

Starting to meet together

updated 17 September 2020

Over recent months, many Mothers' Union groups have been taking advantage of the summer weather to gather outside for socially distanced afternoon teas in gardens. But as the autumn beckons, and Government restrictions on gatherings remain, how can Mothers' Union members start to meet again? And is it safe to meet?

The situation relating to the opening of community or commercial premises and facilities, including Church Halls, is subject to change and to local variations. These guidelines are given as general information and will be subject to change in England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in line with the relevant public health guidance. There may be additional limitations in areas where local restrictions apply. Please check the latest guidance at the time of your meeting

Meeting in Church Halls or Community Venues

There is UK Government advice on the safe operation of community facilities following COVID-19 secure guidelines.

From 14 September 2020, in England, Informal or formal adult social groups can gather in groups no greater than six if social distancing rules of staying 2 metres apart (or one metre with risk mitigation) are adhered to. However if groups of six mix and socialise, this breaks the law and such meetings should not take place.

Ultimately, it is up to those with a responsibility for community facilities to assess whether or not it is possible to be COVID-19 secure and meet the current legal requirements. Therefore, some church/community halls may remain closed to adult social groups.

Can we meet in each other's homes?

There are a number of Mothers' Union groups that meet in member's homes. The revised guidance from 14 September 2020 is that in England groups of up to six can meet together indoors. This may give the opportunity for some groups to meet together. However, the limits for indoor meetings vary in other parts of Britain & Ireland:

- Northern Ireland, Scotland - up to six people from two households
- Wales - up to six people from your extended household
- Republic of Ireland - up to six people from two/three different households.

If you live in an area with additional local restrictions, these also need to be taken into account.

Within these numerical restrictions, the advice is to maintain 2 metres social distancing. If this is not possible, you should take extra precautions such as wearing a face covering, and making sure that rooms are well ventilated by keeping windows and doors open. Having hand sanitizer for use by everyone coming into – and leaving - the home is recommended.

When with people you don't live with, you should avoid physical contact, being close and face-to-face, shouting or singing close to others and touching things that other people have touched.

Try to avoid meeting too many different people socially in a short space of time.

Can we have a Mothers' Union service in church?

If you wish to hold a specific service for Mothers' Union members in church, you need to speak to the parish priest/minister and meet any requirements the church has in place to ensure this can happen safely.

What to think about if meeting in a church or community facility

If you choose to meet in small groups in a community facility or have a service in church, it is advisable to undertake your own risk assessment check to make sure that all the necessary precautions are being taken to keep members safe. Particular attention should be given to:

- Entry & exit points
- Social distancing
- Toilet facilities
- Hand washing/sanitising

A simple risk assessment checklist can be found at the end of this document.

Test and Trace

To comply with 'Test and Trace' systems, a temporary record should be made for each meeting of the names of those present with a contact telephone number. This record needs to be kept for 21 days. While Mothers' Union groups should have a record of members present at a meeting and their contact details, you do need to have each person's permission for their information to be shared with the NHS or other equivalent health body, should this be required.

Can we meet in a restaurant or coffee shop?

Government advice in England is that no more than six people should meet together at indoor venues such as restaurants, pubs, coffee shops etc. Such premises are required to provide appropriately distanced tables, etc. The limit on the number of households that can meet together in the group of six applies to restaurants, etc in other parts of Britain & Ireland.

What about our more vulnerable members?

Some groups of people are at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19, including those aged over 70 and those with specific medical conditions. Advice has been given to these groups by the Government about minimising contact and staying at home as much as possible, but individuals are

entitled to make their own decisions about the precautions they wish to take. Some people may choose not to be part of a larger gathering because of the situation of their family members.

It's important that members are made aware of the guidelines that are being followed and the special provisions that are being made by local groups, so they can make an informed choice. It is each individual's personal choice whether or not to engage in any meeting or activity, and no one should feel pressurised either to stay away or to participate.

Can I give a lift to another member?

Sharing a vehicle with anyone outside your household is not currently recommended, but if you do:

- Have the same passengers in the car for both outward and return journeys
- Don't fill the car with passengers
- Open windows for ventilation
- Maximise the distance between people in the car and travel side by side or behind other people, rather than facing them
- Wear a face covering
- Clean the car between journeys, paying particular attention to door handles and other areas that people may touch.

There can be additional restrictions imposed on local areas and Government advice is subject to change. For current advice in, go to:

England

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>

Northern Ireland

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-documents>

Republic of Ireland

<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/?referrer=/health-covid-19>

Wales

<https://gov.wales/coronavirus-regulations-guidance>

Scotland

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-phase-3-staying-safe-and-protecting-others/pages/overview/>

Risk Assessment – Meeting date:.....

Mothers' Union group/branch:

Venue Name and Address:

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Area of risk		Action required?	Completed
Entry & Exit	Are one-way systems for entry/exit and/or access around the building required?		
	Will other groups be entering or leaving the building at a similar time?		
Social distancing	Is the seating arranged to meet social distancing criteria?		
	Are tables set out to maintain social distancing, especially where people sit opposite each other?		
Toilet facilities	Is the access to the toilet facilities marked to enable socially distanced queuing?		
Hand washing/sanitizing	Are handwashing facilities (or hand sanitiser) available for those entering and leaving the building?		
Cleaning	What are the arrangements for the cleaning of the premises before and after the meeting?		
Any other areas of risk specific to the venue			