

Moving from Alert Level 4 to Alert Level 3

A Practical Advice Update

Wales remains at Alert Level 4 but Welsh Government has set out the next anticipated steps of relaxing restrictions towards Alert Level 3.

It is anticipated that from 26 April, if public health conditions permit, the following relaxations will go ahead:

- organised outdoor activities will be permitted for up to 30 people
- outdoor wedding receptions will be permitted for up to 30 people
- outdoor hospitality can open
- outdoor visitor attractions can open

Precise details of what this will mean are awaited and Church in Wales guidance will be updated as soon as possible after details are published.

We are clear that organized outdoor activities includes worship. The key point is that such activities are organised i.e planned and controlled by a recognisable body such as the PCC/MAC/LMAC. Such activities should be accompanied by a risk assessment to decide the right risk mitigation measures for the activity. Social distancing of two metres must be observed at all times for such activities. Welsh Government guidance should be consulted for specific limitations on permitted activities.

Welsh Government are indicating that other relaxations should follow leading to the re-opening, in a limited way, of community centres and other indoor activities on the 17th May. At this point, Wales will be in Alert Level 3.

Vaccination

We celebrate the fact that well over 1.6 million vaccination first doses have been administered in Wales. It is important to remember that although vaccination greatly reduces the risk of severe COVID-19, Public Health Wales is still learning about how the vaccine affects transmission of the virus and someone could still pass it on even after being vaccinated.

However, even if someone has received their two vaccine doses, they should still follow the same steps to keep themselves and Wales safe; wearing a mask, keeping a 2m distance, washing their hands regularly and keeping rooms as well ventilated as possible.

Even where a whole congregation has been vaccinated, there should be no relaxation of risk mitigation measures. Vaccination is not a cure but is likely to significantly reduce the impact of the virus on those vaccinated.

Opening Churches for Worship

Whilst places of worship can, by law, be open for worship, funerals and weddings, Welsh Government continues to advise, during Alert Level 4, that:

‘those who are responsible for places of worship should consider whether there are alternative ways of holding worship services’.

That is clearly sensible advice but the Bishops do feel that, for those churches which can safely do so, a resumption of a limited number of in-person services may now be more appropriate. Accordingly, those responsible for churches who intend holding services in person, you must:

- Rigorously review and update your risk assessments and consequence risk management measures to ensure that recommended arrangements can be sustained.
- Adjust your arrangements in the light of experience and the observed behaviour of attendees, when open for worship, and make adjustments to prevent lapses. It is vital, despite vaccinations, that social distancing is maintained, face coverings are worn and that hygiene and cleaning standards are fully observed.
- Pay particular attention to arrangements for people to leave your building after services. The end of a service is a particular time when social distancing can be breached. Generally, controlled exit row-by-row is advised. Clergy should generally avoid standing by entrances or exits to meet and greet people as this can create bottlenecks and bunching.
- Strictly observe guidance on the administration of Holy Communion (still in one kind only) as this is a moment of closer contact.
- Submit your updated risk assessment to your Archdeacon for approval
- Remember that as an open church you are an exemplar of good behaviour.
- Follow Government and Provincial guidance and do not take chances.

For those churches which cannot safely hold in-person services with the necessary precautions in place, organised outdoor worship may provide a useful first step in bringing back in-person worship.