

11 September 2020

Important update about WI meetings

England

Earlier this week, the Government announced a ban on gatherings, indoors or outdoors, of more than six people in England. You must therefore not meet with people from other households socially in groups of more than six unless the activity falls within an exempted category. This rule, enforceable by law and referred to as 'The Rule of Six' will apply indoors and outdoors, including in private homes.

Gatherings of over six people in England will therefore be unlawful outside of the exempted activity categories, and the potential consequences are dispersal by police or COVID-secure marshals, fines, and possible arrests. This is will be effective from Monday 14 September.

The Government has made a limited number of exemptions:

- where everyone lives together or is in the same support bubble, or to continue existing arrangements where children do not live in the same household as both their parents
- for work, and voluntary or charitable services
- for education, training, registered childcare, or providers offering before or after-school clubs for children
- fulfilling legal obligations such as attending court or jury service
- providing emergency assistance, or providing support to a vulnerable person
- for you or someone else to avoid illness, injury or harm
- participate in children's playgroups
- wedding and civil partnership ceremonies and receptions, or for other religious life-cycle ceremonies – where up to 30 people will be able to attend
- funerals – where up to 30 people will be able to attend
- organised indoor and outdoor sports, physical activity and exercise classes (see the list of recreational team sports, outdoor sport and exercise allowed under the gyms and leisure centre guidance)
- youth groups or activities
- elite sporting competition or training
- protests and political activities organised in compliance with COVID-19 secure guidance and subject to strict risk assessments

As the guidance currently stands, WI meetings are not considered exempt from 'The Rule of Six'. The second bullet point does state there is an exemption 'for work, and voluntary or charitable services', however this does not apply to WI meetings as we are not offering a charitable service.

The inclusion of education is aimed, predominately, at schools, colleges, children and young people's groups and universities.

Sadly, this means that all WI and Federation meetings with more than six people in attendance must be cancelled with immediate effect. The WI resuming meetings guidance is therefore suspended until further notice. We will re-issue it very soon with the new rules taken into account and with ideas on ways some face-to-face activity might be considered within the new guidance, so please keep an eye on social media and My WI for any updates. Some WI activities in groups of more than six may still be able to take place if they fall into the 'organised team sports' category, but we are exploring this further and will include it in our updated guidance. We are also carefully considering if any other WI activities, such as campaign actions and active charity work organised by the WI, falls into the exemptions. A decision on this point will be updated at a later date.

This also applies to AGMs/Annual Meetings, which we know many WIs have been planning for the upcoming month, in order to adhere to constitutional requirements. The new emergency temporary legislation and guidance from the Charity Commission has made provision to the end of this month for virtual and hybrid AGMs, but we know many of you were hoping to use the previous guidance and 30 people limit to deliver face-to-face events. Any face-to-face events planned will sadly have to be postponed to ensure adherence to the new guidance. Like us, the Charity Commission must also now review its guidance based on the Government update this week and we will update you as soon as this revised guidance is published. This guidance will include information on whether the emergency legislation will be extended to December to provide an opportunity for charities to continue to deliver virtual or hybrid AGMs while face-to-face gatherings are still prohibited.

If you are planning to organise breakout group meetings or multiple events for groups of six or less, please apply the usual health and safety guidance. Always remember to wash your hands, cover your face, and keep socially distanced. Further guidance and safety measures will follow from NFWI, but please do consider the safety of members first and foremost if organising any WI meet-up. Whilst these meetings do not constitute full WI meetings and therefore a risk assessment is not mandatory, we would encourage you to undertake a risk assessment for any activity you are planning even with smaller numbers.

We acknowledge that the Rule of Six does give scope for multiple groups of six in COVID-secure venues such as pubs or cafes. However, the guidance also stipulates that people should avoid social interaction with anyone outside the group they are with, which means this is not an appropriate way for WIs to meet up in larger groups. The Government's Rule of Six is attempting to reduce the numbers of people interacting as much as possible to avoid a future national lockdown, and the WI cannot undermine this.

Please check any information and details on [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) as this will always be the most immediate source of any information. A link to the Government's latest update which this guidance is based on is [here](#). We appreciate that government advice is changing fast and this creates anxiety for you and your members. Please be assured that we will share information with you as soon as we receive it and do contact your federation or NFWI if you have any questions or concerns.

Wales

The Welsh Parliament has announced restrictions for how many people will be able to meet indoors. This will apply from Monday 14th September.

At the moment, people are allowed to gather socially indoors with people from up to four other households, but only if they have formed an exclusive extended household (also known as a bubble).

From Monday, only a maximum of six people from the extended household will be able to meet indoors at any one time. This rule applies in pubs and restaurants as well as in people's homes. Children under 11 will not be counted in the six.

The stricter rules for Caerphilly County Borough Council area still applies – extended households are no longer allowed and no social meetings with anyone you don't live with are allowed. This applies in pubs and restaurants as well as in people's homes.

A link to the Welsh Parliament's update is [here](#)