



HM Prison &  
Probation Service

Official - Sensitive

# COVID-19 Operational Guidance

## Temporary regime to reduce risk

24 March 2020

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# Introduction

## Introduction

On Monday 23 March 2020, the government announced new rules on staying at home and away from others as part of the public health measures in response to the coronavirus (COVID 19) pandemic.

These rules explained that the single most important action we can all take, in fighting coronavirus, is to stay at home in order to protect the NHS and save lives. When we reduce our day-to-day contact with other people, we will reduce the spread of the infection. That is why the government introduced three new measures.

1. Requiring people to stay at home, except for very limited purposes
2. Closing non-essential shops and community spaces
3. Stopping all gatherings of more than two people in public

Every citizen must comply with these new measures.

In prisons, this means that people in prison will spend more time in their cells. They will, however, be given access to essential services including meals, showers, telephone contact with loved ones and legal advisors, access to health services, and where possible time in the open air.

These measures are part of the nationwide efforts to fight coronavirus. They are temporary and the government have stated that they will review the restrictions within three weeks. Their review will take into account the best public health advice. The intention is to ensure that we take the action that protects everyone but that we restrict people no more than is necessary and only for as long as is necessary.

The document outlines a framework for prison establishments to implement a temporary regime that seeks to apply the principles of the Government guidance to the prison setting, while also ensuring that essential services are delivered and individual rights are respected.

## Temporary regime activities

Business as usual cannot carry on in the face of this extraordinary public health threat. We all have to minimise contact between people in order to reduce the opportunities for coronavirus to spread. This is affecting daily life throughout the country, and prisons are part of the fight against coronavirus.

With immediate effect Governors need to review every aspect of their daily regime so as to minimise contact:

**All non-essential activities involving groups of people should be stopped. This includes social visits, education, non-essential work, association, communal dining, periods of mass prisoner movement and access to the gymnasium.**

Guidance on other elements of regime is provided below, which has been designed to provide the best balance between individual safety and ensuring that basic needs are met. This should be implemented with proper consideration to the core government guidance that all persons should avoid contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus (which may include high

temperature and/or a new and continuous cough) and where they are in the same place as other people, maintaining a space of two metres between themselves and any other person to minimise opportunities for transmission of the virus.

Issue	Guidance
Work	<p>Essential work can continue subject to the appropriate considerations. Where staffing level allows, prison cleaners should be unlocked to perform cleaning and should be briefed regularly on the social distance measures. The equipment should be disinfected afterwards and waste appropriately disposed of. Laundries must continue to operate. Catering should be maintained to sustain effective functioning of the establishment. When preparing meals the rules of social distancing still apply and persons should work at a distance of 2 metres apart. Only people essential to the process should be present. Where available, additional protective equipment should be provided. There may be other roles that are locally assessed to be essential including maintenance of buildings and grounds, administrative tasks and peer support. It is for Governors to determine the roles that are essential within their establishment, but this must be judged within the general framework that contact between people should be minimised.</p>
Use of the phone	<p>Prisoners should have regular access to the phone. Those with in-cell telephones should be reminded to clean the equipment after every use and provided with products with which to do so. For establishments without in-cell technology alternative mobile options are being explored. Where possible, those without access to an in-cell telephone should be unlocked in small numbers for timed access to a communal phone. Staff should take account of social distancing in areas where phones are located close to each other. The precise number unlocked at any time must be judged locally and should be such that this activity is supervised so as to maintain social distancing.</p>
Access to showers	<p>Prisoners should have regular access to showers and sufficient hygiene materials. Small numbers should be unlocked so that the showers available are used efficiently. Prisoners do not need to be unlocked individually for this. Prisoners who are sharing a cell will be able to use the same shower area as they are classed as a 'household' under social distancing guidance. The precise number unlocked at any time must be judged locally and should be such that this activity is supervised so as to maintain social distancing. Shower areas must be cleaned daily in line with national cleaning guidelines.</p>
Access to open air	<p>Prisoners should have regular access to the open air. Prisoners need not be unlocked individually for this, small groups of people may be given access so that an efficient system of access is maintained. Staggered exercise for each wing could be introduced to allow a reduced number out at a time. The precise number unlocked at any time must be judged locally and should be such that this activity is supervised so as to maintain social distancing.</p>
Serving of Meals	<p>Prisoners do not need to be unlocked individually for this. Small groups of people may be unlocked so that an efficient system is maintained. A reduced number of prisoners working on a servery should be used. The precise number unlocked at</p>

	any time must be judged locally and should be such that this activity is supervised so as to maintain social distancing.
Visits	Due to restrictions on travel and social contact, it is not possible to maintain domestic or official visits at this time. This is an extraordinary measure during this period in which the nation faces an extreme public health threat. These will be restored at the earliest opportunity, as soon as it is safe to do so.
Healthcare and medication	Prisoners do not need to be unlocked individually for these activities. Small groups may be unlocked so that an efficient system is maintained. The precise number unlocked at any time must be judged locally and should be such that this activity is supervised so as to maintain social distancing.

Prisoners in open establishments generally have unrestricted access to facilities such as phones, showers, time in time in the open air and therefore special measures need not be put in place to provide access to these facilities. However, prisoners should be informed that they must observe the national guidance. They should remain in their place of residence except for:

- Getting basic necessities such as food, toiletries and canteen from official sources
- One form of outdoor exercise a day, alone or with one other person they are co-located with
- To access medical and social care
- Going to and from work if they are undertaking essential work

Non-essential activity in groups must be suspended including any sports activities, education, programmes, communal dining or gymnasium sessions. Any activities that potentially involve people going to the same place, such as the serving of meals, must be managed and supervised so as to ensure that social distancing is maintained.

Particular consideration should be given to how social distancing is achieved on a shared residential unit, dormitory or billet in an open prison. In circumstances where prisoners are living in very close proximity, sharing cooking and bathing facilities, the whole unit may constitute a 'household' under government guidance so that association can continue within that unit. This will be a judgement in the individual circumstances.

Whilst ROTL may still take place, it will be by exception. Work placements that have been given key worker status in the community may continue e.g. prisoners employed in food production, distribution and retail should continue on ROTL wherever possible. In special circumstances, resettlement, childcare and special purpose ROTL may continue to be available provided the applicant can demonstrate that they are participating in an essential service or can observe the government guidance on social distancing for the duration of the ROTL. Governors have discretion to make the necessary judgements.

More guidance is available from the UK government at the following link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/874714/Full\\_guidance\\_on\\_staying\\_at\\_home\\_and\\_away\\_from\\_others.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874714/Full_guidance_on_staying_at_home_and_away_from_others.pdf)

## Special measures to support prisoners

In light of these extraordinary circumstances, a package of measures will be offered in order to support prisoners during this period. This is to ensure that they have access to activities, their basic needs can be met and they can maintain contact with their families. Whilst some measures are in the process of being implemented (such as access to additional in cell telephones) and others remain under development, the following measures **must** be put in place:

- There will be no charges for access to televisions and normal incentives scheme restrictions on access to TVs will be lifted. Local arrangements should be made to implement this immediately.
- Pay will continue for existing employment
- Any local schemes that offer additional letters, phone credits or other incentives should continue.

It is essential that regular communication is maintained with prisoners locally so that they understand what is happening, why it is happening and that we appreciate that this will have a significant impact upon them.

## Shielding

The latest Government guidance includes a section on social shielding which is intended to protect “people who are at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) because of an underlying health condition”. The latest guidance identifies that shielding of high risk individuals is particularly important where there are high numbers of people with a pre-existing weakness in close proximity. A list of the health conditions that are included in the heightened risk list is provided on the link below. NHS England is directly contacting every person with relevant conditions by 29 March 2020, including serving prisons who will be contacted via their prison healthcare provider.

In the community those at heightened risk are advised to self-isolate (on their own or with members of their immediate household who provide essential care to them) and avoid any-face to face contact for a period of 12 weeks from the date on the NHS letter they receive. People giving essential support to these persons on a sessional basis can continue to do so but must immediately self-isolate and cease visiting if they become symptomatic. Those people living with a person of heightened risk need not self-isolate with them if not providing essential care to them, however these people must strictly follow social distancing guidance in proximity to the affected person.

Prison Heads of Healthcare need to be aware of the latest government guidance and take steps to identify all prisoners with conditions that increase their risk of infection. Heads of Healthcare must discuss this issue with establishment Governors or Directors and incorporate the management of this group into local healthcare plans. In adherence with national guidance, those prisoners identified as being at heightened risk will be required to follow social shielding guidance and self-isolate for a period of at least 12 weeks from the date at which they are notified.

Those prisoners requiring social shielding will have to adhere to a separate regime. People in this group will need to remain in their cell as much as possible. When they are unlocked in order to access showers, phonecalls and other necessities, they should be unlocked individually. Where this is not possible, public health advice should be sought on alternative arrangements. Ideally, those prisoners who are being shielded should be located in a single cell.

Staff assisting/supervising these prisoners should pay particular attention to maintaining high levels of personal hygiene and adhering to social distancing regulations wherever possible. Food should be delivered to the cell door or they should collect this individually. Where food is taken to their cell, this should be done with as much space as practical being maintained between the

prisoner and the staff member. For instance the staff member placing the meal in the cell at a point away from the prisoner is a more effective method than passing it from one person to the next. Where possible social shielding prisoners should be the first to be given the opportunity to use equipment or access a service. This means that all equipment and surfaces must be cleaned at the start of the day before use by a socially shielding prisoner.

The protection of these individuals and provision of care equivalent to that which would be provided in the community needs to be factored into the local healthcare delivery plan. Establishments need to give particular consideration to the cases of prisoners who, until recently were in receipt of social care packages in the establishment as these may not now be supported by Local Authorities and may therefore need to be maintained by local healthcare practitioners. Further guidance on social shielding is provided in the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>