

# Guidance on frequently asked questions for places of worship and community centres during the 'firebreak' period 23 October – 9 November 2020.

## **What does the 'firebreak' mean?**

The firebreak is a series of restrictive measures which last from 6pm on the Friday the 23<sup>rd</sup> October until the start of Monday 9<sup>th</sup> November. These replace all the pre-existing Covid rules. The 'firebreak' rules now contain 5 main elements;

- People must stay at home, except for very limited purposes
- People must not visit other households, or meet other people they do not live with
- Certain businesses, including bars, restaurants and most shops must close.
- Schools will open but only provide on-line learning for those in year nine and above, but childcare settings will remain open
- Face coverings will continue to be required in indoor public spaces that remain open

A full set of information on the 'firebreak' can be [found here](#).

## **Can my place of worship or community centre open to the public?**

Yes, but only for specific purposes. It can open for a wedding ceremony or funeral services, to allow access to critical public services and provide essential voluntary services.

Communal worship and private prayer cannot take place during the period of the 'firebreak'.

## **What can places of worship and community centres open to the public for?**

You can open to provide public services at the request of Welsh Ministers or the Local Authority and to provide essential voluntary services. Essential means if the service was not provided during the period of the 'firebreak' a significant harm would result for the recipient. If the delivery of the voluntary service can be delayed until after the 'firebreak' period without significant harm it should be postponed. If the voluntary service can reasonably be delivered from home this approach should be taken.

Examples of public services that can be provided include food banks and services for the homeless and other vulnerable people as well as health services such as blood donations and flu vaccinations. Childcare services can also continue to be provided in these buildings.

### **Are there other reasons my place of worship or community centre can open?**

You are allowed to undertake maintenance work to prepare your building to open again after the 'firebreak'.

You are also able to broadcast from your place of worship acts of worship, without the presence of a congregation. Work is a reasonable excuse to leave home and this allows the faith leader and anybody providing necessary technical support to attend.

### **Can my place of worship open as a visitor attraction?**

No all visitor attractions are required to close

### **Can we still run our café?**

Cafés and restaurants are required to close for service on the premises although takeaway service may still be offered with appropriate protective measures.

### **Can outdoor worship take place?**

No, the stay at home message and restrictions on meeting other households mean that outdoor worship cannot take place during the 'firebreak'.

### **I am a faith leader can I work during the 'firebreak'?**

Work is a reasonable excuse to leave home. Both paid and unpaid faith leaders can be considered to be working whilst they fulfil their duties. Obviously many of your normal activities are curtailed but some can continue. For example the broadcasting (without a congregation) of worship is allowed during the 'firebreak', as is the provision of essential voluntary services.

In fulfilling your duties, you should remember that activities should not be undertaken if there is a, lower risk, reasonable alternative and that rules on meeting other households still apply. So, for example, pastoral duties should be conducted remotely and working alongside others should only be considered where essential. Normal rules on working, such as the use of face coverings and physical distancing still apply.

### **Can weddings and funerals take place?**

Solemnisation of marriage and formation of civil partnership ceremonies and funerals can take place. This does not include the social gatherings which often accompany these events, such as wedding 'receptions' or funeral teas, as these must not take

place during this period. The existing guidance on wedding ceremonies and funerals apply;

<https://gov.wales/guidance-marriages-and-civil-partnerships-coronavirus>

<https://gov.wales/guidance-funerals-covid-19>

### **Can other life event ceremonies take place?**

No, gatherings for ceremonies such as Baptism, Memorial Services or Bar/Bit Mitzvah should be postponed until after the 'firebreak'.

### **Can I visit a cemetery?**

Yes it is reasonable to visit an outdoor cemetery during the 'firebreak'. It should be remembered that the expectation is that people should stay at home so visits should be delayed until after the 'firebreak' if at all possible. Where it is necessary it should be noted that gatherings of more than one household are not allowed.

### **What about All Saints Day and All Souls Day?**

We are conscious that these important religious festivals fall within the 'firebreak', but the need to impact on the spread of the virus means that services will not be possible this year. Individual households may visit a grave of a loved one and faith leaders may offer blessings but the two things may not be combined without this forming a gathering which would not be allowed.

Secular gatherings around 'halloween' are also not allowed.

### **What about Divali/Diwali?**

We are conscious that these important religious festivals fall immediately after the 'firebreak'. Preparations can take place for the celebrations but these should take place remotely wherever possible.

### **Can Madrassas, Sunday Schools and other supervised children's activities happen?**

Whilst childcare services can continue in places of worship and community centres, educational provision such as Madrassas, Sunday Schools, language classes or other supervised children's activities should be suspended during the 'firebreak'.

## **Can Remembrance services take place?**

Yes, pre-planned Acts of Remembrance can take place outdoors, with up to 30 people, but indoor services are not permitted. Guidance on the conduct of such events can be found here; <https://gov.wales/coronavirus-firebreak-frequently-asked-questions>