

Preparing to reopen your village hall: Guidance on Physical Distancing

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Introduction

In Scotland, the default position is to stay 2 metres physically distant from individuals of other households. It is a fundamental part of the Government's strategy to prevent the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19); and there are only limited exceptions. For the purposes of this guidance, the two-metre rule is used throughout.

Before introducing any of the measures below, **you are required to have undertaken a Coronavirus (COVID-19) risk assessment** of your premises, taking account of the activities for which the hall is to be used. Please refer to our separate guidance and template on risk assessment, available on the [Bavs website](#).

The law

Physical distancing duties are set out in regulation 4(1) of the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020. A person who is responsible for carrying on a business or providing a service must take all reasonable measures:

- to ensure that a distance of two metres is maintained between any persons on the premises (except between members of the same household or a carer and the person assisted by the carer)
- to ensure that they only admit people to its premises in sufficiently small numbers to make it possible to maintain that distance
- to ensure that a distance of two metres is maintained between any person waiting to enter the premises (except between members of the same household or a carer and the person assisted by the carer)

General

Start by sketching out a plan of the building, and identify access points, pinch points, and other heavy use areas (doorways, routes to toilets etc.). Try to draw this to scale where possible, as it will become a useful aid to introducing many of the physical distancing measures needed. In general, you should:

- Insist that all users respect the 2 metre physical distancing (as well as all other safety measures); and make it a condition of hire.
- Refuse to hire the hall to any groups who you believe will engage in high-risk activities (i.e. where they may struggle to follow the necessary physical distancing precautions).
- Encourage user groups, where you have the space, to take their activity outside.
- Consider what steps you could reasonably take to deal with breaches of the physical distancing measures, from reporting incidents, up to and including responding to a serious breach.

Signage and marking

Good signage is not only helpful to hall users, but demonstrates that you are serious about safety:

- Ensure that there are clear signs throughout the premises reminding people of the need to maintain physical distancing.
- Where necessary, mark the floors/walls in rooms, corridors and entrances with 2 metre guides, for example to queue for the toilet, to enter a store room, or for positioning tables and chairs.

Room capacity

There is no particular method or formula to use for calculating this. Basically, the maximum physical distancing room capacity is the number of people that can reasonably follow 2 metre distancing within the room, taking account of any pinch points and busy areas. You should consider the following:

- Room capacity will depend upon the activity for which the hall is being used, as tables, equipment, and approaches to doorways, for example, will reduce floor space.
- Use your room plan when working out capacity, particularly when positioning tables.
- Allow for busy areas where there may be a need for a queue (such as in front of a serving hatch).
- If the hall is being used for something like an exhibition or a craft fair, consider whether or not you will use a one-way system (see below). This too may affect capacity; and total numbers in the room may need to be regulated with a one-out, one-in system.

- If you have two or more rooms, don't simply add the total capacity of each together for an event in case people favour one room over another. Your capacity limits need to be per room rather than per event.
- In smaller rooms, such as a kitchen, where people may be moving around more often, there may be times when keeping a 2 metre distance is not always possible. In such cases you should take additional measures such as the wearing of face coverings or plastic visors.
- You may decide it is easier to close off smaller rooms altogether.

Room layout

This is where your room plan will come in really handy. Use it to show how moving furniture and equipment around can maximise your numbers but allow two metre distancing:

- Tables will need to be more than two metres apart if people are to stand or sit around and between them. (Physical distancing applies to people, not objects).
- Where you have pinch points, you should avoid encouraging people to linger. So, at doorways for instance, have hand sanitiser available before people enter (rather than just inside), and avoid putting tables immediately next to the door.
- If the event could benefit from a route for attendees (e.g. an exhibition), consider introducing a one-way system, but don't make this so narrow that people can't pass each other quickly. If that isn't possible, introduce a no-passing system with queueing.
- If your hall has two or more rooms for hire/use, then you will need to give further consideration to the flow (deliberate or accidental) of people between rooms.
- Locate tables that may encourage people to browse (e.g. a buffet, an information stall, a display) centrally in the room to allow better circulation and reduced pinch-points.

Controlling people numbers

Setting a maximum capacity will mean controlling the numbers admitted to an event. Responsibility can be passed to hall users as follows:

- Where possible, insist hall users ask people to pre-book for events. If contact details are also collected when booking, then test and protect requirements will be met at the same time (in case contact tracing is required).

- If pre-booking is not practical, insist hall users take responsibility for halting entry once room capacity is reached. A queuing system outside the hall or a particular room may be required.

Restricting interaction between households

It remains the case that for any event held at the hall where family and friends are meeting together, there should, from 14 September 2020, be a limit of two households with a maximum of 6 people in the group (although under 12's are not counted). The purpose of this is to limit interaction between multiple households (and so minimise the chance of infection spreading from someone with the virus who is not showing symptoms).

Put another way, family and friends groups must not only be physically distanced from each other, but also kept apart by 2 metres from other households at all times. This must be considered when arranging tables and chairs for an event or activity.

Non-sporting gatherings and events

Before planning physical distancing measures, it is important to remember that certain types of activity may not be allowed under the government's Route Map. Indeed, most public gatherings, inside or outside, are still prohibited except for some specific reasons.

Gatherings are allowed, however, for the following non-sporting activities and events:

- where the gathering is for childcare, education or training
- where the gathering is for work purposes, or for the provision of voluntary or charitable services - but individuals should try to minimise all meetings and other gatherings in the workplace.
- where the gathering is to avoid injury, illness or to escape a risk of harm
- where the gathering is to access public services
- to take part in organised exercise
- to take part in organised activities, indoor or outdoor, for those aged under 18 (e.g. scouts or brownies) but not soft play.
- where the gathering is to provide care or assistance to a vulnerable person
- where the gathering is to provide emergency or medical assistance
- where the gathering is to donate blood

Note: This information is taken from the Scottish Government's rules on [staying safe and protecting others](#). In all cases, physical distancing, hand washing and surface cleaning still

applies; and depending upon the situation (e.g. inside a village hall) face coverings will also be required.

Using halls for meetings

Although allowed for work purposes, it is still advisable for meetings to be held online where possible. Indeed, the official guidance states that meetings should be kept to the minimum. Not only that, but the default position remains that people should continue to work from home where they can. Given the recent increase in the number of new COVID-19 cases, continuing to hold online meetings makes sense.

A collaborative approach

We stressed at the beginning the need for a risk assessment. However, to cover all identifiable risks, you will need to work with the hall users. Your conditions of hire will need to make clear the expectations placed on all hall users; and organisers will need to be clear with you about the activities that will take place. You can ask them to undertake their own risk assessment; and consider this alongside your own measures.

Remember too that physical distancing alone is not enough. You will also need to ensure that sufficient cleaning, hygiene and any other appropriate measures are being followed.