



GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES

Iechyd Cyhoeddus
Cymru
Public Health
Wales

Reference Number: PHW SCD06
Version Number: 3
Date of Next review: Dec 2028

RELIGIOUS OBSERVATION GUIDELINES

Introduction and Aim

Public Health Wales aspires to create a vibrant, inclusive, and healthy culture where people from all backgrounds and religious beliefs are supported to thrive.

Public Health Wales recognises that many religions require time during the day for prayer or meditation and that having support to do this is important to colleagues.

This document outlines the procedure within Public Health Wales to support the religious needs of its people.

Linked Policies, Procedures and Written Control Documents

[All corporate policies and procedures are available on the Public Health Wales website](#)

[Annual Leave and Bank Holiday Policy](#)

[Annual Leave Purchase Scheme](#)

[Flexible Working Policy](#)

[Special Leave Policy](#)

[Work How It Works Best – Agile Working Policy](#)

[Being Our Best](#)

[Respect and Resolution Policy](#)

[All Wales NHS Dress Code](#)

Scope

This guideline should be considered by all employees of Public Health Wales, and those with an honorary contract with Public Health Wales.

Equality and Health Impact Assessment

An Equality, Welsh Language and Health Impact Assessment has been completed and can be viewed on the policy webpages.

Approved by

Leadership Team

Approval Date

18/12/2025

Review Date

18/12/2028

Date of Publication:	26/02/2026
Accountable Executive Director/Director	Director of People and Organisational Development
Author	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager

Disclaimer

If the review date of this document has passed please ensure that the version you are using is the most up to date either by contacting the document author or the [Board Business Unit](#).

This is a controlled document, the master copy is retained by the Board Business Unit

Whilst this document may be printed, the electronic version posted on the internet is the master copy. Any printed copies of this document are not controlled. This document should **not** be saved onto local or network drives but should always be accessed from the [internet](#).

Summary of reviews/amendments

Version number	Date of Review	Date of Approval	Date published	Summary of Amendments
1	2017-18	19/03/18	16/05/18	First Guideline
2	October 2019 – July 2022	17/11/22	01/12/22	<p>Paragraph added in introduction.</p> <p>Paragraph added in section 3 around time to pray.</p> <p>Paragraph added in regard to time off.</p> <p>New section added in regard to Religious Festivals.</p> <p>Detail added into Appendix 1.</p>
3	2025	18/12/25	26/02/26	

1. Introduction

Public Health Wales aspires to create a vibrant, inclusive, and healthy culture where people from all backgrounds and religious beliefs are supported to thrive.

Religious and spiritual beliefs are an important part of many people's lives. Ensuring that people can practice their faith in the workplace contributes to a more inclusive and respectful working environment. At Public Health Wales, we are committed to supporting religious observance - in line with equality legislation and while balancing operational needs.

Legal requirements

Equality Act 2010: Religion and belief are one of the nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, and protection is given to followers of any religion (or any religious or philosophical beliefs) as well as those without a religion or belief.

Employers have a duty to provide reasonable adjustments to accommodate religious observance wherever possible.

Legislation relating to matters of equality in the [Human Rights Act 1998](#) and the [Equality Act 2010](#) prohibits discrimination and victimisation against a person on grounds of religion, belief and non-belief.

[Public Sector Equality Duty:](#) The general duty requires public authorities, in the exercise of their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other unlawful conduct prohibited by the act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic
- foster good relations between people who share and people who do not share a relevant protected characteristic

Public Health Wales is committed to building a psychologically safe environment where diversity is embraced and celebrated and supports colleagues to practice and express their religious beliefs.

We want to understand what matters most to our people and encourage our colleagues to discuss their needs with their manager in the first instance. Our Being Our Best behavioural framework can support how individual colleagues and their managers can work together to accommodate requests for flexible working relating to an individual's religious and spiritual belief.

2. Roles and responsibilities

To create an inclusive culture at Public Health Wales, it is a shared responsibility. Every one of us – organisational leaders, people managers, and colleagues - plays a part in building a workplace where people of all faiths and beliefs feel respected and supported. By valuing religious observance and making space for different practices, we demonstrate our commitment to fairness, equity, and belonging. Together, we can create an organisation where diversity is celebrated, staff are valued for who they are, and everyone can thrive.

2.1 Organisational Leaders

Leaders are responsible for creating an inclusive culture, setting the tone by role modelling our organisational values. They should provide clear guidelines and resources for managers and colleagues. They should acknowledge a range of religious observances to support staff and promote inclusion in Public Health Wales.

As per [Being Our Best](#), organisational leaders should;

- build relationships with and actively participate in our diversity networks and events, really listening to and acting on the experiences of staff groups and communities.

2.2 People Managers

Managers play a key role in putting these guidelines into action by responding to requests promptly with openness, applying accommodations consistently, and fostering a safe space for colleagues to share their needs. Managers should work with colleagues to create schedules that respect religious observances (e.g., prayer times, fasting, holidays). Managers have a role in identifying any cultural awareness issues and strive to create an inclusive culture in their teams. This includes sensitivity will be given to dietary requirements and restrictions at workplace events, meetings, and celebrations.

As per [Being Our Best](#), people managers should;

- show care to my team collectively and individually, securing and sticking to regular time for check-ins and asking 'how are you doing', being present for the response.
- earn trust and show that I am trustworthy, respecting privacy / maintain confidentiality at all times.
- manage people and work according to needs, empowering not over-managing or excessively directing people or situations that do not need it.

- recognise positive and healthy behaviours in the team, highlighting and acknowledging what we want to see more of.

2.3 Colleagues

Colleagues should share their religious accommodation needs early and clearly with managers, be flexible and work with colleagues to find solutions that minimise disruption.

We expect our staff to respect others' religious needs, even if different from their own and avoid making assumptions or negative comments about others' accommodations.

As per [Being Our Best](#), colleagues should;

- take time to consider who needs to participate in discussions and decisions and involve them early.
- actively listen and take time to reflect on the views and experiences of others particularly when they are different to my own.
- am aware of and use the resources we have to help me have honest conversations with colleagues, including when I observe someone else being treated disrespectfully.

3. Bullying and harassment

Public Health Wales is proud of its commitment to creating a workplace with diversity and inclusion at its core, where everyone can be their authentic self and give their best. As a public health institution, we aim to embody inclusivity in all aspects of the work we deliver for the people of Wales.

Public Health Wales will not tolerate any form of bullying and harassment which occurs at work and out of the workplace and will take all practicable steps to avoid and eliminate it as per our [Respect and Resolution Policy](#).

4. Altered hours for religious observation

We recognise and respect the diverse religious practices of our staff. Team members may request altered work hours to accommodate religious observances, such as prayer, fasting, or holidays. Many religions require time during the day for prayer or meditation. Some of the prayer/worship requirements of commonly practised religions and beliefs in the UK are listed at Appendix 1.

Some religions prohibit working on certain days – for instance, from Friday sunset until Saturday sunset in Judaism, and on Sundays in some Christian religious groups. Muslims also observe Ramadan for one month of the year (dates vary each year), which involves fasting during daylight hours.

Requests for altered hours for religious observation should be made as early as possible, and managers will make reasonable efforts to support these requests while ensuring business needs are met. Flexibility, mutual respect, and open communication are key in honouring both individual beliefs and workplace responsibilities.

Flexibility around time allowed for prayer and ablutions can be best achieved by discussion with the person concerned, as individual needs can vary.

5. Religious leave requests

Colleagues may request annual leave for religious festivals, such as Eid, Diwali, Yom Kippur, or Christmas. All leave requests should be given fair consideration in line with service needs, as per the organisation's [Annual Leave Policy](#). Flexible working arrangements to allow for religious observances should be granted where possible, in line with the [Flexible Working Policy](#), and [Work How It Works Best Agile Working Policy](#).

Individuals should make requests for such leave well in advance, to allow managers to support their requests where it is reasonable and practical to do so. There is no right that guarantees time off however, it is good practice to accommodate requests where possible. It may not always be possible to avoid individuals being rostered to work but, it can be avoided by being flexible.

Managers should sympathetically consider such a request where it is reasonable and practical for the colleague to be away from work, and where they have sufficient annual leave entitlement. Where several requests are made for leave on the same day, managers should hold discussions with staff to seek mutually acceptable compromises and solutions.

However, where a colleague requests time off at a particularly busy time, or at a time when the individual's absence would otherwise cause difficulties for the business or the department, or where the amount of time off requested is unreasonable or excessive (taking into account the needs of the business), the organisation reserves

the right to refuse to grant some or all of any of the time off requested.

We acknowledge that different faiths and cultural traditions observe mourning and bereavement in diverse ways. This may include specific rituals, extended periods of reflection, or designated times away from work to honour the passing of a loved one. To respect these practices, reasonable flexibility will be provided to colleagues who require additional time to grieve or observe mourning in accordance with their religious or cultural beliefs.

6. Areas for religious prayer

We recognise and respect the diverse religious and spiritual practices of our people. To support individuals in their faith and belief, Public Health Wales, will provide a quiet, private space for prayer, meditation, or reflection as it is an important aspect of religious inclusion.

- **Multi-faith rooms:** rooms are available across all our buildings, including where staff may work in a Health Board building. Please work with your manager, to find a suitable room. Please contact the Facilities Team, should you have any questions – PHW.Facilities@wales.nhs.uk
- **Quiet space:** flexible use of quiet spaces where dedicated prayer rooms are unavailable.
- **Relevant facilities:** consider religious requirements, such as providing washing facilities nearby for ablution before prayers.
- **Health and safety:** Any space provided for prayer should also comply with health and safety regulations, ensuring that it is safe and fit for purpose.

These spaces are open to people of all faiths and belief systems, and we ask that they be used with respect and consideration for others. Individuals are encouraged to make use of these areas during appropriate times, in agreement with their managers, to ensure that both personal and organisational needs are met.

Colleagues who choose to use the room provided for these purposes are requested to respect the rights of other individuals to observe their personal beliefs and this includes not using the room for eating or drinking.

7. Religious attire

We are committed to respecting and valuing the diversity of our workforce. Employees have the right to wear religious attire, such as hijabs, turbans, kippahs, crucifixes, or other items of faith, as an expression of their beliefs. Restrictions will only apply where there is a clear and justifiable reason, in line with the requirements set out in the [All Wales NHS Dress Code](#).

- **Health and safety:** Staff should not wear any loose clothing that may compromise their health and safety in the workplace.
- **Infection control:** All clinical staff must wear short sleeves or elbow-length sleeves in the workplace to enable effective hand washing techniques. If longer sleeves are worn, these must be rolled to elbow length before carrying out clinical procedures.
- **Open discussion:** Where religious attire is at odds with organisational restrictions, managers and colleagues should work together to find an alternative solution.
- **Accommodation of diversity:** This means if an appropriate risk assessment is completed that temporary sleeves or alternative garments (e.g. disposable oversleeves or cotton underlayers) may be permitted, especially outside of direct patient care, or if they can be removed or adjusted during hand hygiene.

8. Implementation and Training

All employees are required to complete [statutory and mandatory training](#) to ensure a respectful, inclusive, and compliant workplace.

Please visit our [learning and development](#) pages to see additional resources which will increase awareness and understanding of how to develop inclusive practices in the workplace. Our [staff diversity networks](#) host regular awareness raising sessions which can support understanding.

Managers play a critical role in fostering an inclusive workplace and ensuring compliance with statutory and mandatory training in addition to providing guidance and encouraging Participation in any training that supports an inclusive culture in Public Health Wales.

People managers should bring the guidance to the attention of their teams.

9. Equality and Welsh Language

An Equality, Welsh Language and Health Impact Assessment has been completed and has not identified any potential negative impacts (unintended consequences) or gaps.

This guidance will be made available in Welsh on our Policy webpages.

10. Review

This guidance will be reviewed in 3 years' time or sooner if required.

The named lead will monitor this policy to ensure it is compliant with current legislation, to ensure it is effectively implemented, and ensure that it is reviewed in accordance with the timetable for review.

We are continually looking to improve our employment practices and welcome any feedback you may have in relation to this guidance.

Feedback can be provided by emailing PeopleSupport.PHW@wales.nhs.uk or you may wish to feedback via your Trade Union representative.

Appendix 1

Religion or belief	Prayer/worship
Atheism	Belief that there is no God.
Baha'í	Baha'is are required to say one of three prayers during the day. The prayers must be recited in a quiet place and in a south easterly direction to face Qiblih. Two of the three prayers require movement and prostration.
Buddhism	There are a number of different traditions in Buddhism arising from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Different traditions will celebrate different festivals. Some Buddhist traditions do not celebrate any festivals. Buddhist members of staff should be asked which festivals are important to them. Festivals follow the lunar calendar and will therefore not take place on the same day each year.
Christianity	There are a wide variety of Christian Churches and organisations all of which have their own specific needs, rituals and observations. In addition, there are a number of 'holy days of obligation' when Christians may wish to attend a church service and request a late start to the working day, or early finish in order that they can attend their local church. Many practising Christians will wish to attend their Church on Sundays throughout the year.

Hinduism	Hinduism is a diverse religion, and not all Hindus will celebrate the same festivals. Hindu worship is primarily an individual act rather than a communal one, as it involves making personal offerings to the deity. Worshippers repeat the names of their favourite gods and goddesses and repeat mantras. Water, fruit, flowers and incense are offered to God.
Islam	Observant Muslims are required to pray five times a day in a clean, quiet place. Prayer times are dawn, midday, late afternoon, after sunset and late evening. Friday is the most holy day of the week and midday prayers are particularly important. Friday prayers must be said in congregation so a Muslim may wish to travel to the nearest mosque or prayer gathering. Before prayers observant Muslims undertake a ritual act of purification, which involves the use of running water for washing the hands, face, mouth, nose, lower arms and feet. Ramadan might have an impact on individual's performance and flexible working options could assist. Please see appendix 2 for an example of flexible working, which can help staff during this month.
Jainism	Jains are required to worship three times a day - before dawn, at sunset and at night.
Judaism	The Jewish Sabbath and religious festivals all begin at sunset and end at sunset the following day. Practicing Jews

	<p>are required to refrain from work on the Sabbath and most (but not all) Jewish festivals. Practicing Jews may request an early finish ahead of Sabbath or certain festivals to ensure enough time to prepare for them. Festivals do not take place on the same day each year; though remain within seasons, as the Hebrew calendar is a lunisolar calendar.</p>
Rastafarianism	<p>Abrahmic religion considered both a religious movement and social movement.</p>
Sikhism	<p>Sikh worship can be public or private. Sikhs can pray at any time and any place.</p>
Zoroastrians	<p>Zoroastrians are required to pray five times a day, saying a prayer for each part of the day: Hawab (sunrise to midday), Rapithwin (midday to mid-afternoon), Uzerin (mid-afternoon to sunset), Aiwisruthrem (sunset to midnight) and Ushahin (midnight to dawn). Prayers must be said in front of a fire or symbolic replica of one. A prayer is also said before eating.</p>