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RELIGIOUS OBSERVATION GUIDELINES

Introduction and Aim

Public Health Wales aspires to create a vibrant, inclusive, and healthy culture where people from all generations, 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 employees.

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

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
Special Leave Policy

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

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

Approved by

Leadership Team

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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 [Corporate Governance](#).

Summary of reviews/amendments				
Version number	Date of Review	Date of Approval	Date published	Summary of Amendments
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>
1	2017-18	19/03/18	16/05/18	First Guideline

1 Introduction

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

In addition to the moral imperative, religion or belief is one of the nine protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010. People have legal protection from being discriminated against because of religion or belief, or lack of religion or belief, under the Act. People also have an absolute right to hold (with a qualified right to manifest) a religion or belief under Article 9 of the Human Rights Act 1998.

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

So that we are able to understand what matters most to our employees, we encourage colleagues to discuss their needs with their line manager in the first instance

Managers of Public Health Wales will work with employees to agree how these needs can be best met and will work to accommodate requests for flexible working to accommodate religious festivals where possible.

2 Roles and responsibilities

Public Health Wales recognises that to create a psychologically safe environment for all employees, all forms of bullying and harassment will be called out. We are committed to taking all practicable steps to avoid and eliminate bullying and harassment in the workplace.

will not tolerate any form of bullying and harassment and will take all practicable steps to avoid and eliminate this.

All staff have a responsibility to be sensitive when discussing religion and belief and to ensure discussions do not become a source of discomfort or unease for other colleagues.

These guidelines will apply to all employees of Public Health Wales.

3 Procedure/Process/Protocol

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.

Flexibility around time allowed for prayer and ablutions can be best achieved by discussion with the person concerned, as individual needs can vary. Being flexible with the times of normal break periods can often lead to acceptable solutions. It is important to remember that most individuals have had a great deal of experience at fitting such needs around their work.

All employees should be able to pray/worship at work without obstruction. Public Health Wales would like to encourage employees to approach their line manager if they require support to practice and express their religious beliefs.

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. Shift patterns and any necessity for weekend working should be discussed from the first day of employment so that suitable compromises can be reached. Muslims also observe Ramadan for one month of the year, which involves fasting during daylight hours.

Flexible working hours can often accommodate such requirements and assist staff who are observing religious rituals. Where it is impossible to do so for reasons of staffing or other business necessities, it is important to show that every effort has been made to find suitable solutions.

4 Religious festivals

Religious festivals are commonly celebrated on recurring cycles in a calendar year or lunar calendar.

Hundreds of very different religious festivals are held around the world each year and a religious festival is about celebrating something that is special to that religion.

Some of the famous religious festivals include Christmas, Hanukkah, Diwali, Passover, Easter, Holi, Eid –al-Adha, Ramadan and Vesah.

5 Leave requests

Most religions or beliefs have special spiritual observance or holy days when some staff may wish to request time off in order to attend the associated ceremonies or festivals. Employees 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 employees time off however, it is good practice to accommodate requests where possible. It may not always be possible to avoid employees 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 employee 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 an employee requests time off at a particularly busy time, or at a time when the employee'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.

6 Areas for religious prayer

Employees may request access to an appropriate quiet place (or prayer room) to undertake their religious observance.

At Capital Quarter 2, the First Aid room on the 6th Floor is available for the purpose of allowing employees to pray or undertake religious observance. This room is open to all employees, whatever their religion. Employees who do not adhere to any religion or belief may also use this room for the purpose of quiet contemplation or rest. This is currently under-review.

Employees 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.

Not all PHW sites have a dedicated room for prayer/worship however, if a quiet place is available for example, meeting room or library, employees are welcome to use them.

7 Training requirements

Line managers are responsible for explaining and agreeing use of these guidelines with staff and encouraging and understanding the needs of individuals.

Our People and OD Team can also signpost employees to other resources which will increase awareness and understanding of how to develop inclusive practices in the workplace. You can contact a member of the team by e mailing PeopleSupport.PHW@wales.nhs.uk

8 Monitoring compliance

These guidelines will be reviewed every two years or as required to support Public Health Wales policies. Any changes to the guidelines will be agreed in line with the organisation's process for the approval of procedures.

As a user of these guidelines, if you have any additional areas you would like us to consider as part of future reviews of this policy, please e mail us at PeopleSupport.PHW@wales.nhs.uk

Appendix 1

Religion or belief	Prayer/worship
Aeithism	Belief that there is no God
Baha'i	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 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.
Rastafarianism	Abrahmic religion considered both a religious movement and social movement
Sikhism	Sikh worship can be public or private. Sikhs can pray at any time and any place
Zoroastrians	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.

For further guidance see the **Policies, Procedures and Other Written Control Documents Management Procedure (PHW47)**.

Appendix 2

An example of flexible working for Ramadan:

“A few weeks prior to Ramadan, I explained to my manager the importance and significance of the month for me and how flexible working arrangements would make it easier for me to observe fasting. My manager agreed that I could work from home to reduce the burden of travelling and use this time to focus on worship. I combined the flexible working arrangements with booking some days of annual leave and split these into half days to maximise the time, spread over the month. At the end of the month, I booked a day off for Eid but my manager was aware that this would need to be flexible over 2 consecutive days as the day on which Eid falls is based on moon sighting (lunar calendar)”.