

GUIDANCE

Guidance to members of the public on marriage and civil partnership ceremonies: coronavirus

How to arrange a safe wedding or civil partnership ceremony during the coronavirus pandemic.

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Introduction

Getting married or forming a civil partnership is an important milestone for many people. As a result of the temporary restrictions put in place by the Welsh Government to control the spread of coronavirus and protect people's health which included restrictions on gatherings and on entering buildings, weddings could not take place. These restrictions have now been eased to allow limited events which solemnise marriage or form civil partnerships. This has been done to allow people, who wish to do so, to meet the fundamental tests of becoming married or forming a civil partnership.

The current restrictions limit what is allowed to the formal elements which provide the legal and spiritual basis on which the marriage or civil partnership is formed. Importantly, this does not include the social gathering, wedding party or 'reception' that many will want to enjoy as part of their day. The public health situation and the risks associated with such gatherings do not allow us to go further at this stage. In deciding whether you want to go ahead with your wedding at this point it is important that you understand what the current rules mean for you.

What is allowed under the current Regulations?

The Regulations allow people in Wales to gather and enter buildings to attend the solemnisation of a marriage or the formation of a civil partnership.

The Regulations also allow places of worship to open for the same purpose, which means that a marriage or civil partnership can take place in places of worship or Register Offices. It is for the place of worship to decide for itself if it does want to open for this purpose, they are not obliged to do so.

Other venues, commonly used for weddings, such as hotels are only able to open for limited purposes under the current Regulations so cannot host events.

How many people can attend?

A 2 metre distance must be maintained between households. This means that the total number who can be involved will be decided by an assessment done, by those managing the venue, of the capacity of the building given social distancing rules. This number will be significantly less than the normal capacity of the building.

The couple having their marriage solemnised or forming the civil partnership are considered as the same household, even if they had previously lived apart. There will be no need to maintain 2 metres distance between them during the event and afterwards they can live together as a new household or be absorbed into the household of either as necessary.

Who should attend?

People should not attend if;

- They are showing symptoms of Coronavirus,
- They are part of a household which is self-isolating

People can attend if:

- They are organising the event or are a participant in the ceremony.
- You have been invited to the event
- You are a carer for someone allowed to attend
- You are attending to raise a lawful impediment to the marriage or civil partnership. (this ensures the ceremony is compliant with relevant law)

Those who are part of an extremely vulnerable or shielding group can attend if they choose to do so but should take additional precautions as directed by those managing the venue

Are there restrictions on what the ceremony can involve?

Because of the public health risks associated with many of the practises normally involved in a solemnisation of marriage or civil partnership formation certain activities are not allowed or are severely restricted. For example:

- Communal singing or chanting would not be allowed. Where safe to do so, an individual may sing with protection provided through the use of screens. Alternatively recorded music may be used.
- Musical accompaniment should be at volumes which don't require raised voices.
- Musical instruments which you blow into should not be used and the use of organs may be restricted.
- Exchange of articles, such as rings, is allowed when accompanied by hygiene and handling procedures which provide a break in the risk of transmission.

- No food or drink should be handled except where it is an essential religious practise and in these circumstances food should be in a sealed container and consumed only within households without sharing cutlery, plates or bowls.
- Good hygiene and social distancing behaviours will be required throughout. The venue for your marriage or civil partnership can advise on appropriate practises and will have the right to cease ceremonies should such guidance be ignored

Marriages and civil partnerships can be broadcast and livestreamed so people who cannot be physically present can attend the ceremony virtually.

Using social distancing, you are allowed to gather outside the venue, enter the building and congratulate the couple inside or outside after the ceremony. Other than these elements, which are essential to the solemnisation of the marriage or the formation of the civil partnership, the normal rules around gatherings apply, this means only two (extended) households may gather outdoors at any one time. As a result it will not be possible for the participants to follow the ceremony with any social gathering except where it is limited to the two households.

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