



## Guidance for Community Cinemas and Nontheatrical Exhibitors

This document has been created to help Community Cinemas and non-theatrical exhibitors as they begin to once more screen films for audiences. The objective is to help you keep your audiences and volunteers safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Guidance and regulations around Covid-19 are continuously evolving, so it is important to make sure you have the most up-to-date information. This document will be updated as new information and guidelines are released. Keep an eye on the UKCA guidelines and on the government regulations that apply in your region.

- England: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
- Scotland: <https://www.gov.scot/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/>
- Wales: <https://gov.wales/culture-and-heritage-destinations-and-venues-guidance-phased-return#section-45364>
- Northern Ireland: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/dfc-culture-heritage-destinations-phased-return-guide.pdf>
- Isle of Man: <https://covid19.gov.im/>
- Updated UKCA guidelines: <https://www.cinema.uk.org.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/guidance-for-cinemas/>

The advice presented here is drawn from several sources, including primarily the UKCA guidance *Cinemas - keeping workers and customers safe during COVID-19*, the Event Safety Alliance's *Reopening Guide* and Arthouse Convergence's *Reopening Safely* presentation. Other resources consulted are listed at the end of this document (Appendix A).

**This advice and information should only be considered as an accompaniment to the public health advice, legislation and safety requirements in your region.**

### Before Your Next Screening

It is important to carry out a risk assessment and to consider all the ways in which you will have to change your usual practices, before you announce your return. You will also want to think about how you communicate these changes - you will need to manage your own expectations as well as those of your volunteers and audiences.

It is also important to really consider the well-being and mental health of your organisation's members and patrons. Some people will be excited and eager to reopen; others will find this a time of increased anxiety. Keep 'checking in' with your staff, volunteers and audience. A list of mental health resources is included at the end of this document (Appendix B).

Public health and Covid-19 regulations are a devolved matter. This means that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are responsible for their own policies. There may also be local restrictions in certain areas at different times. Check the most current guidelines **in your area** to be sure you are in compliance. For example, while gatherings have been limited to 30 people or less in England, be aware that this does not apply to gatherings organised by businesses, charities, public or political bodies – including cinemas – provided they have carried out the health and safety risk assessment and are taking measures to prevent risk.

### Risk Assessment

UK government guidance says that you should conduct a risk assessment of your proposed activity and the venue you will be using. This is true even if your organisation is volunteer-led or not-for-profit. If you have fewer than five workers or are self-employed, you do not have to keep a written record of your risk assessment, but it would be a good idea to do so.

There is a matrix at the end of this document to assist you in carrying out your risk assessment (Appendix C). This is intended only as a guide: every organisation must look at their own circumstances and working practices and carry out a risk assessment that suits those. The questions asked here may not cover every eventuality, so do think about the specific circumstances of your venue and audience. In most cases, your organisation does not own the facilities it uses for screenings. The venue owners have a responsibility to make their buildings safe for use, but you also need to think about how you *use or adapt* the space. Talk to your venue about their own risk assessment and the measures they have taken to reduce risk and ensure access. You should only start screening films when you are confident you can do so with minimal risk. Remember, your local Film Hub is here to help!

If you are an employer, you have specific legal obligations to protect your employees. See the full UKCA guidelines for advice around these obligations.

### Policies and Communication

Perhaps you have been in regular communication with your regular audience during the shutdown. Or perhaps you have found it difficult or impossible to reach the people who would normally attend your films. Either way, now is the time to reach out to potential audiences and let them know you are still here and looking forward to the future.

As you complete your risk assessment, you will have begun to think about the impact on the audience experience. Here are some things to consider:

- What restrictions will there be on audiences? Will they be allowed to sit with the members of their own household? Will there be physical barriers between audience members?
- If your screenings are sometimes enhanced (for instance, by filmmaker introductions, Q&As, music performance, themed food and drink, or audience participation of any kind), will this activity still be possible? What do your audiences want or expect in this regard?
- Will they need to book tickets differently? Can they do this online and with contactless payment?

- Are there any discounts available, to reflect the change in offer and/or the change in audience members' financial circumstances? Can you make any changes to your usual membership or entry fees?
- Will seating be assigned? Have you made appropriate provision for disabled access and seating?
- Will concessions be available? Can audiences bring their own food and drink?
- Do your target audiences have any particular needs or concerns? For example, if your typical audience is made up of older people, you may wish to think about whether they will feel reassured by additional, more stringent, social distancing measures. If your audiences include children, consider how you will advise parents about their supervision. If your audience includes people who are visually impaired or who are unable to read signs printed in English, consider how best to provide signage and communications.
- How will individual access requirements be met? The changes required for social distancing may create new barriers for some members of your audience. For example, one-way systems may pose challenges for people in wheelchairs. Queuing systems and changes to seating may create difficulties for people with mobility issues. Screens may make communication more difficult. Thinking through these challenges and communicating with your audiences – and listening to their concerns and suggestions – can help make reopening more successful and less stressful for everyone. You may also want to make use of the FAN's Inclusive Cinema website and resources.  
<https://inclusivecinema.org/>
- The Event Safety Alliance advises that messaging to your audience should be “positive, practical, and proportionate”. Use all your channels of communication to reinforce your message and encourage compliance with policies by reaching people before they arrive at the screening. The ESA document contains additional advice on messaging and marketing. <https://www.eventssafetyalliance.org/esa-reopening-guide>
- The Independent Cinema Office (ICO) has compiled a list of Covid-19 resources available to cinemas and people working within the exhibition industry.  
<https://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/advice-support/covid-19-support-and-resources/>
- Publicising the changes you have made, using your website and social media channels, will help build public confidence in your organisation. Reach out to your most loyal attendees and talk to them about your plans: these people will be the most eager to return and will be key to a successful reopening.
- As you communicate your plans to audiences, think about the best way to reach your audiences, including those with different access requirements. Use multiple channels: telephone, email and social media. On your website and social media channels, be clear about the access adjustments you have made, so audiences with access requirements can see if the screening is suitable for them before they leave.
- Take part in the marketing campaigns being organised at regional and national levels. Sign up with your local Hub and receive the FAN ‘Booking Now’ email, which contains information about ‘Back to Cinema’ campaigns. Contact your local Hub to find out more.

## Programming and Licencing

There are a few schemes which might be of interest as you programme your event or season. Contact your Film Hub for advice and support.

- Cinema for All runs a Booking Scheme for members; this features over 800 films, all available for just £90 per screening. They have developed, as part of their *Lift* Programme, new offers for their members available from their website:  
<https://cinemaforall.org.uk/lift-the-community-cinema-relaunch-package/>
- The Film Distribution Association's scheme, Relaunching Cinema: Content for Recovery, lists over 450 films that are available to book, from blockbusters to British classics to LGBTQ+ titles. <https://www.launchingfilms.com/relaunching-cinema---content-for-recovery.pdf>
- Park Circus' For The Love Of Cinema is a selection of 23 classic British and Hollywood films. All are available in DCP and come with a full range of promo materials, including artwork and trailers, as well as favourable terms. <https://www.parkcircus.com/>
- Moviola is a charity who help community cinemas and groups screen films locally. Membership is free and groups are able to choose how often they wish to book films. Moviola offers a select menu of latest blockbusters, independent and classic films to pick from, and may be able to assist you with your programming and booking queries.  
<https://www.moviola.org/>

There will be changes to programming too. The UKCA and major health organisation guidelines recommend minimising risk through social distancing and through reducing the time spent with other people, especially face-to-face and indoors. This might mean modifying the way you schedule films. Consider single films instead of double features. If you are showing more than one film in a day, you will need to leave adequate time between screenings to permit cleaning of the space and reduce crossover between people leaving and arriving at screenings.

Note that the UKCA guidelines also say that you should avoid programming film content which is “likely to encourage audience behaviours increasing transmission risk” – such as singing, shouting or dancing.

Communication with your existing and potential audiences can help you make decisions about programming; think about what *your* audiences want to see now, and about the culture and vision of your organisation.

## Finances

The UKCA guidelines are not concerned with finances, but this is bound to be at the top of your list of concerns. As you plan for reopening, you may wish to carry out a financial risk assessment too. Some things you may need to budget for:

- Sufficient quantities of hand sanitiser
- Any PPE required
- Touchless transaction equipment – e.g., scanners
- Paper products and single-use items to replace reusable ones
- Increased marketing costs – e.g., ‘boosts’ to Facebook posts

## Getting Your Venue Ready

The Cinema Technology Community (CTC) has published some general recommendations for cinemas; depending on your setup, these may be useful as you prepare to reopen. The CTC recommends:

- Pre-Opening Testing to ensure that systems have remained operational
- Inventory - create an inventory and check that all essential components (including batteries, e.g.) are stocked
- Capacity and Lead Times for planned projects - check that your suppliers and product manufacturers can provide what you need in a timely manner
- Powering Up Equipment – the recommended order for powering up is projector, server and lastly the audio rack.

You should make arrangements for a deep cleaning, using normal cleaning supplies, of the venue. Toilets and entry areas will also need to be cleaned. Other areas of the venue should be cordoned or closed off to prevent people from entering or gathering in these. If the venue hasn't been used during lockdown, check that the emergency exits are clear and unlocked, and that any lifts or disabled access doors are operational. Additionally, any access aids such as audio description equipment may need to be deep cleaned. Have a plan. How will equipment be cleaned between uses and who will be responsible for these tasks?

Consider what PPE you will need on a routine or exceptional basis. For example, while physical assistance of disabled customers could generally prove difficult given social distancing, in an emergency evacuation you could need PPE to support someone.

## On Arrival

People coming to or hosting your screening will need to follow social distancing and hygiene guidelines. They will also need to comply with the current regulations around face coverings. Further PPE use is at the discretion of the operator, unless it becomes obligatory in your region.

You will need to think about how people travel to the screening, where they will wait to enter the venue, and how they will get to their seats.

The UKCA suggests using the space outside the building for queuing. Make sure there is a safe place for people to queue while also maintaining social distancing. Consider road and pedestrian traffic. Some venues will use physical barriers or markers to keep people away from the road, along with signage and markers to ensure proper distancing, but only on their own property. Do not obstruct or post signs on the public right of way.

Consider having designated staff or volunteers to serve as 'social distancing champions'. Their task is to monitor and offer advice to audience members, and to respond to concerns. You will need to make sure these designated volunteers are confident in that role.

Think about where your venue is located. Are there other businesses close by? You may need to contact these other businesses and coordinate your screenings with their own activity. For example, you might wish to adjust your screening times so that they do not overlap with the busiest times at a venue next door. This will make it easier for people to queue while maintaining social distancing.

Where possible, you should make hand sanitiser available to people upon arrival, by setting up a hygiene station at the point(s) of entry. Make sure these stations are plentiful enough that they don't themselves become a point of congestion.

Have a plan. What will you do if someone is unable, or refuses, to comply with your guidelines or with government regulations?

### Refreshments

If you intend to serve or sell refreshments, you should consult the local/regional guidelines for food service. UKCA guidelines advise that you do not serve or sell any open, unpackaged food. You should also limit contact between volunteers/staff and patrons. You can do this by using a one-way system at the point of service and by placing physical barriers such as screens between staff/volunteers and customers. You should restrict access to straws and paper products; some disabled customers may require straws so have these available on request. Consider using a pre-ordering system and contactless payment for refreshments.

## During the Screening

### Seating

The UKCA guidelines say that maximum capacity should be based on the government requirement for social distancing, venue layout and the configuration of space. Your risk assessment should have allowed you to calculate your maximum capacity and the configuration of your seating. You should not permit anyone to stand during the film. The guidelines advise:

- Utilising allocated seating systems where possible. This may mean making modifications to your space and/or your booking process. If you cannot use allocated seating, then you should identify another way to ensure appropriate social distancing.
- Follow the devolved regulations about social distancing. In England, for example, the current social distancing guideline is “1-plus”. This means you may need to arrange your seating to maintain 2m distancing where feasible and where that is not feasible, 1m “with mitigations”.

### Movement Around the Venue

The UKCA guidelines advise:

- Using a ‘one-way’ system to direct traffic through the space. This might mean rearranging furniture or creating temporary partitions in the space you are using. You may also need to use emergency exits as regular exits. Make sure that your pathways are accessible to everyone, including people in wheelchairs.
- Providing floor markings and signage to remind customers to follow social distancing wherever possible.
- Using social distancing champions to assist audience members with following social distancing measures.
- Being mindful of audience behaviour during the screening. In particular, organisations are asked to ensure that people do not raise their voices by singing or shouting.

Have a plan. What will you do if there is an emergency or disruption during the screening? The UKCA guidelines say to review your incident and emergency procedures to ensure they

reflect the social distancing principles as far as possible. Consider fire exits and meet-up points.

## After the Screening

The UKCA guidelines recommend keeping a temporary record of your volunteers and attendees (you should hold these records for 21 days), and assist NHS Test and Trace with requests for that data if needed. Consider the GDPR implications of how you keep and store these records. If you need guidance, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) may be able to help. <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/>

Don't forget about your audience members' well-being when they leave the event. Have a plan. How will you collect feedback from your attendees? Ask about their experience and be prepared to make changes to reassure your attendees. Rebuilding confidence may take time, so nurture the relationship with your audience.

Compiled by Film Hub NI on behalf of the Film Audience Network – this version 1.2 (31 July 2020)  
For more information on the Film Audience Network and your nearest Film Hub visit [BFI](#).

## Appendix A: Resources

Art House Convergence. *Reopening Safely* (April 2020).

<https://www.arthouseconvergence.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Reopening-Safely-4.29.20.pdf>

Cinema Technology Community. *Covid-19 Restart; Things to consider ahead of re-opening* (April 2020). <https://www.cinema-technology.com/post/covid-19-restart-things-to-consider-ahead-of-re-opening>

Event Safety Alliance. *ESA Reopening Guide* (nd). <https://www.eventsafetyalliance.org/esa-reopening-guide>

Film Audience Network. 'The Bigger Picture' Covid-19 resource: [The latest advice and guidance regarding COVID-19](#)

Film Audience Network. Inclusive Cinema project: <https://inclusivecinema.org/>

Film Audience Network. *Simple guide to comms during closure & working towards reopening* (July 2020). <https://watershed.co.uk/filmhub/guides-resources-exhibition/simple-guide-to-comms-during-closure-working-towards-reopening/>

Independent Cinema Office. *Further considerations for independent cinemas when thinking about reopening* (26 June 2020). <https://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/blog-further-considerations-for-independent-cinemas-when-thinking-about-reopening/>

UK Cinema Association. *Cinemas – keeping workers and customers safe during COVID-19* (v1.3, 19 July 2020). <https://www.cinematuk.org.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/guidance-for-cinemas/>

UK Cinema Association. *Drive-in and Other Outdoor Cinemas – keeping workers and customers safe during COVID-19* (v2.3, 3 July 2020)  
<https://www.cinematuk.org.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/guidance-for-cinemas/>

We Are Parable. Audience Confidence research <https://www.the-bigger-picture.com/articles/confidence-of-minority-audiences/>

## Appendix B: Mental Health Resources

### **UK-wide resources:**

Anxiety UK – Guide to anti-anxiety techniques and mindfulness exercises.

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/products/booklet/breathing-and-relaxation-guide/> Also a fact sheet on health anxiety. <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/products/anxiety-condition/health-anxiety/health-anxiety-fact-sheet-instant-download/>

The Film and TV Charity – Support for industry workers and freelancers; advice on a range of topics relating to mental health, well-being and Covid-19. <https://filmtvcharity.org.uk/we-can-help/community/>

The Mental Health Foundation – looking after your mental health during the coronavirus outbreak. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/coronavirus/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

Mind, the mental health charity – Support and information on a range of topics relating to mental health, well-being and Covid-19. <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/>

NHS – Tips and advice around Covid-19 and well-being. <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

The Samaritans – Support and guidance for anyone worried about their mental health. <https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/if-you're-having-difficult-time/if-you're-worried-about-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak/>

### **England:**

Public Health England – *Guidance for the public on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of coronavirus (COVID-19)*. [https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19)

### **Northern Ireland:**

Aware NI – Advice and local resources. <https://www.aware-ni.org/covid-19-support>

Northern Ireland Government advice. <https://www nidirect gov uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-taking-care-your-mental-health-and-wellbeing>

### **Scotland:**

Support in Mind Scotland – Tips and advice; local resources.

<https://www.supportinmindscotland.org.uk/listing/category/coronavirus-support-guidance>

The Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) – Support and resources.

<https://www.samh.org.uk/about-mental-health/self-help-and-wellbeing/coronavirus-information-hub>

**Wales:**

Public Health Wales/ Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru – Support and local resources.

<https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/latest-information-on-novel-coronavirus-covid-19/how-are-you-doing/>

## Appendix C: Risk Assessment – Questions to Ask Before Reopening

Download this document [here](#)

Name of Organisation and Venue:				
Assessment completed by:	Date completed:	Date of Next Review:		
	<b>Initial Assessment (Yes, No, Does Not Apply)</b>	<b>Actions Required</b>	<b>Who Is Responsible</b>	<b>Deadline for Resolution</b>
Have you calculated the maximum occupancy of the space in which you intend to screen? This should be based on the regional or local government regulations and on the possible configurations of the space.				
Do all areas you will be using permit social distancing? <i>This includes entrance and exit points, lobbies and waiting areas, toilets, hallways, areas where volunteers will work or store equipment, and auditoriums.</i>				
Does the place you intend to use for screening have adequate ventilation? You may wish to check with the building owners to find when the ventilation system was serviced. Consider what further adjustments you might need to make.				

Can you schedule your screenings to avoid congestion at the venue or on the way to the venue?				
Have you planned for safe and socially distanced queueing outside the screening?				
Do you have sufficient PPE and hygiene supplies, including hand sanitiser and soap?				
Can you create hygiene stations at the venue?				
Can you provide additional waste receptacles and arrange for their collection?				
Does the place where you screen have adequate handwashing facilities? Consider whether these permit the required social distancing. Facilities should be accessible to all.				
Does the place where you screen have adequate toilet facilities? Consider whether these permit the required social distancing. Are there adequate accessible toilet facilities?				
If the space has lifts, have you/the venue reduced the permitted occupancy, posted signage, and provided hand sanitiser for users?				

Are there enough entrances and exits to avoid congestion?				
Have you made a written emergency plan and discussed this with your volunteers/staff?				
Is there sufficient car and bicycle parking for your audience?				
Can areas of the space that are not being used be made inaccessible to the public?				
Can you provide allocated seating at the event? If not, you may wish to provide a plan and sufficient staff to direct people to their seating.				
Can you provide sufficient wheelchair and companion seating given social distancing guidelines?				
Can you employ a one-way system throughout the space? Can you ensure that this provides enough space for wheelchair users?				
Can you provide signage and floor markings to direct traffic throughout the space?				
Can you provide easy-to-read, iconographic signage that works for people with learning disabilities as well as ESOL audiences?				

Have you conducted (or has the venue conducted) a deep clean of all areas?				
Do you have the volunteers/staff and equipment to clean equipment between uses?				
Do you have the volunteers/staff and equipment to clean seats, door handles, stair rails and tables before and after each screening?				
Have you carried out a cleaning assessment and prepared a written schedule for cleaning?				
Do you have, or can you adopt, a contactless system for booking and payments?				
Do you have, or can you adopt, a system to collect the names and contact details of the people who come to your screenings? Consider a safe place to store this information in case it is needed for 'track and trace' purposes.				
If you will serve refreshments at your screenings, have you removed any unpackaged food?				
Do you have, or can you adopt, a pre-order system and contactless payment for refreshments?				
Have you limited self-service access to straws, napkins, etc.?				

Can you create physical barriers (screens) between servers and customers?				
Are you familiar with the specific guidance about what to do if a case of Covid-19 is reported to you?				
Have you communicated your policies and procedures to your potential audience?				