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# Covid: Two household limit at Christmas to be made law in Wales

🕒 16 December 2020

## Coronavirus



| Shoppers react to the news of limits for people meeting over the Christmas holidays changing.

## **Only two households - plus an additional single person who lives alone - will be able to meet in Wales over Christmas under new laws.**

The Welsh Government had previously joined with the three other UK nations in agreeing that three households could meet between 23 and 27 December.

But as Covid cases rise, First Minister Mark Drakeford has changed his plans.

England, Scotland and Northern Ireland are sticking to the three household rule.

Opposition parties accused the Welsh Government of causing confusion.

But Mr Drakeford said he was giving "just a single message in Wales" that over that "five day period, only two households, together with a single person household, should be meeting together".

"We'll bring the regulations and the guidance into alignment with one another because it is only a single message," he told BBC Wales.

Health Minister Vaughan Gething said Wales had taken a "big step" breaking away from the UK "settlement" on Christmas rules.

"We've done that because of the evidence, because the advice we've had internally about the fact that we can save more lives to do so," he said during a BBC Wales Live debate.

He added the decision will be unpopular with "those who want the rules to stay as they were, and also those who want to go much further", but that "ultimately, the government has to decide".

### **What are the rules for meeting up at Christmas?**

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Earlier, Prime Minister Boris Johnson had told the Commons "there had been unanimous agreement" with the devolved administrations over the three household rule.

But Mr Drakeford announced his change to the plan in Wales on Wednesday afternoon following mounting pressure from medical professionals - now it will be illegal for three households to join together over the festive period.



| The first minister said people in Wales should do the least they need to do this Christmas

Despite the variation to the rules, the UK, Welsh and Scottish governments **issued a joint statement** saying "a smaller Christmas is a safer Christmas".

It urged people to "think carefully" about the risks of forming a bubble, take precautions to minimise risk by stopping unnecessary social contact and to not stay overnight "unless absolutely unavoidable".

The governments warned against travelling from areas where rates are high to areas where rates are low.

Earlier Mr Drakeford said the situation in Wales was "extremely serious" with one in five tests in the country coming back positive.

## 'Confusion all the way round'

The two household guidance was announced by Mr Drakeford at the Welsh Government press conference on Wednesday lunchtime, but it did not become clear until later in the afternoon that the change would be made law.

It followed a call between ministers of the four nations earlier in the day.

Plaid Cymru leader Adam Price said the announcement that about the two household limit was "the right decision".

But he added: "The way the Welsh Government has arrived at this I think will have led to confusion.

"This is confusion all the way round and that's very, very bad news in terms of public health policy, because we know that public trust and a sense the government is in control is absolutely essential - and the last 24 hours won't have instilled any confidence at all."

Andrew RT Davies, Welsh Conservative health spokesman, accused the first minister of causing confusion earlier in the day.

"A consistent approach for Christmas across the UK should have been adopted by Mark Drakeford," he said.

Mandy Jones from the Independent Reform Alliance in the Senedd said any new law on Christmas restrictions "must be put to a vote of the Senedd".

"This week the health minister complained about UK government information being given to the press, yet again members of the Senedd find out through the media."



Given how strong his message about limiting Christmas contact to two households was, the first minister told me it was "sensible" to be consistent by bringing the law into alignment with that message.

It does mean more variation than many expected between the approach of the four nations during the festive period, but Mark Drakeford insists they're united in their central message which is to keep celebrations small, short and safe.

After the concerns expressed by the medical profession, if this puts Mark Drakeford top of the cautious list of UK leader - even if he's not being as cautious as some were calling for - he won't mind that.

But opposition parties are less impressed with the way the announcement was made.

Plaid called for consistency at lunchtime and the Welsh Conservatives, seem less concerned with the departure from the legal approach in the rest of the UK than in it taking "too long" to get clarity on what the approach would be in Wales.

No lack of clarity about what's coming after Christmas though - full lockdown, reviewed after three weeks, but with no official end date in sight.



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