

Ministry of Justice

Covid-19 Stakeholder Update / 24.03.20

This is the Ministry of Justice's regular stakeholder communications update service. This is intended to signpost the latest Covid-19 guidance and central government updates.

We would find it helpful to know about your own communications plans and any intel that will help inform our communications moving forwards. If you know an organisation which should be added to the list please do get in touch at samantha.abrahams@justice.gov.uk or thomas.cracknell@justice.gov.uk.

Please find today's update below

- We have robust and well-established plans to ensure we can continue to deliver key services across the justice system.
- Legislation is being sought through an emergency bill in response to the virus that could extend the circumstances in which a court can direct the use of audio or video links.
- Prisons are well prepared to take immediate action wherever cases or suspected cases are identified, including the isolation of individuals where necessary.

HMPPS

NEW: Following instructions for people to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives, introduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, prison visits are temporarily cancelled. This is to ensure prisons are complying with social distancing rules and to protect staff and prisoners. We are advising people who have booked visits today not to attend and to stay at home. We will continue to provide updates on the [GOV.UK coronavirus and prisons page](#).

To help maintain vital family contact at this time, we have announced today that prisons will receive 900 secure phone handsets. Ministers have approved use of 900 locked SIM card handsets, allowing risk-assessed prisoners to speak to a small number of pre-authorised contacts. A full press release can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prison-visits-cancelled>

In addition, there are a number of other ways to contact someone in prison if you are unable to visit them:

- Leave a voice message using the [Prison Voicemail Service](#)
- Send them an email using the [Email a prisoner service](#).
- [Write to them](#).

Find out more here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-and-prisons>.

The National Probation Service continues to operate as an essential public service and will continue to supervise offenders in the community. The methods of supervision may be carried out differently to accommodate the Government's advice on social distancing but public protection will remain the priority.

Individual pages on the [Prison Finder](#) are being updated with confirmed cases of COVID-19. Where cases are confirmed, prisons are following public health guidelines and local contingency plans, including measures to minimise the risk of further infection.

HMPPS has been working closely with Public Health and NHS services, as well as criminal justice partners, to put robust contingency plans in place. The plans prioritise the safety of staff, prisoners, visitors and offenders under supervision in the community, whilst seeking to minimise disruption to normal services and ensure public protection. The following page will continue to be updated when new advice is available: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-and-prisons>

HMCTS

NEW: Magistrates' Courts will only hear urgent cases today (overnight custody & prisoner production). Parties involved in all other hearings should not attend court unless contacted directly. Updates will be posted on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/HMCTSGovUK/status/1242372339767050240>

HMCTS have updated guidance following the Lord Chief Justice's announcement on jury trials. Following the Lord Chief Justice announcement on 23 March on jury trials, all new trials will be postponed for a short time. Full guidance is available here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-courts-and-tribunals-planning-and-preparation#jury-service>

During this unprecedented public health emergency, we are adjusting practices and taking steps to minimise the risk to the judiciary, court staff and users. Any changes to individual hearings will be communicated directly to those affected in the usual way, by email and/or phone. The following page will continue to be updated when new advice is available: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-courts-and-tribunals-planning-and-preparation>

Latest general guidance

- The new Business Support campaign for Covid-19 - <https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support/>
- Major new measures to protect people at highest risk from Coronavirus - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-new-measures-to-protect-people-at-highest-risk-from-coronavirus>
- Guidance for businesses - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>
- Home isolation / 'stay at home' guidance - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>
- Social distancing / vulnerable people - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people>

Please continue to refer to [GOV.UK/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus) for the latest information on the situation in the UK and the Government's response. For information about the illness and symptoms visit [nhs.uk/coronavirus](https://www.nhs.uk/coronavirus)

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