

## **GUIDANCE ON PHYSICAL DISTANCE BASED CAPACITY**

With effect from 17 May 2021, churches must:-

1. calculate the maximum Physical Distance Based Capacity (PDBC) limit for their premises;
2. display this maximum capacity at their entrances.

Government guidance on PDBC is available at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-calculating-physical-distancing-capacity-in-public-settings/pages/overview/>

This note is to assist Scottish Episcopal Churches in applying that guidance.

Since Covid lockdown restrictions were first eased during the course of 2020, churches have been used to ensuring physical distancing between worshippers. The new Government guidance does not make any change to the requirement to maintain the existing 2m physical distancing requirement. However, the new Government guidance has been issued in order to help support public confidence that public spaces, such as churches, have considered physical distancing, to apply a consistent approach across all public settings and to provide additional clarity on the physical distancing requirement.

Local authorities will be responsible for continuing to engage with premises to support compliance. Local authority regulators are working to a “4 E's” approach: by engaging, explaining, encouraging and, as a last resort, enforcing the regulations and guidance. It will, therefore, be important for churches to be able to demonstrate how they have calculated their PDBC, if asked by the local authority.

It should be emphasised that the PDBC is a notional figure, since the actual number of people who can be accommodated on any given occasion is in fact likely to be a lesser number (see para 3 below).

Churches are encouraged to have regard to the Government guidance referred to above. Particular aspects to consider include: –

1. In practice, the actual capacity of a church building complying with the 2m distancing rule, will vary from week to week depending on those actually present. The individuals within a household group do not need to physically distance from each other, but the household as a whole must of course distance from the next adjacent household group or individual worshipper. In most cases, therefore, the PDBC for the building is likely to be the figure which would be arrived at if the entire congregation comprises only households. Households, themselves, may vary in size from two individuals to a larger number. In order to compute the church's PDBC, it is suggested that it be assumed that the entire congregation comprises households of, say, four individuals. For specific layouts where a pew would hold fewer than four, a lower number could be included in the calculation. For that purpose, children under the age of 5 should be included in the calculation.

2. The PDBC, once calculated, must be displayed on a sheet, A4 size or larger, at the entrance. If a separate hall is also being used for worship, or worship is being streamed into such a hall, the PDBC for the hall should also be calculated and displayed at the entrance to the hall.
3. The PDBC arrived at by the above methodology is a notional maximum capacity figure. However, on any given occasion, because 2m physical distancing must be observed, it is likely that the actual capacity it will be less than that maximum capacity (because congregations will comprise a mixture of households of different sizes and individuals). It will therefore be important for welcomers or sidespeople responsible for seating worshippers to understand the difference between the displayed PDBC and the actual number of worshippers permissible for any particular service.
4. A further complication is that children under the age of 5 do not need to be taken into account for the purpose of actual physical distancing (even though, as mentioned above, they do for the purposes of computing the maximum capacity referred to above).
5. Churches are reminded that physical distancing is only one key measure to minimise transmission of the virus alongside matters such as face coverings, ventilation and the observance of appropriate hygiene.

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