Guidance on reopening places of worship: coronavirus

Guidance for managing the safe re-opening of places of worship and prayer during the coronavirus pandemic.

Last updated: 27 July 2020 | 206 views

Contents

Overview
Introduction
Definitions
Purpose of this advice
Permitted use: Communal worship and religious ceremonies including life events, funerals or weddings by a Minister of Religion or by person
Singing, chanting and the use of musical instruments
Food and drink
Hand washing and use of water
Toilets
Broadcasting
Worship outdoors
Risk assessment
Preparing the building for opening
Communication
Using the building
Observing social distancing
Cleaning
Who can attend
Face coverings
Provision of other services

Overview

This guidance is of general nature and should be considered alongside other specific guidance to ensure that outdoor gatherings can take place safely and in accordance with the law. It is not prescriptive and does not seek to cover every circumstance. It is intended to provide advice and support to those responsible for places of worship to reopen places of worship for worshipping their faith in accordance with the law and in a way that is safe for their congregations. This guidance supports the Welsh Government's phased approach of places of worship for communal worship and religious ceremonies.

The guidance has been written specifically with places of worship and gatherings of faith and belief groups in mind. Anyone responsible for a place of worship or faith or belief group may find it helpful for purposes of minimising the risk of exposure to coronavirus (COVID-19) by:

- take all reasonable measures to ensure a distance of 2 metres is kept between people who are present and waiting to enter the premises and expected members of the same household or extended household and any carers or other essential visitors
- take steps to prevent the Public from entering the premises or have to avoid the risk of exposure to coronavirus

The Welsh Government has issued statutory guidance in connection with that and other measures in Wales.

This guidance should when reasonable practicable in this guidance, and the statutory guidance, the statutory guidance shall prevail. Additionally, the guidance does not contribute legal advice.

This guidance does not impose a duty or requirement on places of worship to open for public worship. Places of worship may remain closed to the public and be closed to public. Some places of worship may choose not to reopen, or may open for a period of time and then decide to close for a period of time, or may open for a period of time and then continue to use online technology to carry out faith and pastoral activities.

The Welsh Government is grateful to the Wales Faith Communities Forum and Faith Leaders Forum for their support in the development of this guidance and for their support in preparing the guidance. The Welsh Government will continue to work with the Wales Faith Communities Forum and faith groups to develop further guidance and support for places of worship and faith groups in the organisation of coronavirus (COVID-19). The guidance will be reviewed and amended as the situation and scientific advice around rates of transmission changes.

Introduction

The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 2) (Wales) Regulations 2020 (the Regulations) prohibit the holding of gatherings in places of worship in Wales. This has been done to contain the spread of coronavirus in Wales and to help protect the public from the spread of severe acute respiratory coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).

Places of worship play an important role in promoting spiritual wellbeing, community cohesion, and in providing a place for people to come together in communal spaces also makes places that are particularly vulnerable to the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

On the 10 July the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No. 2) (Wales) came into force.

Definitions

The term 'place of worship' is not defined in the Regulations. For the purposes of this guidance, the term includes a certified or unrecorded space within buildings or outdoors, which is used for religious or belief ceremonies, services, or other religious or belief activities. Places of worship include gurdwaras, mosques, temples, synagogues, church rooms, meeting houses, halls and sections.

In this guidance, the term a "religious or belief body" refers to an organised group of people who regularly meet to religious worship or to uphold and promote philosophical beliefs and meet regularly for the purpose.

For the purposes of this guidance, the term "worshipper" is used to describe people who are participating in a religious or belief ceremony, service or other activity. The term worshipper also applies to participants who engage in part of their non-religious belief structure.

Unless otherwise specifically stated outside formals, the administration of weddings, the formation of civil partnerships, baptisms and other ceremonies that celebrate rites of passage. These may be part of a communal services or as event in their own right.

Worship or belief gatherings outdoors can include private or tent prayers, Christian prayer meetings, Muslim prayer meetings, Sikh prayer meetings, meditation, mindfulness, yoga and other activities that are part of a religious or belief body's organised, operated, managed and regulated. The persons responsible for the place of worship, or the religious or belief body, should ensure that the place is kept to respect. They should ensure that they are not subject to any other laws, or adhere to the requirements to maintain social distancing between persons in accordance with regulation 13 of the regulations.

Permitted use: Communal worship and religious ceremonies including led prayers, devotions or meditations by a Minister of Religion or by person

Places of worship may open for communal worship, including prayers, devotions or meditations led by a Minister of Religion or by person.

Religious ceremonies can be held as part of communal worship or as an event in their own right. Funerals, weddings and civil partnerships, baptisms should continue to be prohibited, only as described in regulations for funerals and weddings.

Worship and belief ceremonies can be held outdoors in the limited circumstances described in the guidance.

Places of worship and faith and belief communities should adapt religious or belief services, especially where ceremonies would otherwise have taken place indoors, to be held outdoors, or in a way that reduces the risk of exposure and minimise the spread of infection. It is advised that the communal use services should be conducted in the shortest reasonable time as the reduce risk of exposure.

Place worshipper attendance should be encouraged to leave the premises promptly and not gather, to minimise the risk of contact and spread of infection. Worshipper should be encouraged to leave the premises after a reasonable amount. It is advised, you should encourage people to leave, if those is attendance to be seated rather than standing which reduces the risk of contact.

It is recommended that, where practicable, places of worship continue to encourage people who are able to do so to continue to worship at home and to reach those individuals who are self-isolating or shielding.

It is advised that you use alternative instruments such as a piano, electronic instruments or keyboard. A pipe organ may be played for the purpose of maintenance purposes when the building is closed to the public.

Music should be played at levels that do not make normal conversation difficult. This is because raised voices or shouting increases the potential risk of transmission of coronavirus. Amplification of musical instruments or singing amplifying a microphone should also be made at a lowest level.

Where it is an essential part of the worship or ceremony, only one individual should be permitted to sing or chant, and the use of pipe organs scenes and physical distancing should be considered to protect others. This will further reduce the risk of transmission. Where it is not an essential part of the worship, more than one individual may sing or chant over the course of a ceremony but not at the same time. Each individual should make separate arrangements to ensure that physical distancing is maintained. Particular separate precautions in cleaning between each individual are.

Playing non-wind instruments is permissible as part of worship or a ceremony. If possible, they should be played in the open air. Playing wind instruments or activities that involve forced breath, such as singing, playing wind instruments or drinks, is those is attendance, the importance of avoiding singing and playing wind instruments in the vicinity of others is of the utmost. Playing wind instruments or singing should be avoided in enclosed spaces.

Ringing of bells, or similar, is permissible. However, people attending to ring bells should be consulted on the risk assessment process and subsequent protocols for attendance at the event. Specific provisions should be made to ensure physical distancing and other measures are in place. Additional measures between bell ringers and between them and the other attendees should be maintained at all times.

These restrictions apply equally to indoor and outdoor worship and ceremonies.

Singing, chanting and the use of musical instruments

We recognise the importance of music and singing in worship, religious and belief ceremonies. However, activities such as singing, chanting, shouting and/or playing of wind instruments and organs may pose a risk of spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) through droplets and aerosols. Therefore, if the place of worship is outdoor, the activities of singing, chanting and playing of wind instruments and organs may be permitted if the number of people participating in these activities is kept to a minimum and social distancing is maintained.

It is advised that you use alternative instruments such as a piano, electronic instruments or keyboard. A pipe organ may be played for the purpose of maintenance purposes when the building is closed to the public.

Music should be played at levels that do not make normal conversation difficult. This is because raised voices or shouting increases the potential risk of transmission of coronavirus. Amplification of musical instruments or singing amplifying a microphone should also be made at a lowest level.

Where it is an essential part of the worship or ceremony, only one individual should be permitted to sing or chant, and the use of pipe organs scenes and physical distancing should be considered to protect others. This will further reduce the risk of transmission. Where it is not an essential part of the worship, more than one individual may sing or chant over the course of a ceremony but not at the same time. Each individual should make separate arrangements to ensure that physical distancing is maintained. Particular separate precautions in cleaning between each individual are.

Playing non-wind instruments is permissible as part of worship or a ceremony. If possible, they should be played in the open air. Playing wind instruments or activities that involve forced breath, such as singing, playing wind instruments or drinks, is those is attendance, the importance of avoiding singing and playing wind instruments in the vicinity of others is of the utmost. Playing wind instruments or singing should be avoided in enclosed spaces.

Ringing of bells, or similar, is permissible. However, people attending to ring bells should be consulted on the risk assessment process and subsequent protocols for attendance at the event. Specific provisions should be made to ensure physical distancing and other measures are in place. Additional measures between bell ringers and between them and the other attendees should be maintained at all times.

These restrictions apply equally to indoor and outdoor worship and ceremonies.

Food and drink

The distribution of food or drink (consumables) should be avoided except where they are integral to the worship, religious or belief ceremony.

If it is necessary to handle consumables during a ceremony that those giving and receiving the item should wash their hands before and after exchange and should ensure that they are not touching their faces during the exchange of mandated. Utensils must not be shared between people.

In circumstances where it is not possible to maintain a 2 metres distance the use of face coverings is recommended in accordance with the law. Face coverings refers to or a religious item of belief body for the purpose of its guidance. The body is responsible completing a risk assessment on the use of face coverings in accordance with the Health and Safety at Work and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and complying with the duties under regulation 12 for the purpose of minimising risk to exposure of coronavirus (COVID-19). Guidance on face coverings is available. Face coverings cannot be made to contribute the COVID-19 security which requires consideration should have exclusive use of the space for the duration of the event. Persons, signage and/or other measures should be in place to ensure that people do not have access to the site or other appropriate mechanisms to control the number of the space.

Control of the site may be established through ownership or with landowner's permission. Organisers should be very of circumstances which would undermine their control and so public safety of way across the site.

Lesser with Local Authorities and other authorities such as the Police may be consulted on the management of the site and public safety. The place of worship organiser should make sure that they communicate a clear understanding of the behaviours expected by those who attend. Where behaviours breach the law, the place of worship should be ready to call on the relevant authorities to consider terminating the event or asking patrons to leave. The organisers are responsible for managing the public health risks associated with the event.

Places of worship should be open for public worship in accordance with the Regulations and should not be closed to public worship or religious ceremonies as these will increase the opportunities for the virus to spread. It is advised that places of worship should be open for a reasonable amount of time which is open or should be provide protection from the weather. Consideration this should not undermine the COVID-19 security of the site and structures and should not increase the risk of transmission. Places of worship should be hospitable to be mandated. For example, an evening running parishes or the service or ceremony alongside individual gazebos for each household if it is safe to do so. Consideration should be encouraged to be hospitable whether or not it is safe, except.

The numbers attending outdoor worship or religious or belief ceremonies should be determined by the risk assessment and the ability to maintain 2 metres distance. Attendance need not be limited by relative only although organisers may choose to do so. The place of worship organiser is responsible for ensuring that capacity is not exceeded and may need to let people away to maintain this. Where the service or ceremony relates to a life event, the number of people may be limited by the number of people invited by a relative. This is because these events are often attended by people who would not normally attend places of worship and anticipating numbers may be more difficult.

Events that may be organised to include vehicles are included in this consent and should be considered in the risk assessment. Such events should reflect this, ensuring that can maintain household separation.

Risk assessment

Many places of worship are also workplaces and should therefore consider the Welsh Government's guidance for workplaces as part of their decision to reopen their place of worship. The 5-step Framework that sets out practical steps to manage risks in the workplace is helpful in this regard.

To help decide what it is safe to take to ensure a safe place, a COVID-19 risk assessment should be completed by each place of worship. A risk assessment should be completed by the person responsible for the place of worship that belong to a religious or belief body or a place of worship or religious or belief group. Guidance is available.

Your risk assessment should take place in addition to any, the health and safety assessments already in place. The risk assessment should be done in consultation with your workers or their representatives, and be shared with them as relevant. It may also be beneficial to invite worshippers or other attendees in the process. The advice about managing indoor environments, which includes advice on managing visitors, and contractors may also be helpful.

You should consider using the COSHH-19 Workforce Risk Assessment Tool (web) with all staff and volunteers to ensure that the workplace is as safe as possible.

Preparing the building for opening

It is important that, prior to reopening of the usual dedicated or unrecorded to make the building is safe. If buildings have been closed or had reduced occupancy during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to ensure that due to lack of use, increasing the risks of Legionnaires' disease. HSE guidance covering water management and legionella is available.

Drinking fitted (hydrant/outlets) guidance on bringing buildings back into use, and other water systems may be helpful. The guidance covers a range of public buildings, and is recommended the guidance is available on the HSE general web page.

Natural ventilation can emulate or vents should be used as far as possible. Mechanical ventilation systems, including air conditioning and ventilation should be adjusted to full fresh air, if this is not possible systems should be operated as normal. Where ventilation units have filters present ensure enhanced preventative and cleaning maintenance.

In order to ensure good practice is adhered to by those attending, including those who are responsible for the place of worship, it is advised that a suitable introductory sign is of the following measures as appropriate:

- the necessary actions to mitigate risk were identified in the risk assessment
- when the building will be available for the specified purposes and how you will ensure physical distancing and hygiene measures
- using a mobilisation or organised process to manage attendance at the place of worship or outdoor worship and to limit numbers such as seeing people by appointment or booking in advance
- working with other places of worship to engage opening times and the pressure on one building
- ensure that there is a clear signage the entrances, exits and the main parts of the building where is safe
- avoid people congregating in confined spaces, interfacing and and you should ensure that people are able to keep 2 metres apart. Consider how this would separately arrangements to accommodate those who wear them, such as disabled worshippers
- ensure that the place of worship is cleaned or prioritised by gender, disposal of used areas, removing used waste, disinfecting surfaces, equipment, fabrication etc. from the areas that are open to worshipper. Ensure that the place of worship is cleaned and disinfected before worship resumed and consideration should be encouraged to bring their own water bottles
- ensure signage is in place or where rooms to separate workspaces
- introduce signage and floor markings to guide worshippers. Consider posters to build awareness of social distancing and good hand hygiene practice. Consider using a one way system to minimise contact with others and a limited or distanced queuing system
- places of worship who belong to a denomination or grouping or religion or belief should consult with their representative body for further guidance on how to reopen safely.

Communication

Those in charge of running a place of worship should ensure they engage with their congregations and with the wider community to explain what action has been taken and what will be expected.

Faith leaders should provide reassurance to any member who is worried about being their faith community and not attending. Reassurance can be given attendance should remain in place in addition to individual access. People should only attend if they are well and have no symptoms.

Members of faith groups that don't have a formal place of worship should consider how they can meet safely. Consideration should be given to outdoor venues, indoors, or meeting venues with open place of worship.

Using the building

- Individuals should be prevented from touching or leaning devotional and other objects that are handled communally. Barriers and/or other signage should be put in place where necessary
- Hand sanitisers and/or hand gels should be kept open to prevent people from touching handles
- Individuals should avoid touching property belonging to others such as books, pens, or other items. Consideration should be given to other items while adhering to social distancing principles.
- Books, reusable and communal resources (e.g. prayer mats, service sheets, etc.) should be avoided. Consideration should be given to how individual is provided (e.g. a prayer mat or religious text may be brought from home or provided by the place of worship).
- No food or drink should be made available except if they are an essential part of the worship or ceremony.
- Faith leaders should discourage open giving and continue to use online giving or other methods of giving. Consider contactless giving.

Consideration, frequent cleaning (as SARS-CoV-2 can have a short lifespan) could be maintained, and gloves worn to handle cash offerings among prior to this being continued.

Observing social distancing

Guidance on social distancing can be found here.

The number who can practice at one time will depend on the size and the layout of the building. The Welsh Government is that all reasonable measures are taken to ensure a distance of 2 metres is kept between those attending. A risk assessment should be completed and appropriate measures put in place. Guidance can be found here. The purpose of this guidance is to ensure people should maintain 2 metres distance around where usual practices require them to be in close contact. Where it is not possible to maintain a distance of 2 metres, maintaining a distance of 1 metres between members of different households, not necessarily between each individual person, are mentioned of the same or extended household, is permitted. Where it is not possible to keep 1 metres apart, provided that it is safe to do so. The maximum number who can attend an organised gathering outdoors is 30.

In defining the number of people that can reasonably attend while still adhering to 2 metres distancing, the total floor space as well as likely pinch points and other factors should be considered. Consideration of the layout of corridors, aisles, or seating which restrict each place of worship. All possible actions should be taken to avoid queues and to ensure that those waiting to enter or leave a place of worship maintain social distancing.

The other elements of the social distancing guidance such as handwashing and cleaning should be implemented as appropriate.

Places of worship may wish to consider implementing procedures to control the numbers attending at any one time such as asking worshippers to notify the place of worship of their intention to attend.

Cleaning

COVID-19 is mainly spread between people who are in close contact with one another. It is also possible that people may pick up the virus from a surface or envelope. It can also spread through contact with a surface or object and then touch the virus on it.

Wash washing up gloves and spares for cleaning of premises, use disposable cloths and various household cleaning products. Wash your hands for 20 seconds after removing gloves, aprons and other personal protective clothing.

Dispose of any items used for cleaning carefully, they should be double-bagged, then thrown away in the regular rubbish after cleaning is finished.

Find clean hand surfaces with warm soapy water, then disinfect these surfaces with a disinfectant. Pay attention to: door handles, handrails, light switches, frequently touched areas and surfaces, tables, chairs, benches, toilets and stairwells and door handles.

Sufficient time needs to be allowed for cleaning between services, particularly before opening and in between use. A decision should be made locally on how long is needed. Consideration should be given to the number of people using the place of worship and the number of people who are using workplaces to notify the place of worship of their intention to attend.

Who can attend

COVID-19 is mainly spread between people who are in close contact with one another. It is also possible that people may pick up the virus from a surface or envelope. It can also spread through contact with a surface or object and then touch the virus on it.

Wash washing up gloves and spares for cleaning of premises, use disposable cloths and various household cleaning products. Wash your hands for 20 seconds after removing gloves, aprons and other personal protective clothing.

Dispose of any items used for cleaning carefully, they should be double-bagged, then thrown away in the regular rubbish after cleaning is finished.

Find clean hand surfaces with warm soapy water, then disinfect these surfaces with a disinfectant. Pay attention to: door handles, handrails, light switches, frequently touched areas and surfaces, tables, chairs, benches, toilets and stairwells and door handles.

Sufficient time needs to be allowed for cleaning between services, particularly before opening and in between use. A decision should be made locally on how long is needed. Consideration should be given to the number of people using the place of worship and the number of people who are using workplaces to notify the place of worship of their intention to attend.

Face coverings

Provision of other services

If you believe an area has been used by someone, regardless if you suspect the individual may have suspected coronavirus you should follow this **guidance about cleaning non-healthcare settings (on GOV.UK)**.

Historic England has also produced **guidance on cleaning historic surfaces**.

Who can attend

Those experiencing coronavirus symptoms listed below should not attend a place of worship:

- new continuous cough
- high temperature
- loss of or change to your normal sense of smell or taste (anosmia)

Any individuals who are self-isolating due to a possible or confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the household or extended household; or if they are a contact of a case and have been advised to self-isolate should not attend. **Guidance on self-isolation can be found here**

The advice for those who are at **increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) and the extremely vulnerable group** who are shielding continues to be to minimise their contact with others and to be particularly stringent in following social and physical distancing measures for their personal protection. However, they may decide, for their wellbeing, to attend a place of worship despite the additional risk this poses to them. In this case they and anyone with them should strictly follow the social distancing guidance.

No one should feel obligated to return to a place of worship, even if they have a volunteering role that they would normally fulfil.

Those wishing to attend a place of worship should consider how far they need to travel and how they will travel to and from the building safely. Members of the same household or extended household may travel together. The Welsh Government's **advice on travelling safely** can be found here.

If anyone, including religious leaders and volunteers, becomes unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 in a place of worship, they should be sent home and advised to follow the **self-isolation guidance** and to **apply for a coronavirus test**.

If they need clinical advice, they should go online to NHS 111 Wales (or call 111 if they don't have internet access). In an emergency, call 999 if they are seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. They should not visit the GP, pharmacy, urgent care centre or a hospital.

Other people who may have been in contact with the person who has become unwell should wash their hands thoroughly after the interaction, but they do not need to take any other specific action unless they develop symptoms themselves. If they develop symptoms they should follow the **self-isolation guidance** and **apply for a coronavirus test**.

The areas used by these individuals should be thoroughly cleaned according to the guidance referenced above.

Parents or guardians should supervise their children to ensure they maintain social distancing at all times.

The **Welsh Government Test, Trace, Protect** strategy sets out the approach to tackling coronavirus, testing people with symptoms in the community, tracing those who have come into close contact with people who have tested positive for coronavirus and protecting family, friends and our community by self-isolating.

If it is possible to maintain a distance of 2 metres the Test Trace Protect strategy does not require a record of those who attend to be kept. However, there will be occasions, for instance as part of a marriage or baptism where this cannot be maintained. In those situations, a record of the time and date of the event and the names and telephone contact of those who have come within 2 metres of other households should be kept and handled in accordance with GDPR to protect the individuals' privacy. These records should be kept for 21 days after the event. Further **guidance can be found here on how to maintain records and on compliance with GDPR**.

Further information **about Test, Trace, Protect** is available here.

Face coverings

Information about the use of face coverings can be found here: fa**ce covering - frequently asked questions**.

Provision of other services

Since 22 June places of worship and community centres can be used to provide public services, including childcare, as long as the local authority or the Welsh Ministers agree that the service is necessary. Provisions are set out in **The Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (No 2) (Wales) Regulations 2020**.

The provider should talk to the local authority about plans to reopen (through the **Family Information Services** or contact in the childcare team) and to use a place of worship or community hall for childcare. It is not sufficient to make arrangements with the owner/manager of the premises without involving the local authority.

Further **guidance on the providing childcare can be found here**.

Uses of places of worship for community engagement activities such as faith supplementary schools, youth clubs, lunch clubs and the hiring of rooms is not covered by this guidance.

Some places of worship are used as visitor attractions. Visitor attractions can now open for the purpose. **Guidance on visitor attractions can be found here**. Places of worship should ensure that independent risks assessments are conducted for the different uses and appropriate arrangements are put in place to ensure the arrangements for the one use do not undermine the COVID-19 secure environment being created by the other arrangements. This could include closure of all, or part, of the building to visitor access during a service or ceremony or the use of separate entrances and exits.

First published
23 June 2020

Last updated
20 July 2020

Report anything wrong with this page

Share this page

Back to top

Contact us Accessibility Copyright statement Cookies Privacy Terms and conditions

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government