

'Targeted unjustly' says hotelier as Welsh hospitality reacts to threat of Covid pass extension

Welsh hospitality is being "targeted unjustly" says a hotelier as the sector reacts to the threat of Wales's Covid pass being extended to pubs, restaurants and cafes.

The country has seen a spike in the case rate since the start of the summer – prompting Welsh Government to bring in Covid passes for nightclubs and large events.

There are now hopes that the peak has passed with case numbers falling over the last week.

Despite that case reduction Welsh Government is set to extend Covid passes to cinemas, theatres and concert halls and First Minister Mark Drakeford warned pubs, restaurants and cafes might also require passes if infections climb again.

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The hospitality sector fears another hit to incomes at a precarious time for many businesses already badly impacted by the pandemic.

Although CBI Wales said if implemented well then it could “help restore business and consumer confidence” in the vital pre-Christmas trading period.

So, what's happening with case rates:

The Delta surge hit the UK this spring as the more transmissible variant saw case rates spike in England and then Scotland.

Case rates in Wales – which avoided the initial surge – have spiked since June with restrictions eased and the country enjoying one of its busiest summers on record with a huge influx of visitors.

Welsh Government removed nearly all restrictions on August 7 – three weeks after England. Mask wearing was retained in retail and on public transport, although compliance has fallen away.

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Cases were 156 per 100K at the start of July and rose to 425 per 100K by the end of August as the Delta variant become the dominant strain in the country.

The return to school saw a further spike, rising to over 700 per 100K earlier this month, by far the highest rate of the UK nations with only the South West of England seeing a similar spike. Both Wales and the South West have been further impacted by errors at a private testing laboratory in Wolverhampton, which resulted in thousands of people wrongly being told their tests were negative.

The number of hospital inpatients with Covid has increased to 773, however thanks to the vaccination programme it remains at

around a third of the peak during the second wave.

Recent days have seen case rates start to reduce with hopes that the increased numbers receiving vaccine boosters and growing natural immunity are starting to help cut infections. Half term could also help cases fall.

The latest 7 day case rate is 618 – down from a peak of 730. The ONS estimate 1 in 40 people in Wales is infected although this data (up to October 22) does lag the latest case numbers.

New Restrictions:

Welsh Government introduced Covid passes for nightclubs and large events from October 11 – with the legislation only scraping through the Senedd after a Conservative MS failed to register his vote. It means people have to show they've been vaccinated or had a negative result from a lateral flow test before gaining entry.

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Scotland has similar rules but UK Government has so far kept Covid passport restrictions for England in its locker.

Welsh Government will now extend Covid passes to cinemas, theatres and concert halls from November 15.

Pubs, restaurants and cafes might also require passes if infections climb.

Reaction:

Seamus O'Keefe, owner of The Chainbridge Hotel, in Llangollen, said: "Again, it appears the hospitality industry is being targeted unjustly, and threatened with the prospect of closure if we don't embrace the idea of Covid passes.



Chainbridge Hotel, Llangollen

“We have seen the effect on footfall that vaccine passports has had in Scotland and France, and such a step will certainly negatively impact hospitality businesses across Wales.

“It would also be very difficult to implement, as most hospitality businesses don’t have door staff at the point of entry to check passes, and the cross border traffic for businesses like ours will again be a key factor as English visitors won’t necessarily be aware of these requirements, if they are introduced.

“All of this at a time when generally speaking it seems rates are now falling, booster injections are rising, and people’s capacity and desire to move forwards living with the virus seems strong. I hope it’s a non-starter and that the Welsh Government consult the industry more widely before even considering such steps.”

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Kate Nicholls, chief executive of UK Hospitality, said that the proposed extension would be “catastrophic” for the industry.

“No furlough, grant or other support, a combination of working from home and wider use of vaccine passports would see many businesses struggling to survive,” she said.

Phil Clapp, CEO of the UK Cinema Association, said: “For cinemas to be singled out for this new measure seems not only illogical but also potentially hugely damaging.

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“As a sector we have worked extremely hard to remain Covid-safe and there seems to be no evidence that our members' sites are a source of transmission – we are aware of no instance of an outbreak of Covid being traced back to a cinema in Wales or indeed anywhere in the UK.”

Ian Price, CBI Wales Director, said: “If implemented effectively, in partnership with business, the Covid pass

system can help restore business and consumer confidence as we approach the all-important festive trading period.”

FSB Policy Chair, Ben Francis, said: “The First Minister has advised pubs restaurants and cafes to ‘prepare for the possibility of Covid passes’. We would also press on Welsh Government that it is important that they also take the opportunity to prepare and build the evidence base on effective action.



Ben Francis, FSB Wales Policy chair

(Image: FSB)

“It is important that Welsh Government learn the lessons from the operation of Covid passes so far and provide a practical

and evidence-based approach. What has worked and what hasn't? What is the impact on the virus?

“It is important that guidance be available with enough time for businesses to prepare, and that it is shaped to the needs of the sectors brought into the Covid pass regulations.

“The challenges to pubs, cafes and restaurants in implementation of Covid passes are very different and often more challenging to those sectors where passes are already in operation. So it is important that guidance is easy to follow, is practical, and allows businesses to continue to operate in a way that works for them and for the public.”

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