

ACRE Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update

The 4 step roadmap out of COVID-19 lockdown as applied to Village and Community Halls: 1st March 2021.

While the roadmap announced by the Prime Minister on 22nd February indicated that village and community halls will re-open after Easter, on 12th April, this has been contradicted by guidance issued on 25th February indicating that they can only open on 12th April for those activities already permitted under lockdown plus a small list of further activities, given below. They are otherwise closed until 17th May.

Some outdoor activities on playing fields can commence earlier. The process of unlocking will apply in four steps across England, without reverting to Tiers, with a minimum five weeks between each step.

Each step is dependent on all four of the following conditions being met. All dates are “no earlier than” and the Government will confirm a week beforehand. When accepting bookings, it would therefore be prudent to consider the dates of the latter two steps as more likely to be changed than the first two.

1. The coronavirus vaccine programme continues to go to plan.
2. Evidence shows vaccines are sufficiently reducing the number of people dying or needing hospital treatment.
3. Infection rates do not risk a surge in hospital admissions.
4. New variants of the virus do not fundamentally change the risk of lifting.

Preparing for re-opening

A checklist of points to consider is given in Appendix A of the ACRE Information Sheet, opening your village hall. This can be found on the [ACRE website](#). Follow the link to ‘Practical guidance to help halls reopen.’

A key point to remember is the need to make sure the hall’s Fire Safety Risk Assessment is up to date, particularly if use of the hall has changed significantly or building alterations have been carried out while the hall was closed.

The test, trace, and isolate programmes will remain in place, so there will be continued need to keep records of attendance for this purpose. Continued attention to hand washing, good

hygiene, wearing of face masks, social distancing and indoor capacity limits will be required until at least the 21st June. The government has warned that some of these measures may need to be re-applied next winter to keep the virus under control.

The Four Steps are explained below:

Step One : 8th March and 29th March

From 8 March

All schools will open, so schools can use village halls.

after-school sports, activities and wraparound childcare allowing parents to work or undertake training will be allowed.

Two people will be able to meet in outdoor public spaces, meaning they can sit down for a coffee, drink or picnic in a recreation ground, park or playing field.

Up to 30 can attend funerals, up to 6 wakes and weddings (no longer limited to exceptional circumstances).

From 29 March

- Outdoor gatherings of either six people or two households will be allowed – the “rule of six”.
- Outdoor sports facilities such as tennis, bowls or basketball courts can reopen.
- Outdoors, organised adult and children’s sport, e.g., grassroots football, can return.
- Outdoors, organised activities for children can take place e.g., cubs, brownies etc.
- Outdoors, parent and child groups can meet with up to 15 attending, plus under-fives.
- Out of school children’s settings will be able to accept all children.

Step Two: 12th April

- Only the activities shown here are permitted. Other activities e.g., art classes, clubs, WIs, craft groups, Parish Council meetings will not yet be permitted.
- Food and alcohol can be served to those seated in outdoor settings, or as takeaways, alcohol served without the need for a meal.
- Indoor gyms can re-open, but **not** exercise classes.

- Funerals can take place with up to 30 people; wakes and weddings will be allowed up to 15 guests. (Restaurants and hotels will not yet be open).
- All indoor children's activities can open, including dance classes, musical activities, cubs, scouts, brownies.
- Parent and child groups can open indoors, e.g., parent and toddlers, with up to 15 attending plus under-fives.
- Non-essential retail can re-open e.g., hairdressers, charity shops.
- Outdoor gatherings or events organised by a business, charity, public body, or similar organisation, can be held under Covid-19 secure conditions, enabling a village fete or spectators at a sports match, subject to the rule of 6. Guidance will be issued.

The social contact rules will continue to apply in all settings - meaning social distancing must be maintained, no indoor mixing allowed between different households.

Government guidance issued on 25th February on re-opening businesses and venues in England [here](#) says:

"indoor events that bring people together - even if they do not mix with other households - must not run until Step 3. This is only permitted if there is an explicit exemption - this includes support groups, supervised activities for children, parent-and-child groups (up to 15 people, not counting those aged under five), communal worship, or a wedding, reception or commemorative event like a wake."

Step Three: 17 May

- Controlled indoor events can take place with up to 50% capacity.
- Hospitality settings will be able to open in accordance with the "rule of 6", so community cafes, coffee mornings and social clubs can take place.
- Film shows, plays, concerts and sports matches can take place, subject to social distancing.
- Indoor sports activities, including exercise classes, table tennis, badminton can take place.
- Up to 30 people will be able to attend weddings, receptions, funerals, and wakes. Christenings and bar mitzvahs will be allowed.
- Organised outdoor entertainment can take place.
- The "rule of six" will be abolished for outdoor gatherings, replaced with a limit of 30 people.

The "rule of 6" will apply to indoor events. Guidance on social contact between friends and family will be reviewed. While so-called "vaccine passports" are under consideration for

allowing certain indoor venues to re-open safely at this step that would hopefully be confined to larger venues, not village and community halls.

Step Four: 21st June

- All legal limits on social contact are removed. Outdoor events with more than 30 people can take place.
- Dancing is permitted.
- Restrictions on numbers at weddings and funerals are abolished.

Useful information for village hall committees:

Annual Parish Meetings

The Annual Parish Meeting is required to be held between 1st March and 30th June each year. This is when the Parish Council report to the community on its work the preceding year and plans for the future, usually other groups are invited to do the same and a speaker is invited. This could become an important community event this year. The potential for delay in the 17th May date (Step 3), when 50% capacity is permitted, and 21st June date (Step 4), when full attendance is due to be permitted, makes it prudent to arrange these for June rather than May, with capacity for people to join via zoom.

Financial support packages.

The Government guidance for local authority funding for businesses required to close under the current lockdown has been revised [here](#)

The deadline for the Closed Businesses Lockdown Payment (£4,000, £6,000 or £9,000 depending on rateable value) is 31st March 2021. The Local Restrictions Support Grant is being extended initially to 31st March i.e., end of the current financial year, with a claim deadline of 31st May 2021. The Additional Support Grant remains available, for support to businesses/organisations which do not appear on the rating list. Further information is expected in the Budget on 3rd March.

Updated out of School settings guidance.

The guidance for out of school settings has been updated. It explains all children can attend from 29th March and addresses face coverings for those aged 11 or over [here](#)

If your village hall committee needs support, then please contact your [local ACRE Network member](#).