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Britain will relax pub licensing rules during the World Cup

Longer opening hours and easier outdoor seating aim to help hospitality businesses capture more match-day trade.

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The British government said it will relax licensing rules for pubs and bars during the World Cup, allowing venues to stay open later and making it easier to expand outdoor drinking areas as officials try to support hospitality businesses during the tournament.

The announcement, published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on June 8, said the temporary changes are meant to help football fans watch and celebrate matches while giving local operators a chance to capture more trade. Under the plan, pubs and bars will be able to extend opening hours during the competition, and temporary permissions will allow larger terraces and other outside seating areas.

The government said the measures are intended to create a stronger atmosphere around matches and to help local businesses benefit from higher foot traffic tied to the tournament. It also urged customers to celebrate responsibly and follow safety guidance.

For Britain’s drinks trade, the move could have a direct effect on where alcohol sales take place during the World Cup. Longer trading hours may shift more beer, wine and spirits consumption into pubs and bars, especially during late matches and post-game gatherings. Easier access to temporary terrace space could also increase on-premise sales while lowering some compliance costs for hospitality operators that want to serve customers outdoors.

The policy comes at a time when many pub and bar operators are still looking for ways to raise revenue through major live events. International football tournaments have long been important trading moments for the on-trade, particularly for beer-led venues, but wine, ready-to-drink products and spirits can also benefit when larger groups stay longer and order across several rounds.

Outdoor service has become an increasingly important part of that business model. Expanded terraces can help venues add capacity without changing their indoor footprint, which matters during high-demand periods such as major sporting events. In practice, that can mean more seats available for match screenings, more flexibility for operators managing crowd flow, and more opportunities to serve drinks over a longer period.

The government did not detail in the announcement how late venues may remain open in every case or how local implementation will work across different areas. In Britain, licensing decisions often involve both national rules and local authority oversight, so the practical effect may depend on how councils apply temporary permissions and manage public safety concerns.

Still, the direction of policy is clear: ministers want pubs and bars to play a central role in World Cup celebrations. That reflects the place those venues hold in British social life, especially during football tournaments, when licensed premises often become gathering points for communities as well as commercial hubs for food and drink sales.

The reference to outside seating is also notable because pavement service has been a recurring issue for hospitality businesses since temporary pandemic-era measures showed how valuable outdoor trading could be. Any easing of terrace rules during a major event is likely to be watched closely by operators who have argued that simpler licensing can help them respond faster to peaks in demand.

For drinks suppliers, brewers and wholesalers, the announcement may signal a short-term lift in orders if operators expect stronger match-day traffic. Demand patterns during tournaments often favor draft beer and packaged lager, but venues with broader beverage programs may also use extended hours to promote sparkling wine, cocktails and premium spirits tied to celebratory occasions.

At the same time, later opening hours can bring operational pressures. Venues may need more staff, tighter stock planning and stronger crowd management. Local residents and councils may also raise concerns about noise or disorder if celebrations continue late into the night. That is why the government paired the announcement with a reminder about responsible enjoyment and safety.

The World Cup has repeatedly prompted temporary licensing adjustments in Britain when matches involving England or other high-interest fixtures were expected to drive unusually large crowds. This latest move suggests ministers see similar economic value in giving hospitality businesses more room to trade during one of the busiest periods on the sports calendar.

By linking extended hours with easier use of outdoor space, the government is addressing two of the main constraints pubs face during major events: time and capacity. For beverage companies that depend on pub sales, even a short-lived easing can matter if it increases dwell time, boosts average spend per customer or encourages consumers to choose licensed venues over drinking at home.

The announcement did not include financial estimates for how much extra revenue pubs or drinks suppliers might generate during the tournament. But for an industry where margins are often tight, even temporary regulatory relief around opening hours and terrace use can shape sales volumes in meaningful ways when demand is concentrated around nationally watched matches.