

Ministry of Justice

Covid-19 Stakeholder Update / 25.03.20

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: We have temporarily paused the usual regime in prisons so we can implement the Government's measures to encourage the public to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. As well as cancelling visits, this will mean prisoners can no longer take part in usual recreational activities and only essential workers such as kitchen staff or wing cleaners will be continuing with their jobs. This will mean prisoners spend more time in their cell but they will still have access to all essential services and a package of support is being created for them. The measures in prison reflect the social distancing instructions being followed by everyone and are vital for keeping staff and prisoners safe and preventing the spread of the virus.

To help maintain vital family contact, we announced yesterday 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>

The National Probation Service will continue to operate as an essential public service and to supervise offenders in the community. The methods of supervision will now be carried out differently to accommodate advice on social distancing and reduce face to face contact where appropriate. We have developed a number of Exceptional Delivery Models which set out how we will prioritise our service delivery where we experience staffing reductions whilst continuing to manage risk. Public protection remains absolutely critical and will remain our focus throughout this challenging period.

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: HMCTS have initiated a daily operational summary service on courts and tribunals during the Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak. The page provides a daily summary of the HM Courts and Tribunal Service operational position during the coronavirus pandemic. HMCTS will aim to update this page daily by 9am: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hmcts-daily-operational-summary-on-courts-and-tribunals-during-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

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>

Judiciary

NEW: Guidance on Compliance with Family Court Child Arrangement Orders. Advice has been issued for parents whose children are the subject of Child Arrangements Orders made by the Family Court. The full guidance can be read here: <https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/coronavirus-crisis-guidance-on-compliance-with-family-court-child-arrangement-orders/>

Legal Aid Agency

NEW: Legal Aid Agency have published updated ways of working guidance for legal aid firms, including new information on using digital signatures and claiming travel expenses. The new guidance can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-legal-aid-agency-contingency-response#legal-aid-agency-ways-of-working>

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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