

**THE REPRESENTATIVE BODY OF THE CHURCH IN WALES**  
**CORONAVIRUS – COVID19**  
**GUIDANCE ON THE IMPOSITION OF ASHES (ASHING) On ASH**  
**WEDNESDAY**  
**ALERT LEVEL ZERO**

[Introduction](#)

Ashing can be undertaken but must be considered as part of your Covid Risk Assessment. Businesses, employers and other organisations, including activity and event organisers have a legal duty to undertake a coronavirus risk assessment of their premises and activities and take reasonable measures to minimise exposure to, and the spread of, coronavirus based on that risk assessment.

[Transmission Risks](#)

Ashing involves the priest making the sign of the cross on the foreheads of congregation members using the ashes from burnt palm crosses. The celebrant stands in front of each congregant and dips their thumb in the ashes and makes a cross sign on the forehead with the thumb. The celebrant then moves to the next person.

This process has some Covid-19 (or other virus) transmission risks:

- Celebrant and congregant are in close contact directly opposite each other so will breathe directly at each other.
- The priest will touch the skin of one person and then another – if the virus is present on one person's skin it could be transferred via the celebrant's thumb to the next person.
- Cross-contamination on ashes used at subsequent services

The risk of transmission via breath carries the higher risk of transmission. Touching of skin and cross-contamination between services are considered a low-risk transmission routes.

[Suggested Reasonable Mitigation Measures](#)

- Take reasonable steps to ensure nobody who is symptomatic or Covid-positive attends
- The priest and assistants have a negative lateral flow test on the day of the service
- All participants should wear face coverings during the ashing (even if it is no longer a legal requirement in public places) unless exempt
- Well ventilated spaces to blow away potentially contaminated air
- Hands are sanitized by the priest before the ashing ceremony and after. It would be impractical to sanitise between the ashing of each participant
- Fully vaccinated adults are at lower risk of serious harm from Covid-19. Participants should be encouraged to be fully vaccinated (but unvaccinated people should not be excluded from participating)
- Owing to possible risk of cross-contamination after each congregational service, it is strongly advised that any ashes remaining after the imposition be reverently

disposed, for example by committing them to the earth. Ashes should be made up, in advance, into separate allocations for each service

**18 February 2022**