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|  | **KEEPING EVERYONE**  **SAFE AND WELL**  (INFECTION GUIDANCE**)**  November 2023 |

1. **INTRODUCTION**
   1. **Infection Rates:** Covid rates have risen since the Summer and we have, in recent weeks, had a number of cases reported within our churches. Although figures remain relatively low the number of tests and reported results will be lower than previously so incidence may be higher than reported.
   2. **Other Infectious Illness:** As we approach winter, we will inevitably see an increase in other infectious illness such as influenza, common colds, throat and chest infections. We must also take into account gastro illnesses such as Norovirus.
   3. **Vulnerability:** A significant majority of our church members and friends fall into the vulnerable category and we therefore need to promote good practice when dealing with incidents of infection and sickness. These updated guidelines aim to support the churches with this.
2. **PREVENTION**
   1. **Hygiene Standards:** Churches will continue to maintain good standards of hygiene including the cleaning of surfaces items which are handled by a number of individuals. When washing up crockery and utensils extra care will be taken including the effective use of detergent.
   2. **Masks, Sanitiser & Social Distancing:** The wearing of masks remains the decision of the individual but churches will continue to make these available, along with hand sanitiser. We will support those who wish to use a mask and, where appropriate and possible, enable those who wish to maintain social distancing.
   3. **Greetings:** Churches should continue to minimise physical contact such as hand-shaking i.e. by not shaking hands during sharing of “The Peace” if this is observed. Where hand shaking does take place those involved should make use of sanitiser as appropriate.
   4. **Food:** High standards of food hygiene practice should continue to be observed. When serving foods could be handled with gloves or tongs where appropriate. Where biscuits are served these should be individually wrapped. Sugar should either be served using a measured dispenser or by way of individual packets, not from open bowls. Cakes and similar should either be individually wrapped or be covered and served to people rather than left for people to take from an open plate.
   5. **Holy Communion:** Appropriate high standards of hygiene should continue to be observed when preparing elements for communion:

* Hand washing, sanitising and, where possible, food grade gloves should be worn when preparing the bread and filling cups.
* Those participating in the distribution of elements should use hand sanitiser before handling the plates, trays and vessels – this will include the person presiding at communion. Churches should continue to make hand sanitiser available for this purpose.
* Wine from cups that remain full after distribution should not be returned to the bottle but disposed of appropriately. Communion glasses and vessels should be cleaned with the same high standards of hygiene as any other items used in serving food.

2.6 **Vaccination:** The churches will promote and encourage folk to accept vaccinations for covid and other infectious illnesses (where available) whilst recognising that this will not be medically possible for everyone and some may choose not to.

1. **IN CASE OF INFECTION**
   1. **Information:** Churches will make any up-to-date information about covid or infectious illness symptoms available.
   2. **Stay At Home:** Churches will ask all members and friends (via a range of media) to stay at home if they have symptoms of covid or any infectious illness. Also, to inform a pastoral elder or similar if they develop symptoms.
   3. **Taken Ill After Attending:** If a person has attended worship or another church event and then develops symptoms of covid or other infectious illness they should inform the church secretary or pastoral elder and the incidence will be shared with members of the church in an appropriate manner.
   4. **Support:** Churches will do what they can to support those who may be self-isolating e.g. delivery of covid tests etc.
2. **Commendation & Review**

4.1 These guidelines are commended to the churches, having been reviewed and discussed by the Advisory Group. They will be reviewed and may be amended if circumstances and official guidelines change.

4.2 Church may choose to add an addendum to address specific additional local circumstances which are not generally applicable to every church.