

Ministry of Justice

Covid-19 Stakeholder Update / 26.03.20

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 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: Further details about the temporary regime in prisons and probation. We have temporarily paused the usual regime in prisons and the probation service to ensure compliance with social distancing rules and to protect staff and service users.

We recognise the importance of keeping prisoners safe and healthy during this period:

- Prisoners will have to spend more time in their cells. Where prisoners are out of their room, they need to stay two metres apart. Prisoners won't be able to go to gyms or libraries and will be taken to the showers and for food in smaller groups than normal.
- Prisoners will continue to get any medicine every day. Prisoners who would be at a higher risk if they contracted the virus will get information about the extra things they need to do to stay safe.
- Prisoners who work in kitchens, as a cleaner, or other essential jobs will continue to do their jobs, whilst ensuring that they remain two metres apart. More time will be given to cleaners to keep the prison clean, especially the showers. Prisoners who cannot do their job will still be paid.
- All face-to-face Parole Board hearings and new jury trials have been temporarily suspended. The Parole Board will progress cases through a combination of remote hearings and a paper review process, sometimes combined with case management hearings. Prisoners should contact their legal teams who will be able to tell them more. Prisoners will be given free materials for writing.
- Restrictions on having a television and other items will be lifted. We are creating a package of support for prisoners, including advice on in-cell worship, exercise and how to manage anxiety.

The National Probation Service will continue to supervise offenders in the community but the methods of supervision will be carried out differently to accommodate advice on social distancing. Public protection remains absolutely critical and will remain our focus throughout this period.

- Face-to-face contact will remain for convicted terrorists, offenders without a phone and prison leavers reporting for their initial appointment.
- Doorstep visits will be the default option for all other high-risk offenders and medium-risk offenders with domestic abuse or other safeguarding issues. This will involve a phone call carried out so that the offender is visible to their probation officer. Video and voice calls will also be used. We are also reviewing these offenders' risk management and sentence plan to reflect this new regime.
- Lower-risk offenders will now be supervised more frequently, via telephone or video messaging.
- Probation staff are considered key workers but we are encouraging them to work from home when possible.
- Daily calls between individual probation divisions, police forces and local authority social services departments will be scheduled in order to continue the flow of intelligence and review police callouts as part of the risk management process.

The GOV.UK coronavirus and prisons page has been updated to include a summary of this information: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-and-prisons>

Prisons are well prepared to take immediate action wherever cases or suspected cases are identified, including the isolation of individuals where necessary. 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>

As of 13:00 on WEDNESDAY 25 MARCH:

- **19** prisoners have tested positive for COVID-19 across **10** prisons;
- **4** prison staff have tested positive for COVID-19 across **4** prisons;
- **3** Prisoner Escort and Custody Services (PECS) staff have tested positive for COVID-19.

Further updates with the latest figures are likely to be released later this evening to the media and will be included here the following day for information, so please do bear with us if they are superseded during the day.

HMCTS

HMCTS provide 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 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>

NEW: Guidance on taking oaths remotely. Guidance on how HMCTS will use telephone and video technology during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has been updated to include guidance on taking oaths remotely. The guidance in full is available here: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hmcts-telephone-and-video-hearings-during-coronavirus-outbreak?utm_medium=email&utm_source=#oaths-and-affirmations

NEW: Practice Direction on Video or Audio Hearings in Civil Proceedings during the Coronavirus Pandemic. Practice Direction 51Y (PD) clarifies the manner in which the court may exercise its discretion to conduct hearings remotely in private. Read the full announcement here: https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/practice-direction-on-video-or-audio-hearings-in-civil-proceedings-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=

NEW: Provisional arrangements for Employment Appeal Tribunal during the Covid-19 pandemic. All Employment Appeal Tribunal hearings which were listed to take place up to and including 15 April 2020, are postponed. The EAT will not be in a position to conduct remote hearings. Read the full announcement here: https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EAT-Covid-19-Announcement-25.3.20.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=

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>

Cafcass

NEW: COVID-19 guidance for children and families. Cafcass have issued guidance to support children and families as the situation surrounding COVID-19 develops. This information will be regularly updated. The guidance can be viewed here: <https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parents-and-carers/covid-19-guidance-for-children-and-families/>

Latest general guidance

- **NEW: HMRC's Business Support Helpline number is changing.** Call 08000 241222. Opening hours are 8am-4pm. Calls to the old helpline number will be redirected automatically. Guidance and gov.uk information will be updated accordingly.
- 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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