



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

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## POA Circular 140/2020

14<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Dear Colleagues

### **GUIDANCE FOLLOWING THE NEW COMMUNITY ALERT LEVELS**

Please be aware of the following guidance that has been issued to Governors, ensuring that you adhere to the newly imposed restrictions on social visits.

On 12<sup>th</sup> October 2020, HM Government announced that from 00:01 on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2020 there will be a new three-tier system of restrictions in England to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Full details about what the new alert levels mean, and which areas are affected is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-covid-alert-levels-what-you-need-to-know>.

The New System can be summarised as:

**Tier 1) Medium Alert Level** - Areas with the lowest rates of infection will be on a medium alert level. This is applicable to areas where national restrictions continue to be in place.

**Tier 2) High Alert Level** - Areas with a higher level of infections where some additional restrictions are in place.

**Tier 3) Very High Alert Level** - Areas with a very high level of infections and where tighter restrictions are in place. The restrictions placed on areas with a very high level of infections can vary and are based on discussions between central and local Government.

It is important that all establishments understand the impact that these new tiers will have on prison operation. All prisons located in geographical areas that are classed as **'High'** or **'Very High'** will be rated as **Red** sites due to their location in an area of local intervention. In both instances, Governors and Directors must review their establishment regime and consider the risk of infection, adjusting

regimes accordingly as per previously issued guidance on re-imposing restrictions, which is available on the Operational Guidance Platform. Any change that leads to a decision to suspend social visits or to move a full regime stage (i.e. back to Stage 4 of the National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services) must be ratified via Gold.

Establishments located in geographical areas which are classified as **'Very High'** must consider additional temporary regime adjustments and all must take action around

- **Visits – because of the heightened community infection risk in these areas, establishments should suspend visits whilst the area is classed as 'Very High' and people who live in a 'Very High' area will be prevented from visiting other prisons unless there are compassionate grounds for doing so agreed in advance with the establishment.** A postcode checker can be accessed via <https://www.gov.uk/find-coronavirus-local-restrictions>.
- **Regime** - consideration should be given to elements of the regime that are more communal and increase the risk of infection such as off wing work and communal activities that bring different regime groups together. Establishments may wish to consider limiting provision of these activities or finding ways to facilitate them with the reduced mixing of regime groups.
- **Vulnerable Prisoners and Staff** – whilst the Government announcement has not reintroduced shielding, the movement to 'Very High' signals that the risk is increased. Informed conversations with prisoners who are classed as 'vulnerable' or 'extremely vulnerable' by Government definitions (definitions and a list of conditions which classify someone as vulnerable are available in the HMPPS Compartmentalisation guidance) should be facilitated, and establishments should remind them of their ability to take up shielding again if they wish to. Shielding remains voluntary, and a decision about whether to shield remains with the individual. **The raised risk level should also warrant a review of individual staff risk assessments where they fall into the vulnerable category to ensure that the reasonable adjustments in place are still appropriate and that no other action is needed.**
- **Population** - during this period of raised risk we will aim to reduce prisoner movement and as with all Red sites consider exceptional moves, but the prison population will require continued movement and we must service the courts. It is now more important than ever that establishments are proactive in checking their weekly RAG rating, and the RAG rating of sites from whom they receive transfers, to ensure that necessary cohorting procedures can be followed. (<https://hmppsintranet.org.uk/except/2020/09/28/heat-map-for-reverse-cohorting-requirements-to-review-regime/>)

Following SOPs, social distancing guidelines and good hygiene procedures continue to be our best defence against COVID-19. A new face mask strategy for staff was also published on 12 October, and we ask you to encourage your staff to use Face Masks (FRSMs) in line with the strategy, as these provide an extra line of defence for us during this period of increased risk.

Prisons are exempt under these new regulations from the restrictions being put in place in the community but we need to both respond to the raised risk that moving into a 'high risk' category brings as well as play our part in not adding to additional movement or the potential spread of infection via prisons. Our staff and all those who work in prisons are keyworkers and if they need to attend work to support the running of the prison then we are not restricted from accessing work and continuing to run the best COVID-19 secure regimes we can.

Queries related to the implementation of the tier system should be directed to [COVID19.Regimes&OpsGuidance@justice.gov.uk](mailto:COVID19.Regimes&OpsGuidance@justice.gov.uk) in the first instance.

Yours Sincerely



**STEVE GILLAN**  
General Secretary

Yours Sincerely



**MARK FAIRHURST**  
National Chair