

COVID-19 - advice for alcohol licensing

The COVID-19 pandemic presents unprecedented challenges with disruption to society likely to last for some time. Pro-active resilience and creativity now will aid in getting back to normal once the pandemic has passed. It is not *'business as usual'* for the licensed trade but the licensing team remains operational with reduced staff and facilities to assist customers in navigating the current period as effectively as possible.

The Licensing Team is maintaining services in balance of supporting local businesses whilst promoting the licensing objectives.

Under the [The Health Protection \(Coronavirus, Restrictions\)\(England\) Regulations 2020](#) many licensed premises have been forced to close. Guidance has been produced for [Businesses-and-premises-to-close](#) during the *'emergency period'*.

These include pubs, clubs and restaurants selling food or drink for consumption on the premises (which includes any seating areas adjacent to the premises).

Businesses are able to continue to sell alcohol for consumption off the premises where authorised by the premises licence. Premises selling food on a delivery and takeaway basis cannot allow consumption on their premises. Shops, supermarkets, off licences and businesses must ensure customers collecting goods and takeaways abide by the social distance rules and not allow consumption of food or drink on the premises.

Premises who wish to sell alcohol as part of a takeaway service or for consumption off the premises must ensure that the Licence covers off sales as part of the licensable activity and must ensure robust age verification measures are put in place to prevent alcohol being provided to minors.

[Advice for Premises with a Premises Licence who want to operate an alcohol delivery service.pdf](#)

Licence fees

Licensing Act 2003 fees are set centrally. Councils don't have flexibility and the Act does not provide any mechanism to refund licence fees.

Premises licences are subject to an annual fee which is due on the anniversary of the grant of the licence. The Council is currently not able to process the reminder letters for annual fees. Once restrictions are lifted and premises are allowed to re-open reminder letters will be issued and

payment will be required within 21 days of the reminder being sent. If the annual fee is not paid the licence will be suspended.

Premises may be closed due to the lockdown when the annual fee becomes due. If no licensable activities are being conducted you may decide not to pay the annual fee and allow your licence to be suspended. Suspended premises licences can be re-instated upon receipt of the annual fee payment. Premises can be open with the licence suspended if no licensable activity is taking place i.e. restaurant selling food for takeaway or deliveries but no alcohol.

Note that payments for all applications must be made online at

<https://www.bedford.gov.uk/licencing/other-licensing-information/on-line-payment/>