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GUIDANCE

Coronavirus rules and students: guidance

Guidance for students on coronavirus rules.

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Students in Wales need to be aware of the restrictions on socialising imposed by law in response to the coronavirus. These often differ from the law in other parts of the United Kingdom.

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Many of the restrictions are based on the place where you live and who you live with, in other words your "household".

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In summary:

- people in Wales are not allowed to meet socially indoors with anyone who isn't part of their household
- the only exception to this is when one household agrees to join with another household to form an extended household or "bubble"
- in Wales up to four households can join together to make an extended household and up to 6 people from that household can meet indoors at any one time
- however, extended households are not allowed to meet in an area which has been designated a local health protection area – i.e. where local restrictions apply
- up to 30 people can, however, meet outdoors, but social distancing advice should be followed.

These are legal requirements and students can be given a fixed penalty for not complying or could be prosecuted in the courts.

What is a student's "household"?

Working out what your household is isn't always straightforward for students because it isn't always clear who students live with.

Many students leave their homes to go to university and when they arrive they become part of a different household. This does not necessarily mean, however, that they are no longer part of the home they have left. As many students routinely spend time both away at university and at home, they are considered to have two "households" for the purposes of the coronavirus restrictions.

However, students should be made aware there is an increased risk of spreading coronavirus when moving between their two households. So students are advised to only move between their term-time and out-of-term time households when necessary, for example for work or because of concerns about their wellbeing. Students should also be aware that local restrictions may mean that they would need a good reason to travel.

In addition, to mitigate those risks students should:

- reduce the number of contacts they have with others if they plan to move between their two households
- avoid unorganised gatherings, busy places and large queues
- wear a face covering in indoor public spaces, including in public areas in shared accommodation
- maintain social distance even within their own households for 14 days either before they return home or maintain social distance once they return home
- not share towels, toothbrushes or personal items with anyone in either household.

These measures will help reduce the risk to family, friends and the wider community. Students should also remember that some members of their households, at home or during term-time, will be at higher risk if they catch Covid and our actions affect the lives of others.

Everyone must think carefully about where they go and who they're meeting because the more places we go and the more people we meet – the more chances we have of catching coronavirus.

Who forms part of a student's "household"?

The nature of a student's "household" while at university will depend on the type of accommodation they live in.

In many instances the nature of the accommodation will be such that a student's household will be obvious. For students living in "flat" type accommodation provided by universities where a small number of students have bedrooms and shared facilities such as a bathroom or kitchen in a self-contained unit, the student's "household" is that flat. Similarly for students living in a shared house, the household is made up of those living in the house.

Students are not allowed to socialise indoors with anyone who is not in that household. A household may, however, agree to form an extended household with up to three other households, but this may be difficult because all of the students in each household must agree to this. Students should remember also that local restrictions may prevent extended households from meeting.

For students living in traditional style halls of residence, however, the position is less clear. In those circumstances we do not consider that the two or three hundred students who stay in the building live "together" in the ordinary meaning of that word. As a result we do not consider this to be the student's "household" for the purposes of the coronavirus restrictions. On that basis each student living in a single room in a traditional style hall of residence is a single "household" for the purposes of the rules.

The Welsh Government recognises, however, this is not good for the well-being of those students in such a situation. It is also impractical. As a result the law has been changed to provide that students who live in halls of residence have a reasonable excuse to socialise with those in the hall they share facilities such as kitchens or bathrooms with. Shared facilities will be allocated to specific "contact" groups in order, in effect, to replicate the kind of "household" that exists in "flat" style accommodation. For example in a shared kitchens in a hall of residence, it should be made clear for example that kitchen "A" is allocated to students on floor 1, rooms 1 to 12, kitchen B is for students on floor 2 rooms 13 to 24 and so on. It should also be clearly communicated that facilities are for the exclusive use of those allocated to them and that no other student should be using those facilities. Clear signage should make students aware of this.

This reasonable excuse applies both within the hall of residence and outside but no more than 6 students from each of these groups should meet (indoors) at any one time. Students obviously need to understand who is in their contact group and understand that they shouldn't socialise indoors with anybody outside that contact group (unless they have formed an extended household).

Why is this so strict?

We know that coronavirus spreads easily when people socialise indoors. We also know that people tend not to stick to social distancing practices when they socialise. We need, therefore, to minimise close interaction by reducing the amount of socialising between groups of people.

The more people interact the more people will spread the virus, and where a student tests positive for COVID-19 they along with all others they have come into close contact with will self-isolate. This may mean large numbers of students being asked to self-isolate, which could have an impact on their education.

The Welsh Government knows that this is not what student life is normally about, but sadly we don't live in normal times.

Please help us by sticking to the rules. Please help us keep Wales safe.

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