



# HM Prison & Probation Service

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I'm writing to keep you up to date with the latest situation in prisons as we continue to manage the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over the last few weeks and months, we have been gradually easing the restrictions that were introduced into prisons in March. This has been a careful and considered process – prisons remain high-risk environments as large groups of people live in close proximity to one another.

We recognise that this has been an extremely challenging period for you and your loved ones. Our aim has been to reintroduce as many aspects of normal, day-to-day life in prisons as we can, whilst prioritising the safety of everyone. However, the COVID-19 situation across the country is now worsening, and impacts will be experienced in prisons. As we have done throughout this period, we will continue to balance the health risks posed by COVID-19 with the mental health and wellbeing of those in our care.

## This week's announcement on new COVID-19 measures

Given the rising number of cases in the broader community, you will be aware that the Government has this week announced new measures to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Working closely with the public health authorities, we are continually reviewing and monitoring our approach based on the situation as it changes. Following this week's announcement about the introduction of tighter restrictions across the country, we will assess the most appropriate response for the operation of prisons. However, in the meantime, **there will be no immediate change to our operations**. Establishments will decide what aspects of the regime are appropriate, taking account of public health advice.

## Visits

We recognise how important it is for many of you to visit your loved ones. Almost all prisons across England and Wales have over the past few months re-started social visits, although individual prisons continue to monitor this on a local level and may need to restrict or suspend visits in the event of future local outbreaks.

Visits have been operating differently over the last few months. We cannot run as many as we used to because of the need to socially distance and to do more frequent deep cleans. I know that these restrictions can make visits harder, but we're taking advice all the time about the things we need to do to keep people safe.

I would urge you to read [the guidance about visiting someone in prison](#). To avoid putting people at risk, it is vital that you do not visit a prison if you are self-isolating or if you have [symptoms of COVID-19](#). I'd like to thank you for your support and understanding - by following these guidelines you're helping to keep your loved ones and others safe.

## **Other ways to stay in touch**

In addition to face-to-face visits, there are [a range of other ways to stay in touch](#) with loved ones. We have also now rolled out [video calling](#) to over 100 prisons. Over 22,000 calls have been made, providing prison residents with a new window into family life during these difficult times.

As always, if you are worried that your family member in prison is struggling to cope at any point, please [contact the prison](#). Please also encourage your family member to speak to someone about it – such as a member of staff, a Listener, The Samaritans or other sources of support. If you have general enquiries about a family member in prison, you should either contact the Family Services Provider for the prison or the Prisoners' Families Helpline on 0808 808 2003 or by email on [info@prisonersfamilies.org](mailto:info@prisonersfamilies.org).

## **Communicating public health advice**

I understand the importance of continuing to keep people in prison up to date with the latest information. As well as all the communication that takes place within prisons, I also provide written updates to prison residents and provide briefing and answer questions in a weekly slot on prison radio.

The consistent message throughout this period has been the need for everyone to follow public health advice. We have been constantly reminding staff and prison residents about the vital importance of continuing to be alert to the risks. Social distancing, good hand hygiene and the need to follow safe procedures remain our best defence against the virus. Our ability to maintain reduced restrictions in prison regimes depends on our success in keeping infection levels low.

This is a constantly changing picture and we are closely monitoring the situation to ensure that we can respond quickly and effectively to protect the people in our care and our staff.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the role that so many of you have played in helping to keep your loved ones safe and well. I know that support from families has been vital in helping many of our prison residents cope with this difficult period. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



**PHIL COPPLE**

Director General of Prisons