

Hertfordshire County Council is committed to promoting diversity, inclusion, and equality of opportunity both as a major employer and as a provider of services to the local community. This commitment is embedded within our People Strategy and Corporate Plan, which guide how we support our workforce and deliver services to residents.

In January 2024, the Council demonstrated its ongoing commitment to community cohesion by signing Hertfordshire's first Faith Covenant, alongside 22 faith leaders from Bahá'í, Christian, Hindu, Islam, Jain, Jewish, Quaker, Sikh, and interfaith communities. This covenant represents a shared pledge to work collaboratively with faith communities in delivering inclusive and respectful public services.

The Diversity, Inclusion and Wellbeing Team works collaboratively with internal stakeholders and community partners to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion is embedded in everything we do.



**Our work is guided by the Council's RISE values:**

- Residents** – Putting people at the heart of everything we do
- Integrity** – Acting with honesty and transparency
- Sustainably** – Making decisions with future generations in mind
- Equality** – Treating everyone fairly and with respect

These values support the OneHCC ethos, which promotes collaboration, shared purpose, and a culture of respect across the organisation.

For more information, including resources such as the Equality Impact Assessment toolkit and translation and interpreting services, search "Diversity and Inclusion" on the intranet.

You can access a wide range of data, information and intelligence relating to the county of Hertfordshire via the Herts Insight pages

**Population | Herts Insight**

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# Understanding Religion and Belief in Hertfordshire

**This document aims to support inclusive practice through awareness of religion, belief, and their associated cultural expressions.**

To support service planning, delivery, and awareness, we are keen to enable colleagues to understand the communities they serve. Sharing information about religious and cultural practices aims to support staff to provide inclusive, respectful, and person-centred services and will enable enhanced awareness and sensitivity. However, it is important not to assume that all individuals from a particular background will follow the same practices.

This information is provided as general guidance only. Individuals and families may have their own unique cultural preferences, which should always be respected in line with the council's person-centred approach. There may be situations where it is not possible to fully accommodate cultural needs, such as in relation to domestic violence, child protection, health and safety consideration and situations where human rights are at risk.












There should be recognition of the fact that traditions may differ greatly from one area to another like languages and dialects i.e. there isn't just one culture but a multitude of cultures/traditions across the regions. In addition, colleagues are encouraged to be mindful of gender identity and how it may intersect with cultural and religious practices, particularly in frontline and emergency situations. Sensitivity, respect, and inclusive communication are key to supporting all individuals effectively. Please approach each situation with sensitivity, flexibility, and respect for individual needs and to discuss with colleagues when unsure of how to respond.



For help and information email us at [equalities@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@hertfordshire.gov.uk)

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Religion or Belief (numbers in Hertfordshire*)	Place of Worship Holy Scripture	Traditional Greeting	Diet	Relevance to Our Work	Managing Emergency Situations	Languages Spoken
Baha'i  (148 - 0.01%)	Meetings are held in homes or hired halls Kitáb-i-Aqdas	“Allah-u-Abha” (God is most glorious) may be used between Bahá’ís but generally there is no special greeting	No formal dietary requirements, although Baha’is do not drink alcohol unless prescribed by a doctor	No particular requirements beyond general respect for the person Baha’is may wish to say their daily obligatory prayer in a private place Check with the person or their family for their preferences	No specific restrictions on physical contact	Mainly English, also Farsi, Arabic and other languages
Buddhism  (6,562 - 0.55%)	Buddhist temple or Gompa Tripitaka	“Hello” or “Namaste” by pressing palms together and bowing the head slightly forward	No universal restrictions. Many Buddhists are vegetarian or vegan, following the principle of non-harm (ahimsa). Some avoid alcohol and pungent vegetables like garlic and onion	When entering a Buddhist home, it is respectful to remove shoes and bow slightly to any visible shrine. Respect for quiet and mindfulness is appreciated	Treatment by medical staff of any gender or religion is generally accepted. Some may request a quiet space for meditation or a small altar near the bed	English, Cantonese, Hakka, Japanese, Thai, Tibetan, Sinhalese, and others
Christianity  (557,117 - 46.47%)	Church Bible	“Peace be with you” (used on religious occasions); no specific everyday greeting	Generally no restrictions. Some Christians avoid alcohol or stimulants; others may follow Jewish dietary customs or be vegetarian	Cultural and language preferences may vary by background. It is best to check with the family for any specific needs	Most Christians are generally comfortable with appropriate physical contact, regardless of gender	English and the individual's native language
Hinduism  (35,545 - 2.97%)	Mandir/Hindu temple Bhagvad Gita	“Namaste” (I greet you respectfully) by pressing palms together and bowing the head slightly forward	Some Hindus are strictly vegetarian and avoid poultry, fish and eggs as well as any products containing animal fat. Some Hindus do not drink alcohol Hindus strictly avoid beef	It is customary to take your shoes off at the entrance of a Hindu household. Many will appreciate a simple greeting in their own language. Avoid arranging formal meetings on major festival days or shortly after a family member has passed away (unless invited, or for religious purposes).	Treatment by medical staff of any religion is permitted. Hindus usually prefer to be treated by members of the same sex. Some Hindus may not be fluent in English If you need to remove items such as neck beads, note that these may be sacred and you should place them elsewhere, eg around their wrist.	English, Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, Punjabi, Tamil, French, Swahili and many more
Humanism  ( 211 - 0.02%)	N/A N/A (Humanists are non-religious)	No specific greeting	No specific requirements; some may follow a vegan or vegetarian diet for ethical reasons	Humanists may represent non-religious individuals in official settings, such as providing pastoral care in hospitals	No specific restrictions on physical contact	English or any other language
Islam  (47,378 - 3.95%)	Masjid/Mosque Qur'an	“Assalaam-o-Alaykum” (Peace upon you) and in reply – “Wa-Alaykum-us-Assalaam” (Peace upon you also)	All pig products (including pork, ham and bacon) and alcohol are forbidden. Meat must be Halal; some accept Kosher. All fish are generally permitted.	Shoes are removed when entering homes. Physical contact (e.g. handshakes) may be avoided, especially between genders. Women may wear a Hijab when visited by men; some may not allow men to enter the home if alone	Treatment by any medical staff is allowed, but same-sex staff are preferred. A chaperone may be acceptable if same-sex staff are unavailable. Some Muslims may not be fluent in English	English, Arabic, Bengali, Dari, Farsi, Gujarati, Kurdish, Punjabi, Pashto, Turkish, Urdu, Somali and others.
Jainism  (1,773 - 0.15%)	Dehrasar/ Jain temple Agamas/ Sutras	“Jay Jinendra” (bringing palms together honouring those who have conquered their inner negativities like anger, pride, deceit, greed)	Jain diet is based on minimising violence to living beings and is strictly vegetarian with no alcohol, meat, fish, poultry or eggs.  Devout Jains will also not eat root vegetables or honey (thought to contain greater number of living organisms)	It is customary to take your shoes off at the entrance when entering a Jain household, greeting them in their own language; general respectful behaviour. They may prefer not to shake hands	Treatment by medical staff of any religion is permitted but Jains usually prefer to be treated by members of the same sex. Some elderly Jains may not be fluent in English	English, Gujarati, Hindi, Marwari
Judaism  (26,436 - 2.21%)	Synagogue The Torah	Jewish greetings vary for e.g. ‘Shabbat Shalom’ on Shabbat, ‘Good Yom Tov’ on festivals is used.	Any pork product is completely forbidden which includes, ham, bacon and gelatine made from pork products. Shellfish is also not eaten at all Red meat and poultry must comply with kosher standards of slaughter	Avoid arranging meetings on the Sabbath (sundown on Friday evening to nightfall on Saturday) and on other main holidays such as Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot (Tabernacles), Pesach (Passover) and Shavuot (Pentecost). The hand shaking is different depending on the observance level such as the Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox . Jewish practice varies across different denominational and cultural backgrounds	For some it is not usually acceptable to be touched by someone who is not a member of their close family However, the need to save life always takes precedence within Judaism which means that on a Shabbat or Jewish festival a phone can be used as well as getting into or driving a car	English, Hebrew, Yiddish
Paganism  (995 - 0.08%)	Outdoors preferred; some may use a small indoor altar with ritual objects	“Merry Meet”, “Wassail,” “Blessed be”	No universal dietary rules; many Pagans are vegetarian or vegan by choice, often for ethical or spiritual reasons	Respect for nature and personal spiritual practices is central. Customs vary, so it is best to ask individuals about preferences	No specific physical contact restrictions; some may use spiritual tools (e.g. amulets, candles) or request quiet space for rituals	Mainly English; some may also speak regional or ancestral languages depending on tradition (e.g. Welsh, Cornish, Gaelic)
Sikhism  (6,016 - 0.50%)	Gurudwara The Guru Granth Sahib	“Sat Shri Akal” - by putting together two hands and bowing the head slightly forward	Practising Sikhs are usually vegetarian or vegan and avoid eggs, chicken, and fish. Those who eat meat generally avoid beef. Tobacco, alcohol, and drugs are forbidden	Shoes are removed when entering Sikh homes. It is respectful to greet in their language and ask how they prefer to be addressed (e.g. by given or family name)	Sikhs usually prefer same-sex medical staff. Some elderly Sikhs may not be fluent in English.	English, Gurmukhi Punjabi, Hindi, Pushto and Dari
Zoroastrianism  (178 - 0.01%)	Agiary/Fire temple Avesta	“Hamazor hama asho-bed” (May we all be united in strength and righteousness)	Some avoid pork and beef; some are vegetarian. It is best to check with the family for specific dietary or religious requirements	Meetings should be arranged with sensitivity to any family preferences or religious practices	No specific physical contact restrictions.	English, Parsi, Gujarati, Persian