

The Grand Lodge of Ireland

Guidance for Reopening of Lodge Premises

As the Government restrictions arising from Covid-19 continue to be amended, a return to normal Masonic activity will present challenges which need to be addressed.

This paper will assist Hall Trustees and Management Committees to develop their own method to help make the premises safe for meetings to take place.

The Grand Lodge of Ireland recognise the divergent nature of Masonic Halls and the guidance cannot be regarded as specific to individual situations and decisions taken must be cognisant of the circumstances as identified by the user.

It may be useful to nominate a Hall Trustee or a member of your Management Committee to oversee the reopening of the Hall and to put in place the measures recommended in this paper, however the responsibility for good decision making and practices lies with all members.

Hall Trustees / Management Committee members have the discretion to remain closed if they are not able to safely make the space Covid-19 secure.

List of critical checks to be completed before premises reopening for meetings:

- Your insurance company / insurance broker may request that a Covid-19 Risk Assessment is completed, and a report submitted. A Risk Assessment template is available at <https://freemason.ie/publications/covid-19-publications/>
- During Lockdown some of the planned maintenance and scheduled testing may have been missed and certification may be out of date. It is important that the Hall Manager conducts a thorough review of the building certification documents to ensure that all certificates and tests are up to date.
- Fire Alarms should be tested when first entering the building and any faults rectified before building is accessed by others
- Check Fire Fighting Appliances (e.g. Fire Extinguishers) are in place and certification is up to date
- Check Emergency lighting is operational

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- There is a high risk of Legionella bacteria accumulating in stagnant pipes and systems and it is recommended that the cold and hot water systems are thoroughly flushed
- It is recommended that the premises are thoroughly cleaned before reopening

Before resumption of Masonic meetings, it is essential that a number of control measures are put in place in each Hall.

An individual must be appointed to greet members as they arrive at the Hall in order to inform them of the new procedures in place as follows:

1. Hand Sanitiser

Hand sanitiser must be made available at the entrance of the Hall to be used when entering the building. We recommend this is placed on a small table with appropriate signage.

2. Contact tracing

Contact tracing is very important should anyone working or visiting the Hall begin to have symptoms of Covid-19. It means that you have a record of when that person was in the building and can then work out who they have been in contact with during those times. In order to keep up to date and comprehensive records, it is required that **everyone** puts their time of entry and exit from the building on the sheet. A Contact Tracing Template is available at <https://freemason.ie/publications/covid-19-publications/>

Please refer to Government guidelines in your jurisdiction as to how long contact details should be retained.

3. Social Distancing

Currently, the recommended distance to be maintained between people to minimise risk of transmission is 2 meters. In some settings a distance of 1 meter is acceptable, but we are recommending that people observe the 2 meter social distance.

Check if numbers of attendees need to be restricted due to the reduction in capacity with 2 meter social distancing.

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Additional measures of social distance requirements which may include signage, floor markings, seating restrictions, washroom restrictions or a one-way system may be implemented if necessary.

4. Face Masks

Members who feel vulnerable should be permitted to wear face masks if they so wish. Members who have been shielding / cocooning due to health issues should be encouraged to attend but not put under any pressure to get physically involved in the Lodge meeting.

5. Common Areas

Areas such as the kitchen / washrooms should have limited access to one person at a time where allowable. This should also apply to any lifts in the building.

6. Signage

To safeguard members, we cannot over emphasize the use of signs around the building as a reminder of the signs and symptoms of Covid-19, the importance of hand washing and to maintain social distancing.

A number of posters are available from www.nidirect.gov.uk for Northern Ireland and www.hse.ie for the Republic of Ireland, or follow the link to the Grand Lodge of Ireland website <https://freemason.ie/publications/covid-19-publications/>. A number of generic posters are also available for use for your Lodge Premises.

7. Cleaning

Cleaning of surfaces, staircase handrails etc. should take place before and after a meeting.

When cleaning, particular attention should be paid to chair arms and backs, pedestals, gavels, other Lodge furniture and equipment.

Frequently touched points (such as door handles, light switches etc.) should be identified and increased cleaning of these surfaces must be implemented. Equally, it is important to remember to clean areas that may not be frequently used such as lifts or chair lifts.

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Wipes may be made available so members can wipe down used surfaces.

8. Toilet areas

When cleaning the toilet areas please ensure an adequate supply of paper towels is available and that bins are emptied often. Bins should be lined with bin bags.

Increase toilet / washroom inspection frequency to check for cleanliness and an adequate stock of soap, sanitiser and toilet paper are available.

Posters displaying correct hand washing techniques and increased handwashing frequency should be in place in the toilets and washrooms.

9. Regalia

Access to locker rooms / storage areas should be restricted. If access is necessary, it should be pre-arranged with the Hall Manager.

Prior to a Lodge meeting, the Director of Ceremonies or another appointed member should arrive early to ensure the room is laid out in accordance with current social distancing Government guidelines. He should also lay out the various officers' regalia on their designated seats. The officers may then change at their positions thereby avoiding any congregating outside the Lodge Room / Ante Room.

It may be best to forgo singing as part of a Lodge meeting or Festive Board as singing can project the virus.

Printed Ode books and other printed material should be stored away.

Charity collections should be retiring collections only.

Attendance books should not be made available to sign, attendance may be recorded by the Secretary.

10. Bar and Catering Facilities:

Closure of a Masonic Hall may have brought about a closure to the kitchens that operate in them. Food hygiene regulations remain in place all the time and will require to be enacted upon resumption of services.

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On re-entering the Hall premises:

- Clean internally and externally all food storage areas including fridges, freezers, stoves, microwaves and cupboards.
- Clean and sanitise all food preparation worktops and floors.

Kitchens should be cleaned regularly, especially frequently touched areas such as taps, cupboard handles, fridge door handles, kettles etc.

Liaise with caterers to identify how social distancing or other measures will be put in place for dining and bar areas. Take consideration of how access to the bar will be managed to achieve social distancing, including possible floor markings, queue management and table service.

Cashless payment systems should be used where possible.

Further advice on reopening food and bar areas can be found at <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/reopening-and-adapting-your-food-business-during-Covid-19> (UK & Northern Ireland)

<https://Covid19.failteireland.ie/industry-updates/guidelines-for-re-opening-published/> (Republic of Ireland)

11. Suspected case of COVID-19

Anyone feeling ill must not attend a meeting, however one person should be nominated to assist with a member who develops symptoms of Covid-19 whilst on the premises. A designated area must be identified for use if this occurs and the member should remain in isolation. PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) including gloves and a face mask must be provided and worn by the member. Tissues and a bin to dispose of these after use should be provided. From there they must then arrange suitable transport home or seek medical assistance, if required. Public transport of any kind should not be used. Your contact tracing logs must then be used to identify anyone who may have been in close contact. Appropriate cleaning of the isolation area and other areas involved should then take place.

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12. Review

Regular reviews should be carried out, not only to ensure that all the measures are in place and are performing their designed function, but also to measure against any variation in government guidance.

It is advisable in the days prior to a meeting that Lodge Secretaries inform their members by email of the new control measures and procedures in place.

For your benefit we have included a check list for reopening of your premises. follow the link to the Grand Lodge of Ireland website <https://freemason.ie/publications/covid-19-publications/>

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