

World Cup 2026: licensing hours and TENs

The FIFA Men's World Cup 2026 will provide a valuable trading opportunity for pubs, bars, clubs and other hospitality operators. Premises intending to show matches should now check whether their existing licence permissions are sufficient, particularly where later kick-off times may affect trading plans.

The Government has confirmed a contingent national relaxation of licensing hours in England and Wales for certain World Cup 2026 matches involving a home nation. The relaxation will help qualifying on-trade premises, but it is limited in scope and should not be treated as a blanket extension for the tournament.

What is covered?

The relaxation will apply to on-trade premises in England and Wales that are already licensed until 23:00 for on-sales of alcohol and, where relevant, late-night refreshment. When a qualifying home nation match is being played, hours will be extended as follows:

- **Kick-offs from 5pm up to 9pm:** extension from 23:00 to 01:00.
- **Kick-offs after 9pm up to 10pm:** extension from 23:00 to 02:00.

The relaxation applies to England and Wales fixtures in the Round of 32, Round of 16, quarter-finals, semi-finals, bronze medal match and final. Group stage fixtures, matches kicking off before 17:00 or after 22:00, and matches not involving a home nation will not benefit from the national extension.

Key limitations

The relaxation does not override existing premises licence conditions. Conditions dealing with matters such as door supervision, CCTV, capacity, noise management, external areas and dispersal will continue to apply. Operators should check their licence conditions before promoting fixtures, particularly any restrictions on external areas, outdoor bars, use of screens, noise, smoking areas, children, glassware, capacity, door staff, last entry and dispersal.

Premises with an earlier terminal hour, or operators wishing to trade beyond the extended hours, will need to consider whether a Temporary Event Notice is required.

Is showing football licensable?

Showing live football on television at licensed premises will not usually be a licensable activity on its own. However, related activities may still be licensable or restricted by the premises licence, such as the sale of alcohol, late night refreshment, regulated entertainment in some cases, use of external areas, and any event-specific conditions. Operators should not assume that being allowed to show the match means the wider matchday operation is automatically permitted.

Outdoor screenings and external areas

Where matches are shown outdoors, operators should check whether the relevant external area is included within the licensed area and whether the premises licence imposes restrictions on its use. Particular attention should be given to terminal hours for external areas, outdoor bars, amplified sound, temporary screens, customer capacity, barriers, stewarding, toilet provision, smoking areas, neighbour impact and dispersal.

Large outdoor screenings can materially change the risk profile of a premises, even where they take place within the licensed area. Operators should prepare an event-specific risk assessment and consider whether a TEN, variation, additional security, revised dispersal arrangements, or prior engagement with the licensing authority and police are appropriate.

Police and licensing authority advice

Whilst we have seen advice from the police or licensing authority positioned in a way that may suggest otherwise, advice does not carry the same weight or implication as a premises licence condition. That said, responsible authorities are a credible source of advice and it should be borne in mind that if an incident occurs and sensible advice from the authorities has been ignored, it is likely to be treated as an aggravating factor in any subsequent enforcement proceedings.

Temporary Event Notices

TENs remain an important planning tool for fixtures falling outside the national relaxation, or where additional hours or licensable activities are required. A standard TEN must be given at least 10 clear working days before the event. A late TEN must be given no earlier than 9 clear working days and no later than 5 clear working days before the event. "Clear working days" excludes the day of submission, the day of the event, weekends and bank holidays.

Next steps

Operators should review their premises licence, identify the fixtures they intend to show, check which matches may fall within the national relaxation, and submit TENs in good time where additional permissions are needed. Staffing, door supervision, dispersal, resident impact and noise control should also be considered as part of the matchday plan.

The national relaxation is welcome, but it is conditional and limited. Early planning will reduce the risk of missed trading opportunities or licensing non-compliance.

Our Licensing team advises hospitality businesses on TENs, licence variations and operational planning for major sporting events. If you would like to discuss how the World Cup licensing rules may affect your venue, please contact a member of our team.