

Places of worship to re-open for individual prayer

Places of worship across England will be permitted to reopen for individual prayer from Monday 15 June, the Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick confirmed today (Sunday 7 June).

This decision follows discussions between the Government and representatives of major faiths through the Places of Worship Taskforce which the Communities Secretary has chaired.

This move recognises the spiritual and mental health benefits for people being able to pray in their place of worship, and that for some people this cannot be replicated by praying at home.

New guidance will be published shortly to ensure the limited re-opening of places of worship can be done safely and in line with social distancing guidelines. This will recommend the thorough cleaning of shared spaces, hand cleansing at entry and exit and asking worshippers to bring their own items such as a prayer mat or religious text instead of sharing or using communal ones.

Individual prayer will be permitted from 15 June, but communally led prayer, worship or devotion such as services, evensong, informal prayer meetings, Mass, Jumma or Kirtan will not be possible at this stage.

The Government will continue to work with the Taskforce towards the full reopening of places of worship as soon as the scientific advice allows.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

Ensuring places of worship can open again, beginning with individual prayer has been my priority. Their contribution to the common good of our country is clear, as places of solace, comfort, stability and dignity. And the need for them is all the greater as we weather the uncertainties of the pandemic.

I'm pleased this can now happen from 15 June. As Communities Secretary I have worked with faith leaders and representatives to prepare guidance that ensures this can be done safely.

People of all faiths have shown enormous patience and forbearance, unable to mark Easter, Passover, Ramadan or Vaisakhi with friends and family in the traditional way. As we control the virus, we are now able to move forwards with a limited, but important return to houses of worship.

Faith Minister Lord Greenhalgh said:

Religious communities have shown enormous resilience and sacrifice in celebrating significant spiritual moments like Easter, Passover, Ramadan, Eid and Vaisakhi at home during these extraordinary times.

The Government has determined that this is the right time to begin re-opening places of worship for individual prayer.

It's our hope that this is the first step in places of worship reopening fully, when the science supports it. I look forward to continuing to discuss with the Taskforce how to address ongoing practical safety issues in the coming weeks.

Places of worship still have discretion over when they consider it safe to open and may decide to remain closed or reopen at a slower pace if they wish.

Under the existing regulations, funerals are allowed in places of worship where it is possible to do so safely. Other gatherings and services such as baptisms, weddings, supplementary schools, meetings and classes are not permitted. Also places of worship may open for ministers of religion to film or record a service for broadcast, for the hosting of essential voluntary activities such as homeless services, for registered early years and childcare providers and for blood donation sessions. Buildings should also remain closed to tourists.

- The guidance will be available shortly. Faith leaders should carry out a risk assessment of the place of worship and tailor this guidance as appropriate for the venue and practices being carried out. This will be in addition to any risk assessment already in place.
- Individual prayer within a place of worship is defined as a person or household entering the venue to pray on their own and not as part of a group, led prayer or communal act. They should be socially distanced from other individuals or households.
- The government is following the latest scientific and medical advice around how activities such as singing and/or playing instruments can best be managed safely. Further guidance will follow on this shortly, but for now such activity should be avoided.