance on weddings at this time. However, the Government is working to enable small wedding ceremonies from 1 June (as part of Step 2). The FAQs note *"As with all coronavirus restrictions on places of worship, venues and social distancing, we will look to ease them as soon as it is safe to do so."*

On funerals, the Government has also stated that: *"there is no change to the [guidance on attending funerals](#) at present."*

As part of Step 1, the Government has reconfirmed that employers should make every effort to support working from home, including by providing suitable IT and equipment as they have been already. This will apply to many different types of businesses, particularly those who typically would have worked in offices or online. Where work can only be done in the workplace, the Government has set out tailored guidelines for employers to help protect their workforce and customers from coronavirus while still continuing to trade or getting their business back up and running. These 'back to work' guidelines apply to tradesmen, cleaners and others who work in people's homes. CLAS will be seeking clarification as to whether this will allow cleaning and maintenance in church buildings to take place. We do, however, understand that the Government will be publishing even more detailed COVID-19 secure guidelines in the coming days, which has been developed in consultation with businesses and trades unions.