

# Coronavirus guidance from the Synod Moderators



March 2022

**Greetings to the saints who form the United Reformed Church. The Synod Moderators met together at the very beginning of Lent, during which time we looked again at the general situation with the pandemic, considered the relevant Government guidance, and offer the following for your consideration.**

1. The pandemic is not yet over, and in some areas the infection rates are actually increasing. In other areas, whilst the rates are coming down, and the risk of serious illness is diminished by vaccination amongst most of our members and visitors, they are still at a very high rate, and even now hundreds of people are dying each week with or from Covid-19. The need for continued vigilance is clear.
2. As has been the case throughout, the Elders' Meeting (or equivalent council in Local Ecumenical Partnerships) have the responsibility for health and safety, within the applicable regulations. Even though almost all Coronavirus restrictions have now been removed in England, Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey, a duty of care remains with the local church.
3. Even amongst those fully vaccinated, the demographics in most of our churches shows that we have a very high proportion of people who are more vulnerable to the more serious effects of Covid-19.
4. In the opinion of the Synod Moderators, we must remain cautious in protecting ourselves and others.
5. Therefore, we strongly encourage our churches to continue with good practice in reducing the risk of infection to anyone who comes into a United Reformed Church building.
6. Within a local assessment of risk, appropriate measures still include asking people with symptoms of Coronavirus to stay away from church buildings, practice excellent hand hygiene, provide good ventilation in meeting spaces and allow for physical distancing.
7. If ministers or employees contract coronavirus, we would expect them to isolate during the period of their illness and continue to work from home if they are able.
8. The question of whether to wear face coverings seems to be causing the most vexation. In Scotland it is still a legal requirement to wear one in public spaces, including churches. In England and Wales, Government guidance is still strongly in favour of wearing one, especially in crowded places where we are with others whom we do not usually meet. In other public places, it may be the case that the majority of

people are choosing not to wear a face covering. That should not be the guiding factor for our churches.

9. We remind everyone that the wearing of face coverings is an appropriate mitigation to risk of spreading the virus.
10. We ask Elders' Meetings to carefully consider the appropriate timing to inform their churches when it is no longer necessary or recommended to wear face coverings. In our opinion it is too soon to do so now (remembering the legal requirement that remains in Scotland).
11. Even when the expectation is lifted, some will choose to continue to use face coverings. They must NOT be subjected to abuse or ridicule.
12. Above all else, love one another.

*The Synod Moderators, March 3, 2022*

