



**The Professional Trades Union for Prison,  
Correctional & Secure Psychiatric Workers**

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## **POA Circular 079/2020**

6<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Dear Colleagues

### **GENERAL SECRETARY UPDATE NUMBER 7: COVID-19**

The Ministry of Justice on the 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020 released the following figures as of 17:00 hours on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> May:

- 362 prisoners have tested positive for COVID-19 across 74 prisons;
- 401 prison staff have tested positive for COVID-19 across 67 prisons;
- 13 prisoner escort and custody services (PECS) have tested positive for COVID-19.

Sadly, we know that across the estate including PECS there have been more deaths of our colleagues since my last update. Our thoughts and prayers are with our fallen colleagues, family, friends and workplaces. We know that this cruel virus is indiscriminate and I make no apology for repeating the same messages time and time again regarding regime, discipline and social distancing no matter how hard it is or indeed how tempting it is to deviate from PHE guidance or instructions that are in place. These restrictions will save lives of our members and those in our care.

The Government will be making an announcement on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2020 regarding the way forward. There is much speculation in the media about relaxation of the lockdown in society. All employers will be listening intently to those instructions about a potential exit strategy from the lockdown, which came into force on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 after an evening speech by the Prime Minister. I have continually stated that Prisons whether in the Public or Private Sector, Immigration Centres, Special Hospitals and the YCS will not mirror any relaxation that occurs in society as our establishments are completely different and no recovery plan has been agreed or indeed consulted upon as yet. Those discussions will occur and the POA will be at the heart of those discussions. I do not anticipate any big changes after the announcement on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2020 because in our Prisons context any recovery should be a slow and gradual process to ensure safety in all establishments throughout the UK. To rush things back to pre-23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 would be reckless and unsustainable going forward and could actually make things worse going forward. The POA will continue to work with all employers and Government officials on a recovery plan in a collaborative manner but the Health and Safety of our members and those in our care will not be compromised in order to run increased regimes that are unsafe and do not have appropriate social distancing in place.

The National Chairman Mark Fairhurst and myself have written to the Lord Chancellor, Secretary of State Mr Robert Buckland QC (enclosed) on behalf of all POA members after his colleague Matt Hancock MP on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020 announced on the daily update that the families of frontline NHS and Social Care Staff who die from coronavirus will receive a £60,000 payment. He said he felt a deep personal sense of duty that we must care for their loved ones as he confirmed the Government was setting up a Life Assurance Scheme. The Health Secretary Matt Hancock MP said the Government was also looking at other frontline professions who do not have access to a Life Assurance Scheme to see where this may be required. Our belief is that POA members wherever they work should be included in any consideration going forward.

The POA negotiated a deal with Canada Life in respect of a members benefit for a Group Life Assurance Scheme providing each member who takes a policy out and their families with invaluable cover. Since 2012 the premium in that scheme was around £13 per month and now 8 years later it is £16.25 per month. We have just recently negotiated improvements to the policy, which I will put out on a separate circular so that our members can make an informed choice as to whether they wish to protect themselves and indeed their families during these unprecedented times. Sadly, over the last 8 years I know that POA members families who have been bereaved, have received payments from the Group Scheme that has equated to more than £1.4 million.

It is never easy talking about Assurance Schemes in order to provide for your families. but it is crucial that POA members have all the information available to them so that each and every one of you can make that judgement call because of the dangers of the profession.

I have always stated from day one of COVID-19 that we would not politicise the issue and that we would work collaboratively with employers and Government but at the same time I must ensure that all POA members needs are taken into consideration and in due course we will be discussing issues with our legal providers Thompsons to ensure we do not miss anything legally that affects our members or indeed their families during these extremely troubling times. Please expect in the future legal updates in relation to COVID-19.

It just remains for me at this stage to thank once again our excellent POA members throughout the UK, POA Branch Committees' for their excellent work along with NEC/ FTO's and the support staff for this Trade Union.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Gillan', with a small flourish at the end.

**STEVE GILLAN**  
General Secretary

**ENCLOSURE**



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**Our Ref: IR – 673 -20 – MF & SG**

28<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Dear Secretary of State

**DEATH IN SERVICE PAYMENT**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020 the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock announced that the families of frontline NHS and Social Care Staff who die from coronavirus will receive a £60,000 payment. He said he felt a "deep personal sense of duty that we must care for their loved ones" as he confirmed the Government was setting up a Life Assurance Scheme. The Health Secretary said the Government was also looking at other frontline professions who do not have access to a Life Assurance Scheme "to see where this may be required".

Currently POA members in Public Sector Prisons, Privately Managed Prisons, Immigration Removal Centres, Secure Hospitals and Escorting Service are looking after patients, prisoners, detainees and those Sectioned under the Mental Health Act, saving lives and caring for the elderly and the vulnerable.

It is accepted that the Pension Schemes that the above workers belong to provide a "Death in Service Payment." However, this is also the case for frontline NHS and Social Care Staff.

On 28<sup>th</sup> April 2020, an interim assessment of population management strategies in Prisons in response to Covid-19 pandemic in England was published. This report commissioned by Jo Farrar (CEO of HMPPS) and completed by Eamonn O'Moore (PHE) stated amongst other things;

Without a vaccine or effective treatment, the risk of a large outbreaks in the Prison Estate will remain for a significant period.

To protect prisoners, the most vulnerable were identified in conjunction with NHS England. The use of Shielding Units (SU's) were set up to give protective isolation. Shielding Units (SUs) were introduced to protect the most vulnerable identified with enhanced levels of bio-security including dedicated staff;

As of 21<sup>st</sup> April,

- Only around 25% of prisons had fully implemented the compartmentalisation strategy,
- Only around 50% implemented Protective Isolation Units and Shielding units in full,
- Only around 35% had implemented Reverse Cohorting units.

Some large outbreaks will still occur through chance events.

Should a significant number of susceptible individuals remain within the population following an outbreak, which is likely when intervention measures are in place, then subsequent introductions could lead to additional outbreaks. A high population turnover it is highly likely to permit secondary outbreaks.

This situation is likely to persist for at least the rest of the financial year.

Epidemiologists predict a risk of a second wave or even a third wave before we have a vaccine.

It is anticipated that Shielding Units will still be required for the remainder of this financial year.

Protective Isolation Units will also be required.

Risk will be heightened significantly when strategies of social distancing and compartmentalization are relaxed.

Once prisoner reception flows and/or transfers return to nearer normal levels of activity, the risk will increase.

The best defence against infection in prisons is to maintain RCUs going forward for the remainder of this financial year.

It is the POA's belief that our members will be at the frontline of the battle against the Covid-19 pandemic. The Personal Protective Equipment provided to our members has been sourced from the Department of Health and Social Care and the NHS. We believe that it is only right and just that our members should be

seriously considered when the Government consider where this payment should be required.

Yours Sincerely



**STEVE GILLAN**  
General Secretary

Yours Sincerely



**MARK FAIRHURST**  
National Chair

**Sent via email to; [secofstate@justice.gov.uk](mailto:secofstate@justice.gov.uk)**

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