

Jane Hutt AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Cyfiawnder Cymdeithasol
Minister for Social Justice



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref JFS/TH/RE
Ein cyf/Our ref JH-/10349/21

Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Member of the Senedd
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA
Janet.Finch-saunders@senedd.wales

19 August 2021

Dear Janet Finch-Saunders MS,

Thank you for your letter of 2 August regarding masks in faith venues.

The pandemic continues to be a challenging time for everyone in Wales and, whilst vaccination has changed our relationship with the virus, we must still be cautious in how we move forward. We have not yet reached a position where we can remove all protections and – in line with the latest scientific and public health advice – we will keep some measures in place at alert level zero. These include the use of face coverings in indoor public places such as Places of Worship. With increasing rates of transmission, wearing face coverings is beneficial to protect individuals and those around them. This position is the default for all indoor public spaces with only certain exemptions made within the regulations and this policy is based on the extensive evidence now available on the effectiveness of masks in preventing transmission indoors.

Whilst we expect to gradually ease the legal requirement to wear face coverings, and will continue to pose the question within our 3 week review process, we have to recognise that community transmission is currently rising and this includes rises in the over 60 rate. We have started the easing by making an exception of hospitality premises because, for the majority of time people spend there, they are already not required to wear a face covering because of the exemption that applies when consuming food or drink. In addition, people can generally choose not to visit such premises if they are at high risk of severe illness if they contract the virus.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Jane.Hutt@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Jane.Hutt@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

For places of worship making such a choice would create a conflict between deeply held religious convictions and personal safety. Worship can also reasonably take place whilst wearing a face mask in a way that it cannot whilst consuming food or drink.

Hospitality businesses must still carry out a coronavirus risk assessment and can still decide to retain the requirement for face coverings on their premises. In addition, although it will no longer be a legal requirement we continue to advise people to wear a face covering wherever practical in these environments.

This difference regulatory position does not mean that pubs and restaurants are inherently safer. That is the wrong way to understand the overall risk of transmission of the virus within the community. Every contact between people provides a chance of transmitting the disease, if we take actions to reduce risk wherever it is practical to do so, we can afford to take the risks that are more difficult to avoid.

Meetings with the Task and Finish Group on Reopening Places of Worship have been held on the following dates in 2021: 8 January, 8 March, 13 April, 8 July. The date of the next meeting has not yet been confirmed but it is likely that another meeting will be held by the end of the month.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke above the first letter.

Jane Hutt AS/MS

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