



# COVID-19 GUIDANCE

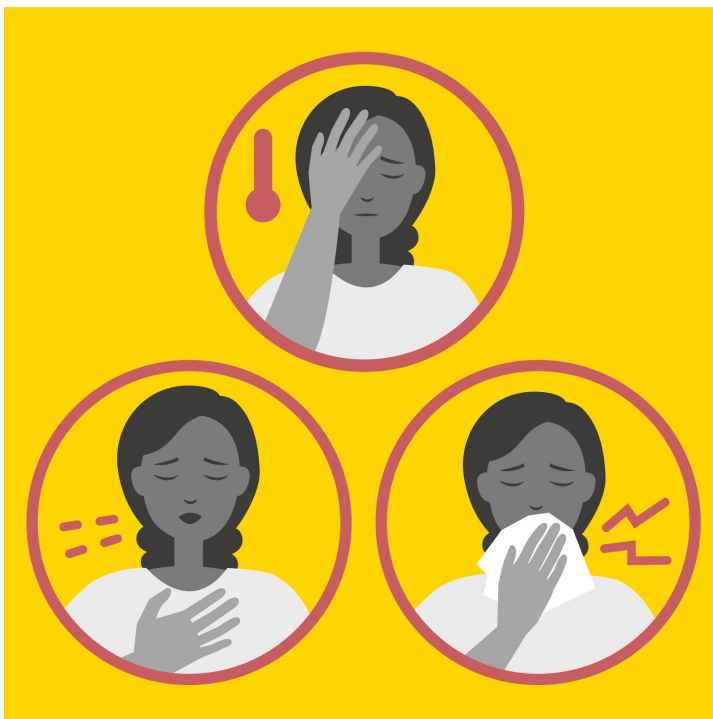
## Guidance for the local church

Covid-19 poses many questions for churches around the world. This document offers guidance for the local church in responding to the pandemic.

The Covid-19 virus is spread by people in close contact (less than two metres apart) as droplets are passed between them, mainly through coughs and sneezes. It is also spread through physical contact as people touch infected things and then their mouth, eyes or nose or touch one another with unwashed hands.

Symptoms include:

- fever and tiredness
- a new, continuous cough
- breathing difficulties



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Across the world, nearly all countries are closing down meeting places, including places of worship, as public spaces have been places where Covid-19 has spread fast. This closure is for a limited time and is for the good of the church and the community. Church members should not abandon the call to worship and fellowship, but out of love and concern for the well-being of others, we should play our part in helping to limit the spread of the disease. Therefore, if services cannot take place in a building in the traditional setting, it is important to think creatively about what ‘church’ looks like during the pandemic.

**Philippians 2:4 (ESV) reminds us, ‘Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.’**

## What the church can and should do during the Covid-19 outbreak



### Promote correct, up-to-date and clear messages

Churches and church leaders should communicate clearly with their community and try to influence them for good. It is important to provide clear and simple messages about Covid-19 that are appropriate to the context (eg [urban and informal settlements](#)) and based on evidence. Use creative ways to promote correct messaging, including by phone, social media, videos and posters.

The messages should include the recommended hygiene measures to prevent infection:

- Wash hands with soap for at least 20 seconds on a regular basis.
- Catch coughs and sneezes in tissues and then safely dispose of the tissue immediately. If no tissue is available, catch your cough or sneeze in the crook of your arm by bending your elbow across your face.
- Avoid touching your face.



### Counter false and harmful messaging to avoid panic spreading and to prevent stigma

Due to fear or ignorance, many wrong messages are being spread, leading to stigma and false accusations being made against people with the disease. People may not understand how the virus is spread, and may become

suspicious of others for no reason. Misinformation can cause isolation, damage and death. Faith leaders should listen to the community to discover what harmful messages are circulating and ensure that they speak out and correct them. This is an opportunity to calm fears and promote positive attitudes and behaviours.



### Model safe behaviours

Church leaders should model behaviours that have the potential to save lives and prevent transmission. They should lead by example, washing hands regularly and following guidance on physical distancing. As the number of cases rises, more people may be asked to remain at home and ‘physically distance’ themselves from others. This is extremely important for reducing the spread of the virus and church leaders can set a good example by keeping to the government’s health guidelines.



### Care for the congregation

Church members may be isolated, worried and fearful. Not all of them may have had access to good information about Covid-19. They may feel sad because they are not gathering with others. Find ways for members to stay connected and provide spiritual support and encouragement to one another. Help families grow in their own spiritual life through prayer and Bible reading. This may include Bible studies in the home, creating a WhatsApp group, or calling each other regularly on the phone.

- Stay in touch over the phone, particularly with those who feel lonely, lack access to up-to-date information or are most vulnerable.
- Set up a WhatsApp group to offer to pray for people, share words of encouragement or even send round a sermon or biblical reflection.
- Share Bible studies that family members (in the same household) can do together.



### Care for the community, especially the most vulnerable

The church does not exist for itself but to love God and to love its neighbour. Christians should model Jesus’ lifestyle during this time through word and actions, speaking about and living lives of hope, love and care for their neighbours. This will counter despair, fear and some of the self-serving behaviours we may see at this time. Those least at risk (the young<sup>1</sup> and the

<sup>1</sup> Young people may also become infected but generally they have a better ability to recover well.

healthy) are best placed to serve. Find ways to engage young people in the plans to decrease the spread of the virus. For example:

- Share information, such as handwashing locations in the community, or other helpful information.
- Check on vulnerable and isolated people to ensure that they have enough food and that their other basic needs are being met.
- Respond to loneliness and fear by, for example, setting up a prayer support group, using the phone or social media if possible.
- Consider other opportunities to respond to this pandemic in your community (see further resources below).



### Help church members look to the Bible to shape their attitudes and responses to the virus

At times like this we need to ensure that we speak and act with love. The Bible shows us that we cannot create a direct link between an individual's sin and disasters that happen in the world, including Covid-19. We cannot blame or stigmatise those who contract it. But the Bible does teach that we live in a fallen world of broken relationships where suffering and sickness are part of our reality. We want people to experience Jesus' promise of fullness of life (John 10:10) and we do this by responding to people's needs in all areas of life: physical, spiritual and emotional. (You may also find this resource helpful: [A Christian perspective on Covid 19](#))



### Intercede before God for an end to Covid-19

The church has been given the full armour of God to respond to the brokenness of this world (Ephesians 6:10–20). We know that our battles are not actually physical but against 'powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms' (Ephesians 6:12). Therefore prayer is important at this time. Jesus understands our fears and worries and asks us to bring them to him in prayer (1 Peter 5:7).

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#### Other resources:

- Tearfund Learn: [COVID-19 resources](#)
- Pete Greig and 24-7 Prayer: [A contemplative prayer resource](#)