



## **Management of Social Distancing at Community Facilities and Activities A Risk Based approach**

Following the end of lockdown community groups have needed to know whether or not they can once again use FVH facilities to hold their usual – or a version of their usual – activities and, if so, what conditions may be appropriate so as to reduce the risk of spreading infection and address fear.

### **The rules on social interactions for groups of up to 6**

These rules were reviewed and updated substantially to reflect the regulations on gatherings of 14<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

The Government Guidance for Community Facilities confirms activities hosting more than 6 can take place at community halls, within a hall's own capacity limits, providing people who attend in groups are in groups of up to 6, socially distanced from other groups. It also says (the bold italics are ACRE's insert): "Only where there is a *significant likelihood* of groups mixing and socialising (and where it would be difficult to prevent mingling and therefore breaking the law) should activities not take place in a community facility".

While some activities are listed as examples, that is a flag for organisers to take particular care if people attend or rehearse in groups. Activities such as WI and amateur choirs are important for the wellbeing of individuals, particularly those who have been isolated from the company of friends and family over the last six months. The emphasis in Government Guidance is clearly on the need to conduct such activities safely, not to discourage them. It may be preferable for those organising activities which are likely to be attended by older or clinically vulnerable people to ask everyone not to attend and seat themselves in groups, but individually (or in a support bubble of 2), so that normal social distancing requirements apply to everyone and confusion is avoided.

### **A. Which activities can now take place?**

The following takes a risk-based approach to a complex situation, bearing in mind: the hundreds of different kinds of organised activities which take place in or around village and community halls and playing fields; the important need to address isolation, loneliness and mental health issues; the needs of families with young people; the need to enable people to remain fit and healthy; and the need for people who normally earn a living around community facilities to do so.

The following should be considered in risk assessing whether each potential hirer can meet the COVID-19 secure guidelines.

- Can attendance at indoor activities be limited to the capacity figures the hall sets and will the organiser be able or willing to comply with social distancing requirements? The regulations now allow groups of up to 6 to socialise together at

an activity, as can larger groups from the same household, "bubble" or a linked household (making a "qualifying group" – see section B below), but mingling between groups is not permitted. (For brevity, reference below to groups of up to 6 includes "qualifying groups").

- What arrangements would be made if more people attend than the room has capacity for? A meeting which usually takes place in a committee room may need to be moved to a larger space to allow social distancing.
- The likely age of those attending. If 70 or over, or if clinically vulnerable, can arrangements be made to ensure 2m social distancing **throughout** their use of the premises, including when using toilets. (Shielding for the clinically vulnerable was paused on 1<sup>st</sup> August but their social interactions need to remain low and within the new group limit of 6).
- Are the organisers willing to clean regularly used surfaces before the event, while it takes place and before leaving? Are they willing to ensure compliance with the requirement to wear face coverings and recording details of those attending or use of NHS QR codes.
- If activities are to be held outdoors what arrangements will be made in the event of rain or a cold snap, e.g. tents, umbrellas?
- Will other organisations be using the premises at the same time? If so, what arrangements will be made to avoid contact between the different groups e.g. staggered start/finish times, Occupied/vacant signage for toilets?
- If an activity will take place outside, will it require access to toilets? If so, a charge would be reasonable to help defray cleaning and other costs such as water rates and insurance.
- Will it comply with any Government Guidance for specific activities.
- Organisers may be following guidance issued by their own governing bodies (eg for sports), which may be more specific to their activity and should provide reassurance. If there is a slight difference between that guidance and the information here, it will be for the organiser to decide which to follow, bearing in mind changes in Government Guidance.

The following are all subject to relevant social distancing requirements, cleaning and hygiene being met. If an activity is not covered here, we suggest you look at the closest match:

### **Group 1: Permitted**

- **Activities which provide essential services, or otherwise already permitted:** e.g. Pre-schools, food and medicine distribution, making PPE, Pop-Up COVID-19 testing, services by voluntary and charitable organisations. Retail activities such as Community Shops and indoor markets (e.g. Farmers Markets, Craft Markets, Antique Fairs, Xmas Fayres) must comply with Government Guidance for the retail sector.
- **Use by Schools:** Guidance has kindly been provided by the Charity Commission, which is available from your Network member if required.
- **Office and certain other forms of employment:** e.g. Building work to the hall, Parish Council, or other office, hire by local companies or organisations for training events, distribution purposes, video recording/transmission. A hairdresser or health therapist. The relevant Government Guidance for that type of employment should be observed.

- **Activities which can be held outdoors and where social distancing can be readily achieved:** e.g. dog training classes, a concert or Christmas market. As with indoor activities organisers will need to arrange activities so as to enable people to comply with the requirement that any groups are only up to 6 people, although there is an exception for organised sports and exercise classes. Events in public outdoor spaces organised by businesses, charitable, philanthropic or political organisations, and public bodies can take place provided they take reasonable steps to mitigate the risk of transmission, in line with COVID-19 Secure guidance, and including completion of a risk assessment. Any other gathering in an outdoor space must not be any larger than 6 people. Equipment should be cleaned regularly e.g. gate latches, handles, balls etc. DCMS guidance permits personal training or coaching if people are able to follow social distancing guidelines. People who play team sports can now train together (e.g. hold fitness sessions) – **see our additional instructions for Indoor and Outdoor exercise and sport.**
- **Activities held indoors where smaller numbers of people attend:** eg: meetings or seated activities held in a large hall such as art classes, history group, dog training classes, weight loss groups, Parish Council meetings, WIs. While Government recommend that meetings continue to take place digitally rather than face-to-face, where possible, meetings are permitted of civic, political or community groups (e.g. parish council, ward meeting of political party, charity board of trustees), MP or councillor surgery/drop in sessions. Age and vulnerability may affect local attitudes about meeting in person so this may differ from place to place and change. A combination may be feasible: A face-to-face meeting may help involve new members and enable those who struggle with digital technology to participate, while others participate on line or by phone.

## **Group 2: Requiring more careful management by organisers**

- **Small events providing catering:** e.g. coffee mornings, pop-up cafés or luncheon clubs. Table service only should be provided. A distance of 2m is required between tables (unless other measures such as back to back seating are in place). Groups of up to 6 only should be allowed at each table. Takeaway drink or food can be provided. Government Guidance for pubs, cafes and restaurants should be consulted to work out how to run these safely. Community cafes will be required to comply with that Guidance. NB Special arrangements should be made to ensure social distancing for vulnerable people and those in the shielding category who wish to attend, to enable participation and avoid their continued isolation.
- **Activities serving mainly older people:** eg Veterans groups, senior groups: The greater vulnerability of those over 70 will require careful attention to social distancing. Consequently it may be appropriate to encourage people to attend either as individuals who social distance from everyone else as far as possible, or in smaller groups of, say, two or three household members, so that mingling between groups of more vulnerable people is avoided.
- **Playing games at tables:** While the older age profile and difficulty complying with social distancing at card tables (normally 67cm) has led the English Bridge Union to advise Bridge Clubs against re-opening for a period, an informal local group may be able to arrange social distancing if groups of up to 6 play together and do not mix with other groups, and slightly larger tables are used. Using new cards or cleaning them is advisable. For games such as scrabble, tiles would need to be cleaned and not

touched by other players.

- **Activities for children and young people:** e.g. cubs, youth clubs, railway modelling club, Sunday school, picnics or BBQs in outdoor areas. Supervised activities for children are an exception to the requirement for groups of up to 6 (see below). For holiday playschemes and before or after school activities Government guidance for out-of-school settings applies. For activities with toddlers, soft toys should be avoided, parents can be encouraged to bring toys which are not shared with other children. Requirements on Pre-schools to keep children in small, consistent groups have been relaxed in favour of minimizing mixing (eg between different age groups) so these type of arrangements may be appropriate i.e. focus on hand cleanliness, arranging the room into small groups and the Government Guidance for “early years” may be helpful. However, it has to be recognised social distancing will be difficult so arrangements may be needed for any families with clinically vulnerable close relatives who attend.
- **Public meetings and public consultation events (e.g. planning):** A one-way system can be created for exhibitions. For large meetings attendees can be asked to use the furthest seat from the entrance first unless hard of hearing, leaving two seats between groups of people on either side. Handouts can be provided at the end rather than at the beginning. Contact details should be taken (for NHS Test and Trace) by one person so attendees do not share a pen. Digital participation can also be encouraged.
- **Other larger events including those with seated audiences:** e.g. gardening club, film show, bingo, quiz night. Attendees can be asked to use the furthest seats from the entrance first unless hard of hearing. A booking system can be encouraged to manage numbers and obtain contact details for NHS Test and Trace.
- **Weddings and wedding receptions:** Weddings and civil partnership ceremonies are permitted where attended by up to 15 persons (excluding those working eg caterers). An exception from the group social interaction limit of 6 applies (see below). Musicians may play and a small group of singers perform, but guests may not sing and recorded music is recommended. The bridal couple are not required to wear face coverings and only they may dance. Sit down wedding receptions are permitted for no more than 15 people (excluding caterers). See also Government guidance on Places of Worship and on Weddings. Government guidance for cafes and restaurants should be followed in relation to catering.
- **Other celebration and life cycle events:** While an event to “mark a person’s death or celebrate their life following a death, such as a funeral” can be held for up to 30 people, government guidance suggests that families consider deferring a celebration or memorial service until it can be held safely and that community facilities should not facilitate large gatherings or celebrations at present. Consequently, while funerals can take place for up to 30, wakes are not advisable because people would need to keep within groups of up to 6 and this type of event could give rise to mingling between groups, which is unlawful. Baptisms and other life cycle or religious events must comply with the group limit of 6. At funerals, baptisms and similar life cycle or religious events relatives and friends may, however, have travelled a distance to attend so it may therefore be appropriate to hire a hall

for the purpose of providing refreshments and toilet facilities before or after, but only for those people attending the event. Any refreshments should be provided in accordance with guidance for cafes and restaurants (see below) i.e. there should either be "table service" or, if caterers are not engaged, people should be seated in order to eat and drink, in groups of up to 6. Loud music or broadcasts are not currently permitted, the purpose being to avoid aerosol dispersal as people raise their voices to be heard, and must be restricted to 85db(A) at the source of play (except for live music)

A hall should not be hired for teenage or adult birthday parties. Hiring for small celebrations such as small wedding anniversary lunches is now more difficult, though small events permitted if compliant with social distancing, keeping to groups of up to 6, refreshments in accordance with Guidance for restaurants. If there is any likelihood of a larger gathering than 30, or mingling between groups, the hall should not be made available.

- **Social Clubs, bars and cafes:** These may open in accordance with Government guidance for pubs, cafes and restaurants (the hospitality sector). Service of food and drink must close by 10pm. There is a legal obligation to ensure people are not admitted in groups of more than 6 and that they do not mix. Table service only is permitted and tables must be 2m apart (or with other mitigation such as back to back seating). Any singing on the premises by customers in groups of more than six or dancing by customers must be stopped. They may also provide takeaway refreshments. Music must not be louder than 85db(A) at source, except for live music. Games such as darts and snooker are discouraged in the Government guidance for pubs. However, they can be permitted if not played in a Social Club or bar but as an activity in their own right or e.g. at a Youth Club.
- **Indoor sport and exercise and dancing classes:** Activities such as yoga, keep fit, badminton, table tennis, indoor bowls, dancing classes, and School PE lessons are permitted. These should be held in accordance with the Government guidance and any guidance issued by the relevant governing body for sport (which may recommend a lower limit on numbers than the hall capacity). Energetic activities such as Zumba and circuit training are subject to tighter capacity and ventilation requirements.
- **Indoor Performances, Rehearsals, broadcasts:** Rehearsals, filming and broadcasting of music, drama and dancing is now permitted, including professional touring performances, amateur dramatics, pantomime groups, children's entertainers, band practices, orchestras, choirs, whether amateur or professional. These should be held in accordance with the Government guidance for performing arts. Children's entertainers need to get back to work and will have plans for managing social distancing and encouraging hand washing, so offer a good option for organised activities for children and young people, e.g. at half term or before Christmas, particularly if a Xmas panto is not being held. Performances are encouraged to close by 10pm, but are permitted to finish later.

- **Children's birthday parties:** Many families do not have the space for this at home. Large gatherings or celebrations are not permitted, neither is loud music or activity which would encourage shouting or singing. While children's birthday parties are not banned, it is unlikely that keeping children in groups of 6 or less which do not mingle could be achieved, so currently not advised unless organised by someone used to managing this in a school or pre-school. A children's party is permitted, however, if limited to one "qualifying group" or 6 or less people.

**Group 3: Not permitted, awaits further Government guidance:**

- **Outdoor events:** If 30 or more people will attend and the event is not organised by a business, charity, benevolent or philanthropic or political organisation, public body, in compliance with Covid-19 Secure guidelines.
- **Dances and discos:** Nightclubs are not permitted to open. Loud music is not permitted. Performers are advised not to encourage impromptu dancing by audiences.
- There should be no **group singing by worshippers or audiences**. Places of worship should take account of the Performing Arts guidance.

**There has been some concern by trustees about responsibilities and confusion about the way different Government Guidance applies.**

The following may help:

1. **Trustees** of Village Halls are unlikely to be at risk if they have undertaken and followed a COVID-19 Risk Assessment before re-opening their Halls, unless the activity is on the specific 'banned' list that is referred to in Regulation 4 (and regularly amended).
2. Risk under the 'crisis regulations' falls to the **event organiser**. If a **hirer, the event organiser**, does not feel the Hall is in a condition that enables them to comply, they should not make the booking. Obligations on the **event organiser** include keeping records for NHS test and trace and taking steps to avoid groups of people mingling at activities.
3. **Trustees and managers of** Village Halls will, of course, want to ensure that their premises make it as easy as possible for both hirers and individuals to comply with relevant Guidance through the provision of adequate handwashing, signage, spacing/capacity guidelines, multiple small tables etc. specific to their Hall. The manner or extent to which managers choose to do this is unlikely to alter the risk for them under the regulations.
4. **Hirers** must commit themselves to operating in a COVID-19 Secure way by following the Government's Guidance in force for their activity. The Government guidance says: "if organising an activity, you should carry out a COVID-19 risk assessment to identify actions which could minimise the risk of transmission".
5. **Trustees and managers** of Halls should follow good practice themselves and avoid creating the conditions for the spread of COVID-19 in their community. For this reason, they will want to avoid letting to any **hirer** where there may be an obvious risk of the Guidance being hard to comply with.
6. In order to assure themselves on 4, above, trustees of Halls should ensure **hirers** inform all participating **individuals** that they must adhere to social distancing

guidelines and the face covering requirement. *The responsibility rests with the **individual** to comply and with the **hirer** (the event organiser) to have carried out a risk assessment and operated the event under COVID-19 Secure guidelines to make it possible* e.g. by laying out seats or tables so as to enable individuals or groups to achieve social distancing from the next individual or group.

7. The Government guidance for **individuals** advises: "you should not hold or attend celebrations of any size (such as parties) where it's difficult to maintain social distancing" and "limit social interaction with anyone outside the group you are attending a place with".
8. **Event organisers** should arrange activities so as to avoid groups of up to 6 "mingling", ie mixing with other groups. The group limit does not stop people saying hello, waving, smiling, or conversing briefly in the way many are now used to doing while social distancing in the street, shops or at work. However, an **individual** in one group may not join another group during an activity or event, just as people in restaurants may not join another table. An **event organisers** should ask **individuals** who attempt to mingle with another group to stop. Common sense can be applied.

## **B. Group social interaction requirements:**

The aim is to contain risk of virus spread to small groups. In general people are therefore being advised to only socialise in a group of up to 6, following social distancing guidelines as far as possible. Covid -19 secure Community Halls can host more than 6 people, subject to their own capacity limits. If people attend in groups, or groups of up to 6 are formed at an activity, they must not mingle (or mix) with other groups.

Those in single adult households can form a support bubble with another household. A "linked household" can be formed between a single adult with children and another household but cannot be changed. "Qualifying groups" can be larger than 6 where a "support bubble" or "linked household" has been formed with another household, or a single household is composed of more than 6 people.

Space requirements may be difficult to determine in advance of occasional events, whereas for regular activities this is likely to be less of a problem: This is because there is a tension with the advice to individuals, which is that they should limit their social interactions with anyone they do not live with. Consequently, even if people attend in a group of up to 6, if those in the group are from different households they may still require sufficient space for social distancing from others within their group, especially if over 70 or shielding. Organisers can therefore ask whether social distancing is needed *within* a group, so that when an activity is being booked or people are being seated, sufficient space is made available.

The exceptions are listed below. The limit on group size of 6 has, however, been introduced to limit the spread of infection. Consequently, even where an activity may potentially be exempt organisers should consider whether it would help limit the risk of spread of infection to adjust their activities and operate in groups of up to 6. For example, Men's Sheds provide a voluntary service, and are wisely advising local groups to operate in groups of up to 6.

- for work, or the provision of voluntary or charitable services
- registered childcare, education or training
- supervised activities provided for children, including wraparound care, youth groups and activities, and children's playgroups
- providing support to a vulnerable person

- providing emergency assistance, and to avoid injury or illness or to escape risk of harm
- for arrangements where children do not live in the same household as both their parents
- fulfilling a legal obligation such as attending court or jury service
- weddings and civil partnership ceremonies and receptions – up to 30 people, in a public place
- funerals – up to 30 people. This does not include wakes, other than for religious ceremonial purposes.
- other religious and belief-based life cycle ceremonies – up to 30 people, in a public place. This only covers the ceremonies, and does not include celebrations of these events.
- Outdoor organised sport or exercises classes or physical activity. This does not include informal sport or fitness activity with family or friends – this must be limited to a group of 6.
- elite sporting competition and training
- support groups – formally organised groups to provide mutual aid, therapy or any other form of support. This includes support to victims of crime, recovering addicts, new parents, people with long-term illnesses, those facing issues relating to their sexuality or gender, and those who have suffered bereavement. May continue to meet in groups up to 15.
- protests – if organised in compliance with COVID-19 Secure guidance

Where a group includes someone covered by one of these exemptions, they are not counted as part of the gatherings limit. This means, for example, that a tradesperson can go into a household of six without breaching the limit if they are there for work. (Ref: GOV.UK FAQs. What you Can and Can't Do. 14<sup>th</sup> Sept 2020).

**Note:**

**Businesses:** While there is an exception for those at work, it is unlikely to apply to those people attending an activity which is run as a business, such as a weight loss group, only to the person at work. Social distancing must be maintained anyway and some people attending may be in the vulnerable category. Those people who wish to do so might attend in groups of 6 or less, and socialise between themselves, and if they do they must not be allowed to mingle (ie mix) with others.

**Support groups:** It would be unwise for an activity to call itself a "support group" in order to avoid the limit on group size. It would be better to think whether group working might help members or clients cope better with the Covid restrictions.

## Managing the social interaction requirement for groups of up to 6 – examples

Activity or Event	Managing groups of 6 or less or “qualifying groups”	Can Face Coverings be removed? (Other exceptions also apply)
Sewing group:	People attend with one or two friends with whom they wish to chat as a group. They do not live together and most people being over 70 they wish to sit socially distanced. Large tables are put out by the organiser/caretaker. Groups can choose to be side by side 1 - 2m apart at one large table or have individual tables set apart from other groups.	To take refreshments (seated) or if they interfere with the activity. If glasses steam up, they should be removed for safety (sharp scissors, needles).
Quiz:	Most people attend in family or friendship groups. They can be asked to book in advance. Some tables will have groups of 4 – 6 family members closely seated, other groups of up to 6 will need larger tables so friends can sit together but socially distanced. One or two tables may have a larger “qualifying group” closely seated. At the interval remind people not to mingle between groups, especially if children attend who may want to mix with friends. Invite people from each table to use toilets one by one.	To take refreshments, when seated.
Art class:	12 people usually sit socially distanced. Only the instructor moves round the room. They can remain as they are or the class can form groups, eg 2 x 6 or 3 x 4. Members of groups would then be able to chat and move within their group during the class and coffee break, but not with other groups. The tutor would still need to interact with each group, with attention to social distancing, but being at work is excepted and does not count towards each group limit.	To take refreshments. when seated. If it would interfere with the activity (eg glasses steam up).
Bingo:	Each group needs to be socially distanced from other groups. If people don't book in advance, someone would need to take them to a row of seats or table large enough for their group. They could be separated from other groups by both a 2m wide gangway and the table separating them from those in rows behind or in front.	To take refreshments, when seated.
Public meeting or talk	Seats might be placed in forward facing rows eg 8 on each side of a 2m gangway, each group or individual separated from the next group or individual by empty seats in the row or sitting in a different row. Someone should be available to help seat people so as to achieve social distancing.	To take refreshments, when seated. If it would interfere with the activity eg by a speaker. A PA preferable if available.

Film show	Barns Green Village Hall, Sussex, held 2 shows, with advance bookings. Limiting group sizes to 4, empty seats between, gave a capacity of 46. They can continue this way or raise the group limit to 6. The seats are the refreshment area, people bring their own.	Once seated during a film show face coverings can be removed, and replaced before leaving.
Wedding reception	Up to 15 people can attend a wedding and a seated reception without adhering to the group limit of 6. The hirer should be asked if there are people who need to socially distance from others, and the tables set out accordingly.	Not required by the bride and groom. Guests may remove them once seated for the meal.
Coffee morning	People attend to socialise with others, but arrive singly or in pairs, and may not have pre-arranged to sit with (ie form a group with) particular people. The organisers may allocate or allow them to join a table of up to 6, socially distanced, and should explain they must not mingle or move to another table.	To take refreshments, when seated.

**30<sup>th</sup> September 2020**