Reopening Your Community Building Guidance

## Reopening Your Community Facility – A Practical Guide

As our community moves toward the easing of lockdown measures and organisations look to re-open community facilities, we have put together a checklist of things you may wish to consider as you think about how to bring your centre back into community use.

We would like to remind you that this is a constantly changing situation with official Government guidance changing regularly. It is important therefore that as an organisation, you make sure any decision about re-opening a building and resuming services are in line with current Government guidance. Up to date advice can be found at <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/>

Remember, even though the Government allows you to reopen you do not have to do so. For many it will be a judgement call for your committee about when it is safe and viable to reopen.

**Disclaimer** – Every organisation’s circumstances are different therefore this is not a definitive list of things to do. There may be other actions not included here that you need to research and consider for your organisation.

## The Step by Step approach

Before opening your community facility, you need to be aware that the following 5 key points should be applied

1. **Minimise contact with individuals who are unwell**: No one should attend the premises if they have symptoms or are self-isolating due to symptoms in their household
2. **Clean your hands often**: Sanitiser should be provided at entry and exit points, sanitiser and/or running water, soap and paper towels toilets and kitchens. Hot air dryers are **not** recommended as they distribute droplets
3. **Respiratory hygiene:** Everyone needs to be encouraged to avoid touching their mouth, eyes, and nose. Tissues need to be disposed of into a bin, then hands cleaned. A “Catch it, Bin it, Kill it” poster should be visiable
4. **Regular cleaning of surfaces that are touched frequently:** including door handles, handrails, table tops, sinks, toilet areas, kitchen surfaces. Ordinary domestic products can be used.
5. **Maintain social distancing where possible**: Social distancing guidelines currently require at least 2 metres (3 steps) to be maintained between individuals and households where possible, or as a minimum 1.2 metres when space is limited. Bookings can be accepted for events where social distancing can be maintained, the number of people each person has contact with is reduced to a small group and/or contacts below 2m are minimised and transitory, but crowded events cannot yet be held.

## Planning for Re-opening of your community facility

Do not re-open until you have identified the necessary safety, compliance, management, and operational issues and established a plan to address and mitigate them. You are not obliged to re-open immediately and it would be unwise to do so if you have not been through that process. **Appendix A** provides a checklist of tasks likely to be needed prior to re-opening, of which compliance with COVID-19 secure guidelines is just part.

The committee will need to engage with their regular users to ensure that the 5 COVID-19 Secure Guidelines requirements above are clearly understood. Groups who use the premises have an important role to play in communicating these requirements to their members and in ensuring the special hire conditions which will need to be introduced are followed.

As part of opening after lockdown, self-certification should be displayed that your premises is complying with COVID-19 Secure Guidelines. This will also help users feel confident about using the premises. **See Appendix B for a sample certificate/poster.**

1. **Social Distancing within a Community Hall**
2. The size and layout of the premises will determine the maximum number of people that can be accommodated while also facilitating social distancing. In order to achieve social distancing requirements, as far as possible, you will need to work out the capacity of rooms and set limits on the number of people permitted to use a particular hall or room at any one time. A rule of thumb might be one quarter of the seating or (for non-seated activities, dancing) capacity set for fire safety purposes or the size of the room in sq. metres divided by 4 for 2 mtrs or 2 for 1 mtr social distancing.
3. User groups may not know at the outset how many people are likely to attend activities and a booking system is not required for small scale activities. It would be preferable to ask groups to think about how they will deal with any excess, which may depend on the nature of their activity and the facilities at the hall e.g. first come, first served, using other space to increase capacity e.g. garden, kitchen, entrance hall, committee room, re-running an activity later or on another day, some people joining in online either at home or via laptop in another room.
4. Arrangements will need to be made to manage people at “pinch points” e.g. arriving for an activity and exiting afterwards, in toilets, kitchens and corridors. There is a risk entrances could become congested owing to multiple user groups, or people lingering to read notices or chat; so a socially distanced queueing system is required, e.g. tape on the ground outside and inside the entrance hall, with signage. Staggered arrival and departure times may help.
5. Implementing a one-way flow in and out of the premises should help avoid congestion, particularly where multiple activities are held at the same time. Usually entry would be via the main entrance, with people leaving via fire exits. Appropriate signposting will be needed. Any changes to entrances, exits and queues should, however, consider the needs of those with physical disabilities. It may not be possible to implement one-way flow internally, as people may have to cross an entrance hall to reach the toilets or kitchen, so it may be necessary to stagger access to such facilities e.g. a longer interval.
6. Some lapse in social distancing may be difficult to avoid, e.g. where people pass in internal corridors. Government guidance indicates that such transitory contacts are lower risk and it will be for hirers to try and arrange their activities to avoid these risks if possible, particularly for older or medically vulnerable people.
7. The latest Government advice is that if you can, you should wear a face covering if in an enclosed space where social distancing isn’t possible and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet. However, face coverings should not be taken on and off frequently, so while this is most relevant for crowded areas such as public transport it is preferable that in halls social distancing and good hygiene are maintained. Where, however, people will be working in proximity, and with older and medically vulnerable people, a face covering is advisable to protect those people. Examples include preparing food or drink in a small kitchen and serving older or vulnerable people e.g. at a coffee morning or lunch club, in a community shop or cafe.
8. Consultation with regular user groups will be important as some reorganisation may be inevitable. Some groups may not return for some time but want to retain their usual “slots” while it may be necessary to hire the premises in different ways. For example, groups may need to use the main hall rather than a committee room to achieve social distancing, which may mean substantially re-arranging timings for main hall use. Some groups may be able to continue running activities online to make way for others.
9. In case of emergency it is important to prioritise safety: In the event of fire or accident people do not have to stay 2m apart if it would be unsafe to do so.
10. **Risk Assessment for COVID-19**

Your management committee must consider the COVID-19 Secure guidelines (see above) and should undertake their own COVID-19 Risk Assessment to ensure that their staff (cleaner, caretaker) and members are safe.

**See Appendix C** for an example.

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Going through a Risk Assessment process and working out the areas of greater and lower risk will hopefully enable a “common sense” approach to which users can adapt.

1. **Cleaning and encouraging good hygiene**

A decision will need to be made on how frequently cleaning should take place, based on an assessment of risk, and use of the building. Some halls have the resources (staff, finance) to clean regularly used surfaces and equipment before users arrive which is ideal. Many community halls have part time or self-employed staff e.g. with other cleaning jobs working only a few hours per week, particularly halls serving rural areas which are used less frequently. This can mean that users let themselves in, are often responsible for putting out and storing away the equipment they use and for cleaning the hall after use. Experience is that not all users clean up after themselves satisfactorily and you may have concern that not all will comply with carrying out a higher level of cleaning on leaving.

1. All halls should:

* Provide sanitiser at every entrance/exit and in meeting rooms.
* Post notices at every entrance/exit showing what is expected of users, erect the **“Catch It, Bin It, Kill It”** poster and posters encouraging frequent handwashing. **See Appendix D**

b) If a hall does not have the staff or finances to arrange additional cleaning before every hire, in these circumstances, the appropriate way of discharging your responsibility and encouraging compliance is likely to be to:

* Require each user group to clean surfaces that their group might use before their own users arrive, and to clean regularly used surfaces such as table tops and sinks during the hire and to clean before they leave.
* For the hall to ensure the hall’s usual cleaning routine is followed e.g. for floors, with particular attention to keeping hand wash basins, door and toilet handles clean and provide cleaning supplies for use by user groups. This means the cleaner/caretaker (or volunteers will need to provide and check/replenish hand sanitiser, cleaning materials (including cleanser, spray disinfectant, washing up liquid and cloths) and tissues and remove waste to outside bins before use on each day the facility will be used. Supplies of soap and paper towels must be provided at toilet and kitchen sinks.
* Limit cleaning of some areas to staff and/or provide instructions to hirers, e.g. where there is a risk of damage or electrical apparatus is involved. For example, switches should be cleaned by cloth, not sprayed with disinfectant, rubberised or glued surfaces can be damaged by frequent sprays or vigorous rubbing.
* Advise the cleaner/caretaker as to the extra cleaning required if someone is taken unwell on the premises with a suspected case of COVID-19. This requires disposable PPE and double bagging of PPE and cleaning materials afterwards, which must be stored for 72 hours securely prior to collection:
* Advise user groups bringing or using their own equipment which is stored at the hall that they will need to clean this for each session and before stowing it away, or ask their group members to bring their own clean equipment and avoid sharing it.

1. **Hiring Arrangements**
2. Instruct booking secretaries to allow longer between hires, to allow either the cleaner/caretaker to
3. Clean before their arrival or user groups to arrive up to half an hour earlier in order to pre-clean for their own use.
4. The cleaner/caretaker will need to be given expected arrival times for each user or other arrangements made to check sufficient supplies of sanitiser, soap, paper towels and cleaning materials.
5. Social distancing will need to be maintained and vulnerable people protected. It is therefore unlikely that the full range of normal use will be possible. The committee will need to decide which users can begin to use the hall pending Government guidance, when venues can re-open for larger events e.g. theatres, cinemas, bingo halls.
6. User groups will need to be given instructions, guidance and responsibility via special hiring conditions which should be attached to their usual hire agreement. These should be issued in writing and signed or accepted in all cases. An electronic signature or email confirmation of the conditions is acceptable. **See Appendix E** for sample special hire conditions.
7. Users should be encouraged to seat or stand people side-to-side, rather than face-to-face, whenever possible with two empty seats (a distance of at least 1m and preferably 2m) between each person if seated. If face-to-face placing is unavoidable a distance of at least 1 metres is required. Where possible users should encourage people to stay in groups, of say 6 to 8, to reduce transmission.
8. You could issues photos to help user groups work out how to arrange the rooms. Drawings of possible layouts could be posted on noticeboards.
9. Users should be encouraged to keep the hall well ventilated, opening doors and windows as far as possible, and will need to remember to close them all for security on leaving. It may therefore be necessary for the caretaker or a volunteer to check the premises at night for the first few weeks, to ensure everyone is remembering. Fresh air is preferable to mechanical ventilation.
10. Users should be encouraged to have regard as to whether people attending their activity are clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 and how they will address the need to keep them safe. Those over 70, who are more vulnerable and have been required to self-isolate for 12 weeks, but not in the shielding category, may wish to attend their usual community activities, so particular attention should be paid to the need to maintain social distancing with them. This is reflected in the Special Hiring Conditions at Appendix E.
11. Users should be provided with a copy of the hall’s COVID-19 Risk Assessment. You may wish to ask to see a copy of their own COVID-19 Risk Assessment. The sample at **Appendix F** can be shared with user groups.
12. You and your hirers may wish to encourage those attending to bring their own Food and Drink e.g. water bottles for the time being, rather than making food and drink on the premises, to reduce work cleaning the kitchen. Users should also be encouraged to bring their own equipment where possible, e.g. crafts, keep fit, and can be encouraged to bring their own personal hand sanitiser, wipes, and tissues.
13. **Employees**
14. Where a hall has employees, guidance can be found in the BEIS guidance on workplaces for offices and contact centres and 5 steps to working safely. In addition to carrying out the hall’s ordinary risk assessment before re-opening, the hall should follow HSE advice for an employer’s Risk Assessment for COVID-19, which involves:
    1. Identifying what work activity or situations might cause transmission of the virus.
    2. Thinking about who could be at risk.
    3. Deciding how likely it is that someone could be exposed.
    4. Acting to remove the activity or situation, or if this is not possible, control the risk.
15. These points are addressed in the Sample COVID-19 Risk Assessment at Appendix C.
16. Guidance is that no one is obliged to work in an unsafe work environment and that in the risk assessment you should have particular regard to whether the people doing the work are especially vulnerable to COVID-19. If that is the case with your hall cleaner/caretaker you may need to make alternative arrangements for the time being.
17. **Procedures if someone becomes unwell with COVID-19**
18. A space should be designated into which anyone will be moved who becomes unwell at the hall with suspected COVID-19 symptoms until transport home or to hospital is available. Tissues and a bowl of warm soapy water for handwashing and paper towels should be provided. Tissues and paper towels should be disposed of into a plastic bag, which is sealed and placed in a secure place for 72 hours before being disposed of into the general rubbish collection.
19. Other people whom they have been in contact with should be asked for contact details and then to leave the premises. The Test, Track and Trace service should be informed.
20. Those parts of the premises which they have used should be closed for 72 hours. A decontamination clean should be carried out in accordance with PHA guidance.
21. Disposable PPE equipment including gloves should be disposed of into a sealed plastic bag and secured for 72 hours before rubbish is collected.
22. The cleaner should launder all personal clothing worn on arrival home.
23. **Frequently Asked Questions**

Q: Will our hall have to re-open when the Government says it can?

A: No – see Section 2.1 above. Some are only opening parts of their premises, others are using the closure period to complete maintenance works. In such cases your management committee would need to meet (online or by phone) to take a decision that it would not be in the best interests of the organisation to re-open when allowed to do so. Minute the reasons why, so that you can show that the matter has been carefully considered in the event of challenge, e.g. by a local user group.

**Q: If an outbreak of COVID-19 is traced to our hall, will we, committee members, or staff, be held liable?**

A: If those responsible for managing the hall use reasonable endeavours to ensure the hall is cleaned and maintained in accordance with the COVID-19 Secure Guidelines, have prepared a COVID-19 Risk Assessment, see Appendix C, and have written records of the action taken this should reduce very substantially the risk of being held liable. Providing this is the case, and any insurer requirements met, any liability should be addressed in the usual way by the hall’s public liability cover and legal expenses cover. Not only would a claimant have to prove the committee had been negligent and that they caught the disease at the premises, they may be held to bear responsibility themselves by putting themselves in harm’s way.

**Q: Hirers want to use the hall but pay a reduced fee because their numbers will be lower, and** they will be doing more cleaning. We can’t afford this, because we have fixed costs to pay and are having to arrange more cleaning too. Do we have to allow it to open at a reduced fee if it’s going to cost us more than the income?

A: It is up to the committee responsible for managing the facility to determine what is in the best interests of their hall organisation in the light of these exceptional circumstances and predicted financial situation.

**Q: What do we do if someone wants to hire the hall for an event at which we think social** distancing might not be observed, such as a birthday party?

**A**: You will be entitled to refuse the booking. You might accept a booking for a future date with the caveat that it is subject to cancellation if Government guidance at the time would not permit it or it appeared requirements then in force would not be met.

**Q: We are confused. When should sanitiser, soap and water or antibacterial wipes be used?**

A: Provide what is most appropriate. Sanitiser tends to be more easily dispensed at entrances and exits, whereas soap and water easily used in kitchens and toilets. For general cleaning disposable cloths used with and warm, soapy water or spray disinfectant are adequate. People can be encouraged to bring their own sanitiser, antibacterial wipes and tissues, because everyone is encouraged to wash their hands more often than usual, for 20 seconds using soap and water or hand sanitiser, particularly after coughing, sneezing and blowing their nose. Wipes must not be flushed down toilets, bins should be provided.