

Coronavirus: Advice for ministers July 2020 – pastoral visiting

Written by the Baptist Union Ministries Team being shared with Ministers of the Congregational Federation

The restrictions on entering other people's homes have been eased, so that people from no more than 2 different households can now meet indoors in England. Your pastoral visiting practices should still seek to reduce the risk of transmission to the lowest reasonably practicable level. Please consider the advice below.

Pastoral visiting

- Home pastoral visits can recommence in certain circumstances, but you will need to consider the advice below first.
- Care home visits may be possible, in which case you should follow the requirements of the home, if that happens.
- Hospital pastoral visits may be possible, but again you should follow the requirements of the hospital, if that happens.

Above all, we have a duty of care towards those who are vulnerable because of sickness or frailty. Those we pastor invest their trust in us. In the current situation we ought to be proving ourselves worthy of that trust by taking full responsibility for our own actions so that we minimise the risk we present to those we are caring for. We must not presume that we are above the risks associated with being in contact with others.

Visiting People in their homes

While recognising that we cannot completely eliminate the risk of Covid-19 the [Government have produced guidance](#) for employers whose staff are working in people's homes. This advice has not changed significantly following the easing of restrictions on 4 July 20. There is no specific guidance from the government about pastoral visiting, beyond the fact that the government are recommending that **home communion does not take place**. However, there is an expectation that you work through the guidance for employers as well as the more general guidance on social distancing, seeking to understand how this applies to your role.

In assessing the risk of carrying out visits it would be wise to talk this through with at least one of your church trustees or another minister. You'll need to think about this to develop a general policy guiding your approach, and then apply it for particular individuals. For small employers with less than 5 employees there is no requirement to write anything down. However, if pastoral visiting might be undertaken by anyone else in addition to yourself, we recommend that you write down and communicate fully the expectations for the whole team.

Please always bear in mind that you could be carrying Covid-19 but not have any symptoms and that you should be aiming to reduce the risk to all parties to the lowest possible reasonably practicable level.

The following points are offered as issues that you should consider as you assess the risk.

1. **Your own circumstances and health.** If you have any symptoms or you are shielding, or someone in your home is self-isolating due to having symptoms, or shielding, you should not engage in pastoral visits.

2. **The circumstances and health of the person you will visit.** You will need to consider the circumstances of the individual you are visiting. Do not visit if they are self-isolating because they or someone else in the household has symptoms, or they have been told by the NHS to self-isolate. Do not visit if they or someone else are shielding.
3. **Is it necessary to visit them in their home?** If there are appropriate alternative ways of enabling a pastoral conversation to take place such as phone or video calls, or meeting in their garden or another outdoor space, then these options should be considered first. For those who are clinically extremely vulnerable it will only be appropriate to visit in doors if they are dying (in last days or hours) of a non-covid related condition.
4. **Contacting them before you visit.** Make sure that the person (or their supporter) is actually wanting you to come into their home, and aware of the potential risks.
 - a. Explain that you will need to social distance, which means they or another person, will need to open the door and then move away from it before you come in and that you will follow them.
 - b. Explore whether you will be able to sit more than 2 meters apart. (You can now sit at 1m with risk mitigation where 2m is not viable.)
 - c. Let them know that you will not be accepting any hospitality. You may of course take your own drink in a flask.
 - d. Tell them that you will only be able to stay for a short period of time.
 - e. Check on their health and their household (2 above).
 - f. Ask them to have windows open in room you will meet in if possible.
5. **Hygiene.** You should make sure that you have hand gel which you use before and after entering the house. While it's good practice to also wash your hands, on arrival and departure, this may not be possible. Make sure you have tissues with you in case you cough or sneeze. Cough into you elbow if you have no tissue. Your used tissues should be taken with you when you leave and then safely binned.
6. **Avoid Transmission.** Do not touch anything you don't have to such as door handles and handrails. Don't borrow items such as a pen or share other objects such as a bible. Try not to put anything of yours down on a surface, e.g. keep a bible in your hand or lap.
7. **Maintaining Social Distancing.** It may prove extremely difficult to maintain the 2m distance due to the size and layout of a house. It may also be difficult to maintain the distance as the person you are visiting may struggle to accept the need to do so. Avoid face to face contact (less than 2m) with those who are clinically vulnerable, which includes over 70s If you cannot maintain a 2m distance at all times then 1m plus should be observed with risk mitigation including the use of a face covering. It is better to sit to the side of person as far apart as possible
8. **Length of visit.** Visits should be kept to a minimum length. The track and trace threshold of 15 mins at 2m distance indicates that the longer the visit the greater the risk of transmission.
9. **Meeting in the garden.** Make sure that you follow the above guidance for the entire time you are on their premises.

10. **After the visit.** Clean the outside of anything you've taken into the house and which has been placed on a surface, e.g. bible, mobile phone.

11. **Traveling to visit.** If someone else who is not a member of your household is accompanying you on the visit, meet them there rather than travelling together. While the normal advice is that no more than 2 households can meet up in doors, a working context allows for more people to be present as long as this is kept as low in number as possible.

12. **Frequency of visits.** You will need to think carefully about who you visit and how many different people you visit. The last thing you want to do is become a super spreader around your congregation. If there are others who can safely share in the pastoral visits, this will reduce the risk of one person spreading Covid-19. Don't go from house to house but space out any visits you have to make over a number of days, so that you reduce the number of people you could infect before symptoms develop.