



Walsall Public Health

1 January 2021

Dear Faith Sector Partners

National lockdown: Stay at Home

Coronavirus cases continue to rise rapidly across Walsall and on 4 January 2021 the Government announced new national lockdown: stay at home restrictions. This is in response to the very serious risks posed by the new variant of coronavirus. The number of people in Walsall who have tested positive doubled from 4 January when the rate was 415 per 100,000, to 826 on the 11 January 2021. This meant over 2200 people tested positive during this time with around 1 in 100 people currently having the virus.

Whilst places of worship can still remain open and congregational worship is not prohibited under the current national lockdown, I would strongly urge faith organisations to seriously consider pausing their communal prayer and worship activities at this critical time.

Travelling and coming into contact with people who you not live with, increases the risk of catching COVID-19. Putting a pause on both travel and communal worship will better help protect our communities, especially older people, who are more at risk of severe illness or death if they catch the virus.

The safest option is for worshippers to stay at home and not socially mix with people who they do not live with. I recognise that this is a significant request, but we are now at an absolutely critical point in the Pandemic. Many more people are being hospitalised and we are seeing increasing numbers of deaths. The communal nature of places of worship makes them particularly vulnerable to the risk of spreading coronavirus (COVID-19). For those with operational responsibility for places of worship - and in the light of the fast and increasing virus transmission rates in Walsall, we ask that you carefully consider the associated risks and ask yourself it is safe to remain open?

Your prompt action will help to protect our communities and save lives.

Pausing activities, is our strongest advice – however, should you still decide to continue with the hosting of communal prayer and worship - and due to the current and now heightened risks, you must complete and update your current infection control procedures to include a more detailed risk assessment. The new variant is up to 70% more infectious and will therefore require a much higher level of compliance to achieve your earlier level of safety, this now includes ensuring a minimum of 2 meters distance between worshippers with a face covering.

Your risk assessment must also;

- Carefully consider and act upon the government guidance for the safe use of places of worship and special religious services and gatherings during the pandemic.
- It should be used within the context of its own specific circumstances, including the size of the building of worship, how it is organised, operated, managed and regulated.



- Wherever practical and reasonable, alternatives to face to face meeting should be employed to reduce the risk of transmission.
- Walsall places of worship should remain closed if all reasonable measures to minimise the risk of exposure to, or spread of, coronavirus have not been taken.

Walsall Council's Environmental Health team continues to work hard to keep businesses and residents as safe as possible from COVID. The service can work with places of worship to provide help and advice on the government guidance on the safe use of places of worship if you do decide to remain open.

The public health team continues to operate a seven-day COVID-19 advice line between 8am and 8pm. This should be the first point of call if you are notified you have had a positive case in your venue by a member of staff, resident, volunteer or by NHS test and trace or you have any questions on infection control to reduce the spread of the virus. The contact details for both teams can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Due to the rapidly evolving national and local situation, this guidance is subject to change and I ask you all to frequently check our website: https://go.walsall.gov.uk/covid-19_information.

Thank you for your continued support leadership and support through the pandemic.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Gunther

Director of Public Health

Appendix A

CONTACTING WALSHALL COUNCIL FOR ADVICE ON CORONAVIRUS ISSUES

COVID-19 helpline

Public Health operates a seven-day COVID-19 advice line between 8am and 8pm.

This should be the first point of call for:

- If you are notified you have had a positive case in your venue by a member of staff, resident or volunteer
- You are informed of a confirmed case of COVID-19 by the [NHS Test & Trace service](#)
- Any questions on infection control to reduce the spread of the virus



Walsall Council

They will work with you to assess the risks and advise you of what actions to take. By taking this early action you could stop a major outbreak.

To contact the team please email walsall.healthprotection@nhs.net or phone 01922 65 8065

Government restrictions in places of worship, workplaces, hospitality venues and other business or community venues

Walsall Council's Environmental Health team is working hard to keep businesses and residents as safe as possible from COVID.

The service can work with places of worship to provide help and advice on the government guidance on the safe use of places of worship.

They will also investigate complaints and respond, where necessary, with robust enforcement action.

Phone 01922 653366

Email covid19reporting@walsall.gov.uk