

The Advisory Group met recently and provides the following update. There are no significant changes being made at this time but we draw the following to your attention:

1. As yet, while data on the Omicron variant are collected and assessed, the implications of the variant remain uncertain. Government is not tightening restrictions at this point but is strengthening its emphasis on compliance with the basic measures we are all already familiar with:
 - the importance of being vaccinated and receiving the booster dose as soon as one is eligible
 - following the "baseline" measures (the wearing of face coverings, encouraging good ventilation and good hygiene)
 - the taking of lateral flow tests when meeting others, in whatever context. The Advisory Group has previously endorsed earlier Government guidance to take lateral flow tests twice weekly. Given the Government's recent request to take lateral flow tests more frequently, the Advisory Group encourages people to take such tests before attending church services and, if testing positive, not to attend.

2. The Government has made some minor changes to its own Places of Worship guidance including some FAQs about Christmas. That revised guidance is available at:
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship/>

3. During Advent and Christmastide many churches will be holding services with little interval in between - perhaps particularly over Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day. Churches are reminded of the need to clean/sanitise between services including regular cleaning of touch points such as light switches, pews, toilets, door handles etc.

4. Face coverings remain mandatory for those aged 12 and over, unless an exemption applies. The Advisory Group has received some anecdotal evidence of occasional difficulty being experienced in ensuring that those attending weddings wear face coverings. It therefore re-emphasises that the wearing of face coverings is a legal requirement for all services in church, including weddings and funerals. There is a specific exemption in relation to weddings but it is limited to the parties being married (where there is at least one metre, or a partition, between those parties and anyone else), to the person leading the service (again, provided there is at least one metre distance or a partition) and to any person accompanying one of the prospective spouses as part of the ceremony (e.g. to walk down the aisle).

5. Some minor updating has been made to the FAQs appearing on our website at:
<https://www.scotland.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/Frequently-Asked-Questions-Version-11-9.12.21.pdf>

Since preparing the above update the First Minister has today reported on the Government's concerns about the Omicron variant. No new measures for places of worship are being introduced at present, albeit Christmas work parties are being discouraged and the rules on self-isolation for household contacts are being made more stringent, but if the situation changes in the coming days and new restrictions are introduced, we will issue a further update.

Kind regards

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