Research report: publications by religious organisations during the Covid-19 pandemic in Ireland

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2023

RECOV-19

RELIGION
EMERGING FROM
COVID-19

Research Report: Publications by religious organisations during the Covid-19 pandemic in Ireland

Caoimhe Ní Dhónaill
(with Gladys Ganiel)

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About the Project

The role of religion has changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, taking on renewed significance in many societies, including those experiencing secularisation. RECOV-19 is a three-year, multi-disciplinary research project analysing the role of religion in societies emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. RECOV-19 compares the changing role of religions in four secularising global north contexts: Canada, Germany, the Republic of Ireland/Northern Ireland, and Poland.

In these contexts, it analyses the majority (Christian) and minority (Islam and others) religions' role in three key areas:

- Constructing **discourses around health, illness, and science**, including promoting the observance (or not) of lockdown restrictions and public health measures like vaccines
- Lobbying and liaising with **governments and policymakers**, including how religious groups have contributed to debates emerging from the pandemic, like addressing inequalities and mental health issues
- Incorporating **digital innovations** like blended online/in-person approaches to religious practices

The project utilises a mixed-methods approach, including analysis of documents produced by religious groups, analysis of media sources, surveys, and interviews. It features a multi-disciplinary team with researchers from Queen's University Belfast, the University of Montreal, the University of Bremen, and the University of Warsaw.

RECOV-19 is funded through the Trans-Atlantic Platform (T-AP) for the Social Sciences and Humanities, a collaboration between humanities and social science research funders from the Americas, Europe and Africa. It was awarded under T-AP's 'Recovery, Renewal and Resilience in a Post-Pandemic World' programme.

The following report provides an overview of the project's first step: analysis of documents and publications released by religious organisations regarding the coronavirus pandemic on the island of Ireland. For reports of the other countries, see: **Canada | Poland | Germany**

^ The above description is an integral part of the project proposal, and the authors are Gladys Ganiel, Solange Lefebvre, Sławomir Mandes, Kerstin Radde-Antweiler.

Sample

The sample of documents analysed in this report were retrieved from four religious organisations. Two majority religions were chosen, and two religions which have minority status in the country. Majority and minority religious status was defined as relating to prominence in the population. Documents retrieved were official documents from recognised authorities or representative bodies from the religious organisations. Documents retrieved were chosen if they were official statements or positions relating to Covid-19, Government restrictions and guidance, or digital media, excluding publications or reports which did not fall under this remit (for example, a publication announcing that a specific priest/Bishop has contracted Covid).

The first majority religion chosen was Roman Catholicism, with 69% of the population of the Republic of Ireland identifying as Roman Catholic, and 45.7% of the Northern Irish population. In order to obtain a varied sample, documents were selected from four sources - The Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference - the overall Church leadership body across the island, and, at regional level, the Diocese of Dublin, the Diocese of Down and Connor, the Diocese of Limerick and the Diocese of Donegal.

The Second Majority Religion selected was Protestantism. In Northern Ireland, 43.5% of the population identify as Protestant, and 6% of the Republic of Ireland's population. Public documents were selected from four sources: The Church of Ireland (Anglican), the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Methodist Church in Ireland, and the Irish Council of Churches, the island's main ecumenical body. It has 15 member churches, including the three main Protestant churches selected for this research. More information can be found here: https://www.irishchurches.org/.

The first minority religion selected was Islam. Muslims make up less than 1% of the population of the island, although the population is slowly growing. Documents came from Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland, an umbrella organisation representing Muslims across the island, and encompassing the Irish Council of Imams.

The demographic information on Protestantism and Islam in the Republic of Ireland is taken from the 2016 Census, while the information on Catholicism and 'No Religion' is taken from the 2022 Census. At the time of publication of this report, the summary document of the 2022 Census has been made available, however the detailed demographics on religion are not yet released.

Sample

The second minority chosen was Humanists. Humanists position themselves as representing all those with no religion in both jurisdictions. Those stating 'No Religion' has risen significantly in both areas, with 17.4% of the Northern Ireland population identifying as having No Religion in the 2021 Census, and 14% of the Republic of Ireland in the 2022 Census claiming the same. Humanists are represented by two groups – the Humanist Association Ireland representing those in the Republic of Ireland and those in Northern Ireland represented by Humanists UK. The sample was taken from these organisations.

Country	Religious Organisations	Number of documents (statements/guidelines/ press releases)
IRELAND/ NORTHERN IRELAND	majority 1: **Roman Catholic Church**	108
	majority 2: **Protestantism**	56
	minority 1: **Islam**	11
	minority 2: **Humanists**	10
		185

Table 1. Number of documents per religious organisation for Ireland and Northern Ireland. Source: own elaboration

The island of Ireland includes two political jurisdictions: the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, which is a region of the United Kingdom. All the island's churches are organised on an all-island, cross-border basis. The island's historic Christian churches were organised on an all-island basis prior to partition in 1921.

^ The Sample was originally conceived during the project proposal phase, authored by Gladys Ganiel, Solange Lefebvre, Sławomir Mandes, and Kerstin Radde-Antweiler. The content presented above has been revised and edited by Caoimhe Ní Dhónaill.

Methods and Coding

Qualitative content analysis aims to analyse large amounts of texts qualitatively and systematically. The relatively structured approach of deductive coding allows different researchers to produce comparable results even if the documents they are analysing are written in different languages or are different types of texts. The coding system was developed deductively, following Mayring's (2014:95, 2020:13) steps of deductive category assignment. In the first step, the three core research areas (discourses around health, illness and science; relations with governments and policymakers; digital innovations) were established as core categories. Based on the literature on Covid and religion in the four countries as well as theoretical knowledge on religion and digital media, state-religion-relations, secularisation theories and processes of change in religions, subcategories were developed and defined with examples from the data material.

After selecting the codes, the team ensured that each researcher had the same understanding of the meanings of the code in order to constitute an intercoder consistency procedure. A codebook (see code tree in Appendix 1) was written, and definitions of each code were added and vetted by each team member. Then, a coding test was decided to ensure that each researcher could code the same way. The team chose one text, coded using the code tree, and then checked and debated it among the researchers. This procedure was repeated three times until no significant coding difference was noticed. Even though the researchers were using the same code tree in order to keep the comparative perspective as the objective, new individual codes related to the specific context of each country could be created (5 in Germany, 4 in Ireland, 0 in Poland and 3 in Canada).

^ The above methodology was developed by a team of researchers: Mathieu Colin, Hannah Grünenthal, Caoimhe Ni Dhonaill, Marta Kołodziejska, and Katarzyna Rabiej-Sienicka.

Findings

DISCOURSES ABOUT HEALTH, ILLNESS AND SCIENCE

Discourses about health, illness and science in the
Roman Catholic Church

- Consistent focus on Catholic 'duty of care' for others and our place in the community – working together to end the pandemic is a moral and religious duty.
- Justification for following governmental guidance and restrictions was given primarily via moral arguments, centring our duty to the most vulnerable, and respecting the work and dedication of health and social care workers. Moral arguments linked to the sacrifice of key workers – the public should follow guidelines as mark of respect to those who are working to keep all safe.
- References to scientific arguments common. Church presents itself as supportive to medical evidence and medical experts.
- Church support for vaccine very evident. This support is based in scientific arguments, and gives space for nuanced discussions around the use of foetal cells in some vaccines. Church informs members that they should attempt to receive vaccinations without foetal cells, but that, should this not be an option, it is morally permissible to take vaccines which may have used foetal cells.
- Discussions around death are evident, in so far as they relate to funerals, mourning, and those who have been bereaved. Discussions around death do not tend to focus on those who have passed (i.e. no significant discussion of afterlife etc).

Discourses about health, illness and science in the
Protestant Churches

- Moral and theological arguments are given to remind followers of their civic duty to follow government restrictions and guidelines. Where theological arguments are present, they are quite generalised (calling on Christian duty to the community), as opposed to significant quoting of Scripture.
- Focus on protection of most vulnerable seen throughout documents, both in justifying following restrictions, and in assuring church members that alternate means will be found to allow continuation of religious practice/contacts.
- In both justifying following restrictions, and in discussions about vaccinations, these documents appeal to members to follow health and scientific guidance, and to listen to experts.
- Methodist documents assure those who do not get vaccinated that they will not be treated differently in church/religious settings. This discussion is not evident in any other churches.
- Death discussed as it relates to those bereaved and funeral practices. Again, discussions around death do not tend to focus on those who have passed (i.e. no significant discussion of afterlife etc).

Discourses about health, illness and science in
Islam

- Justification for following government guidance expressly linked to specific theological arguments and examples directly from the Quran, and on theological guidance from religious leaders.
- Muslims are reminded that to be a good citizen and community member, is to be a good Muslim, so moral goodness is linked directly to religion.
- Appeals to listen to scientific consensus and public health experts evident in these documents.

Discourses about health, illness and science in the
Humanists

- Humanist documents appeal to followers to listen to scientific and health experts on following restrictions and vaccinations. Very supportive of uptake of vaccinations by members.
- Humanist documents give more detail on some of the scientific processes than the other groups, referring to the peer review process etc.

Relationships with governments and policymakers in the
Roman Catholic Church

- Generally there is a consistent and supportive narrative throughout these documents around following all regulations and guidelines. Catholic Church documents remind all dioceses and parishes that the Church has hierarchical authority, and that there should be no deviation from Church dictates and following governmental regulations.

- There are a few areas which show some minor frustrations with messaging around regulations – especially when changes are made at short notice. However, even with these frustrations, messaging remains that regulations should be followed. This is particularly evident in later stages of the pandemic, and specifically around a number of quick changes in rules around Confirmations.

- Significant and detailed advice given to parishes around practical guidance for health and hygiene in churches (e.g., signage, spacing for physical distancing, hand sanitizer etc), and changes to religious practices (numbers of clergy on altar, means of distributing the Eucharist, general dispensation for weekly obligation for Mass). This is updated often, as rules and guidance were often changed quickly and at short notice. As mentioned above, for the most part, new rules and guidance were accepted readily, with some minor frustrations noted.

- Catholic Church documents refer to meetings with political leaders – a relatively close working relationship with government and policy-makers explains general support for following restrictions. In the official documents, this is usually presented as being a two-way relationship, with mutual respect and understanding on both sides of the table.

Relationships with governments and policymakers in the
Protestant Churches

- Protestant church documents show close alignment with Government and policy-makers, implying relatively high levels of cooperation, and evidence of meetings and joint announcements with key political actors.
- Some documents appeal to policy-makers to loosen some restrictions, especially around funerals, however, even here, compliance with current guidelines remains.
- Documents present significant details about practical guidance to religious practice and health and hygiene related issues, to help navigate various stages of restrictions and lockdowns. This is closely aligned with the documents presented by the Catholic Church. Significant and detailed advice given to parishes around practical guidance for health and hygiene in churches (e.g., signage, spacing for physical distancing, hand sanitizer etc), and changes to religious practices, including guidance on singing and choirs.

Relationships with governments and policymakers in
Islam

- Muslim documents are very supportive of members following official government guidelines.
- A significant focus of their official documents is in how to best meet the requirements of faith while meeting the requirements of the government. Authority is given by religious leadership, alongside stating official legislation.
- When restrictions are eased, Muslim documents give guidance for safe religious practice, tending towards cautious measures (advising mask-wearing remains, even when not legally required).

Relationships with governments and policymakers in the
Humanists

- Humanist documents are very cooperative with government guidance, urging members to follow guidance, and giving public safety and health reasons.
- Humanist documents show some frustration with government and policy-makers, in having different rules for weddings in religious buildings than those in hotels, arguing that Humanists are effectively being treated differently.
- These documents refer to freedom of religion, as they remind followers that being forced to follow stay-at-home orders may be dangerous for non-religious people in particularly religious households, and countries.

Digital Innovations in the
Roman Catholic Church

- Digital means of maintaining communication and contact between clergy and the faithful discussed in a positive way, with examples of viewing numbers to online services etc. given.
- The role of digital (and some non-digital) media is noted as being important in potentially reducing stress and loneliness – through actual contact, or taking part in online rituals. This can include live-streamed Mass, or taking part in nation-wide prayers, taking place at agreed times, organised online.
- Digital media is presented as best means to continue religious life during pandemic, but not a permanent means of meeting religious duty. Dispensation from weekly attendance at Mass is specifically discussed as temporary.
- When restrictions begin to loosen, digital technologies are still discussed as being important to parishioners who are medically vulnerable.
- General guidance is based around already existing programmes – Zoom, Skype, Facebook, Twitter etc, and using webcams to stream religious services, or take part in 'pilgrimages'.
- Catholic documents referred to non-digital media for 'older' followers, such as radio and television broadcasts of Mass by the Irish National Broadcaster, RTÉ.

Digital Innovations in the
Protestant Churches

- Similarly, digital technologies and online religious contact and services are seen positively in Protestant church documents. Multiple means of connecting through digital prayer groups, streamed services and single-sex/youth groups are presented.
- Digital technologies were as important for contact with other people as for contact with faith/religion.
- These are also seen as a temporary measure, which cannot fully replicate the community of Christ found in real life meetings.
- Protestant church documents contained practical advice for clergy and church staff on using digital technologies. Protestant church documents also provided some opportunities for training, specifically relating to providing digital services and pastoral care, where needed.

Digital Innovations in
Islam

- Digital opportunities for communal worship (specifically Friday Prayers) are not an option in Muslim documents. Theological arguments put forward state that Friday prayers must be held in the same room as religious leaders, so digital technologies do not provide an appropriate alternative.
- Digital technologies are not discussed in any other parts of these documents.

Digital Innovations in the
Humanists

- Digital technologies are not a major focus in Humanist documents, but they are discussed as a generally positive means of providing some support around funerals and wedding arrangements.
- Outside this, digital technologies are not mentioned frequently, although without having regular religious services, this is not necessarily unexpected.

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Table 1. Number of documents per religious organisation for island of Ireland. Source: own elaboration

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Research Team

Dr. Gladys Ganiel
Dr. Caoimhe Ni Dhonaill

Queens University Belfast
UK/Ireland

Prof. Dr. Solange Lefebvre
Dr. Mathieu Colin
Dr. Denitsa Tsvetkova

University of Montréal
Canada

Prof. Dr. Kerstin Radde-Antweiler
Dr. Hannah Grünenthal

University of Bremen
Germany

Prof. Dr. Sławomir Mandes
Dr. Marta Kołodziejska
Dr. Katarzyna Rabiej-Sienicka

University of Warsaw
Poland

The Changing Role of Religion in Societies Emerging from Covid-19

RECOV-19 is a three-year, multi-disciplinary research project analyzing the role of religion in societies emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The project investigates whether or to what extent the role of religion has changed during the pandemic in four contexts: Canada, Germany, the Republic of Ireland/Northern Ireland, and Poland. It has three main areas of investigation: discourses around health, illness, and science; changing relationships between religions and the state; and religious adaptations to the digital world.

RECOV-19 is funded through the Trans-Atlantic Platform (T-AP) for the Social Sciences and Humanities, a collaboration between humanities and social science research funders from the Americas and Europe. It received an award under T-AP's 'Recovery, Renewal and Resilience in a Post-Pandemic World' programme.

^ The above description is an integral part of the project proposal, and the authors are Gladys Ganiel, Solange Lefebvre, Sławomir Mandes, Kerstin Radde-Antweiler.

Contact

http://recov19.org
facebook.com/recov19
@19recov

Caoimhe.NiDhonaill@qub.ac.uk
G.Ganiel@qub.ac.uk

Cover design & formatting by Katarzyna Rabiej-Sienicka

Appendix 1

Code tree

DISCOURSES ABOUT HEALTH, ILLNESS AND SCIENCE
- Physical health
- Mental wellbeingDeath
- Religious practices
- Justification by scientific/factual arguments
- Justification by theological arguments
- Justification by moral/ethical arguments
- Attitudes towards vaccination
  - Pro vaccination
  - Mixed feelings towards vaccination
  - Anti vaccination
- Role of community during the pandemic
- Role of relationships during the pandemic

RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENTS AND POLICYMAKERS
- Freedom of belief
- Key political/public/religious actors
- Levels of cooperation / conflict
- Court cases
- Wider societal impacts of restrictions/state actions
  - Social impacts of state restrictions
  - Religious impacts of state restrictions
- Impact of restrictions on churches/religion
  - Financial
  - Organisational issues
  - Religious practices
  - Religious authority/authorities
  - Interreligious dialogue
- Anti-corona movements
- Post-Restriction Plans

DIGITAL INNOVATIONS
- Non-digital media
- Digital tools/platforms used
- Virtual religious rituals and practices
- Impact on religious authority and community
- Impact of media on the society
- Impact of media on religious organisation
- Attitudes towards digital technology
- Key digital actors

Appendix 2

Table 2. Overview of codes per religious organisation (total number of coded segments for all documents per organisation for three years) for island of Ireland. Source: own elaboration

Code	majority 1	majority 2	minority 1	minority 2	
	Roman Catholic Church	Protestant Churches	Islam	Humanists	total
HEALTH, ILLNESS, SCIENCE					
physical health	14	11	1	0	26
wellbeing	16	18	1	1	36
death	38	14	2	17	71
religious practices	8	2	5	0	15
justification by scientific/factual arguments	39	22	7	10	78
justification by theological arguments	23	17	22	0	62
justification by moral/ethical arguments	66	28	5	5	104
attitudes towards vaccination > pro vaccination	18	10	5	12	45
attitudes towards vaccination > mixed feelings towards vaccination	3	1	0	0	4
attitudes towards vaccination > anti vaccination	0	0	0	0	0
role of community during the pandemic	34	39	2	3	78

role of community during the pandemic	20	10	1	2	**33**
Total: Discourses about health, illness and science	**279**	**172**	**51**	**50**	**552**
RELATIONSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENTS AND POLICYMAKERS					
freedom of belief	0	0	0	6	**6**
key political/public/religious actors	21	13	0	1	**35**
levels of cooperation/conflict	62	50	13	14	**139**
court cases	0	0	0	0	**0**
wider societal impacts of restrictions/state actions > social issues	37	10	0	0	**47**
wider societal impacts of restrictions/state actions > religious	67	10	1	0	**78**
impact of restrictions on churches/religion > financial	20	1	0	0	**21**
impact of restrictions on churches/religion > organisational issues	40	32	1	0	**73**
impact of restrictions on churches/religion > religious practices	24	27	10	4	**65**
impact of restrictions on churches/religion > religious authority/authorities	0	2	0	3	**6**

impact of restrictions on churches/religion > interreligious dialogue	3	23	0	2	28
anti-corona movements	0	0	0	0	0
post-Restriction Plans	0	0	0	0	0
Total: Relationships with governments and policymakers	274	168	25	30	497
DIGITAL INNOVATIONS					
digital tools/platforms used	38	9	0	0	47
virtual religious rituals and practices	22	12	0	3	37
impact on religious authority and community	52	41	0	8	101
impact of media on the society	1	0	0	0	1
impact of media on religious organisation	0	0	0	0	0
attitudes towards digital technology	0	0	0	0	0
key digital actors	17	12	4	2	35
contrast with non-digital media	0	0	0	0	0
Total: Digital Innovations	130	74	4	13	221
TOTAL CODED SEGMENTS	683	414	80	93	1270

Appendix 3

Context: timeline of the pandemic in

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

2020

29/02/20 – First case of Coronavirus confirmed .

12/03/20 – All schools, colleges and childcare facilities closed.

15/03/20 – All bars, cafes, pubs and restaurants ordered closed.

27/03/20 – Taoiseach (prime minister) announces a 'stay-at-home' order, with most public venues closed, including churches, hairdressers, sports clubs, gyms etc.

10/04/20 – Announcement that restrictions and stay-at-home order to remain in place until at least 5th May.

01/05/20 – Restrictions further extended until at least 18th May.

18/05/20 – Ireland begins Phase One of easing restrictions, opening a number of major public buildings and public gardens.

25/06/20 – Face coverings become mandatory on public transport.

29/06/20 – Further easing of restrictions, including reopening of churches, hospitality which served food, hotels, hairdressers and beauty salons.

15/07/20 – Planned further easing of restrictions expected for 20 July, delayed until at least 10 August.

04/08/20 – Expected easing of restrictions for 10th August announced as being further delayed. No new expected date confirmed.

10/08/20 – Face coverings made mandatory in most public buildings, including shops, shopping centres, libraries etc.

18/08/20 – Indoor events limited to 6 people, with exceptions for religious services, weddings, shops and restaurants, which could have increased (albeit still limited) numbers.

18/09/20 – Due to rising numbers of cases in Dublin, further restrictions were implemented there, as part of targeted restrictions. This included closing museums, galleries, cinema and other cultural attractions, and limitations of food hospitality to outdoor dining and takeaway food.

21/09/20 – Entire country moved to highest level of restrictions. Stay-at-home order in place, and all non-essential businesses and services to close.

01/12/20 – Household visits were limited to those in their 'bubble' of one other household.

18/12/20 – Some restrictions eased for Christmas – including allowing up to two households to visit another home. This was intended to last until 6th January.

22/12/20 – After receiving advice from the Chief Medical Officer, the eased restrictions were reduced from Christmas Eve to the highest levels of restrictions.

Appendix 3

31/12/2020 - Highest levels of restrictions confirmed to last until 31st January, at the earliest.

2021
06/01/2021 - Government agrees to new measures, including closures of schools until February.
07/01/2021 - Vaccine rollout begins.
23/02/2021 - Government confirms that restrictions will continue until 5th April at the earliest.
01/03/2021 - Most children back to schools as part of phased reopening, focussing on schools for children with special educational needs, younger year groups and for key exam years, first.
15/03/2021 - Remaining primary school and initial non-exam year secondary students returned to school.
12/04/2021 - Remaining schools open, and two households permitted to meet outdoors.
10/05/2021 - In-person religious services allowed. Three households, or six people, could meet indoors. Museums, libraries and galleries could reopen.
17/05/2021 - Non-essential retail opened.
07/06/2021 - Wedding allowed up to 25 guests. Bars that serve food, restaurants, cafes, reopened for outdoor dining, and gyms reopened.
10/09/2021 - 90% of adults have been vaccinated in Ireland.
22/10/2021 - Attendance limits on weddings and religious ceremonies removed, nightclubs allowed to reopen, the return of normal trading hours in pubs and restaurants, and 100% capacity allowed at sporting venues.
30/11/2021 - Further masking mandates added for children over 9 years on public transport, in retail and schools.
03/12/2021 - Due to Omicron variant and rising Covid cases, nightclubs reclosed, bars and restaurants had limited opening times, only 6 adults per table, and indoor events (including religious services) limited to 50% capacity.
17/12/2021 - Bars closure time reverted to 8pm, households remain limited in numbers of guests. Warnings not to hold large celebrations in the home around Christmas and New Years.
06/01/22 – Schools reopened, despite rising Covid cases.
22/01/22 – Announcement that almost all restrictions to end. This includes the requirements of vaccine certificates and social distancing, restrictions on household visits and capacity limits for indoor and outdoor events, and nightclubs to reopen and pubs and restaurants to resume normal trading times. Rules on isolation and the wearing of masks remain.
17/02/21 – Requirement to wear mask ends.

Appendix 4

Context: timeline of the pandemic in

REPUBLIC OF NORTHERN IRELAND

2020

27/02/20 - The first case of Covid-19 in Northern Ireland (NI).

19/03/20 - The first coronavirus-related death in NI was confirmed.

23/03/20 –Boris Johnson announces 'stay-at-home' order (UK Lockdown) to come into effect as of midnight and tol be reviewed every 3 weeks.

28/03/20 – At 11pm, NI businesses ordered to close. Fines to be levied if non-compliance.

15/04/20 – NI lockdown extended to 9 May.

24/04/20 -The Northern Ireland Executive agrees to reopen cemeteries following public pressure.

12/05/20 – The Northern Ireland Executive publishes a five-stage plan for exiting lockdown.

14/05/20 – Easing of restrictions begins. Marriage ceremonies where a person is terminally ill will also be allowed.

19/05/20 – NI further eases its lockdown measures. Groups of up to 6 people who do not share the same household are allowed to meet outdoors, so long as they maintain social distancing. Churches are allowed to reopen for private prayer.

26/05/20 –For the first day since 18 March, no new Covid deaths are reported in NI.

08/06/20 - Outdoor weddings attended by 10 people permitted.

12/06/20 – Non-essential retailers reopen .

23/06/20 – Up to 6 people can meet outdoors.

10/07/20 – Indoor weddings and baptisms allowed

10/08/20 – The wearing of face coverings becomes compulsory in shops and other enclosed places.

19/08/20 – The heads of Northern Ireland's four main churches – the Church of Ireland, Methodist Church, Catholic Church and Presbyterian Church – ask their parishioners to wear face coverings during services.

01/09/20 – Schools reopen fully.

22/09/20 – Extension of Covid-19 restrictions to all of NI from 18:00 due to rising Covid cases. Previously these restrictions, which included no mixing of households indoors, and maintaining outdoor mixing to six or less, were only applied to specific postcodes which had spikes in Covid numbers. However, with Covid numbers increasing across NI, these restrictions were extended to all areas.

30/09/20 – Bars, pubs and restaurants closed again.

Appendix 3

14/10/20 – Restrictions further extended. Schools to be closed again as part of 'circuit breaker'.

12/11/20 – Lockdown extended by a further week.20/11/20 – Restrictions eased for one week, with a two week 'circuit breaker' planned from 27th November to 'protect Christmas'.

08/12/20 – First vaccinations received .

11/12/20– Non-essential retailers, and restaurants, cafes and other venues serving food are permitted to reopen .

26/12/20 – Six-week lockdown after rules were briefly relaxed for Christmas Day.

2021

07/01/21 – Four main churches announce a suspension of services until February.

21/01/21 – Restrictions extended to 5th March 2021.

17/03/21 – Churches announce dates to resume practice, between 26th March – 2nd April.

24/03/21 - The Catholic Diocese of Derry postpones First Communions amid concerns they could encourage people to have parties.

26/03/21 – The Catholic Church begins the process of resuming services.

12/04/21 – Schools fully open. Restrictions relaxed, with larger groups able to meet and some non-essential retailers opening.

30/04/21 – Outdoor dining, gyms and non-essential retail reopened.

12/04/21 – Schools bubbles, 'Rule of Six' and self-isolation for close contact ended.

07/09/21 – Further restrictions reduced, with larger groups able to meet outdoors (15) and dancing allowed at weddings.

13/12/21 – Covid passes become enforceable for hospitality businesses, as most other restrictions for hospitality have been lifted.

17/12/21 – New guidelines require close contacts of anyone testing positive for Covid to self-isolate again, even if fully vaccinated. Indications that new restrictions are to be expected, given rising Covid figures.

26/12/21 – Nightclubs close again only two months after reopening.

27/12/21 – A limit of 6 on the number of people who can meet indoors, the return of table service for the hospitality sector and 2 metre social distancing are reintroduced .

2022

20/01/22 – Covid passports scrapped for hospitality.

21/01/22 – Length of self-isolation after a positive test cut to 5 days.

15/02/22 – All restrictions lifted.