



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

National Chair: Mark Fairhurst  
General Secretary: Steve Gillan

Headquarters:  
Cronin House  
245 Church St.  
Edmonton  
London N9 9HW  
t. 020 8803 0255  
f. 020 8803 1761  
e. [general@poauk.org.uk](mailto:general@poauk.org.uk)  
w. [www.poauk.org.uk](http://www.poauk.org.uk)

**North Regional Office**  
1 Linden House  
Sardinia St.  
Leeds  
LS10 1BH  
t. 01132 428833  
f. 01132 429075  
e. [adminnro@poauk.org.uk](mailto:adminnro@poauk.org.uk)

**Northern Ireland**  
Castell House  
116 Ballywalter Rd.  
Millisle Co Down  
BT22 2HS  
t. 02891 861928  
f. 02891 861839  
e. [adminni@poauk.org.uk](mailto:adminni@poauk.org.uk)

**Scotland**  
21 Calder Rd.  
Edinburgh  
Scotland  
EH11 3PF  
t. 0131 443 8105  
f. 0131 444 0657  
e. [adminscot@poauk.org.uk](mailto:adminscot@poauk.org.uk)

## **POA Circular 152/2020**

5<sup>th</sup> November 2020

Dear Colleagues

### **LOCKDOWN RESTRICTIONS FOR PRISONS IN ENGLAND**

We are now able to confirm the extent of lockdown restrictions that will come into effect from today in Prisons in England. We have included Public Health England Advice for clarity. Much of the advice models the Welsh ‘firebreak’ restrictions. If any member has concerns, they should contact their local POA branch officials who may seek support from their National NEC Representative.

**These restrictions apply across public and private sector establishments.**

### **STAFF WHO ARE EXTREMELY CLINICALLY VULNERABLE**

Any member who receives communication from the NHS informing them to shield should follow that advice and stay away from the workplace and remain at home shielding. You will receive special leave with full pay throughout your shielding period.

Any staff, whether they have health conditions or not, who are living with someone or caring for someone who has health concerns, that places them or family members at greater risk of infection, should immediately speak with their line managers to review workplace risk assessments and discuss any further measures that may need to be put in place to reduce risk.

Only those staff who receive communication from the NHS informing them to shield will be expected to shield. I accept that many staff will have concerns and anxieties. If you think you need to stay away from the workplace, please discuss your concerns with your line manager ensuring you have local POA committee support. NEC representatives will advise you if needed. All cases will be considered in line with current Government guidelines.

If staff indicate they would like to remain at work, appropriate risk assessments must be undertaken and reviewed regularly to minimise their risk.

Please see link for Government guidance:

[Guidance on shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19](#)

### **SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL VISITS**

*Public Health England Advice specifically relates to the Youth Custody Service and states:*

*In the Children and Young People's Secure Estate (CYPSE), enabling ongoing social visits and other supports is very important and children and young people are in the main less impacted by COVID-19 infection, but this is not a universal experience and the health and wellbeing of those who work in and visit CYPSE spaces needs to be considered.*

HMPPS have confirmed that they intend to continue with social visits in the YCS estate. The POA have asked that only those prisoners with complex needs, compassionate grounds or on the recommendation of healthcare professionals should access a social visit in order to reduce footfall and risk, however, the opinion of HMPPS is that all social visits in the YCS estate should continue.

It is therefore essential that local committees review their Risk Assessments, Safe Operating Procedures and Safe Systems of Work to ensure they are satisfied that risk is mitigated.

Professional visits will continue and are to be facilitated remotely wherever possible. Where a professional visit must take place in person, PPE should be worn in line with the SOP and EDM. These visits are a legal requirement and must be enabled.

**Social Visits in the Adult Estate will cease**, with Purple Visits to be used. Visits to recommence at the end of the lockdown under the current Stage 3 EDM.

### **GYMNASIUM**

**The POA believe that restrictions that are in place in the community in relation to indoor gyms should be replicated in Prisons.** HMPPS have confirmed that indoor Gym may remain open throughout the national lockdown in prisons.

Local Governors may decide they wish to utilise outdoor facilities only as the risk may be judged to be too significant. Access to PE for prisoners can be maintained **where it is safe to do so**. The use of gyms by staff is currently under review but for the time being staff are not allowed to use the gym facilities. This is in line with actions taken by the Army, Police, Fire Service and HMPPS are looking to see if prison staff can be treated differently.

Local committees are encouraged to review all Risk Assessments, Safe Operating Procedures and Safe Systems of Work to ensure indoor gym facilities can mitigate the risk and all social distancing and cleaning protocols are adequate. Your area NEC Representative will assist if you cannot reach agreement on the safe facilitation of indoor gym.

**We acknowledge that this is a contentious issue and ‘one size does not fit all’ but must reiterate that our concerns have been ignored and we feel community restrictions should be replicated in Prison Gyms. Infections amongst staff and prisoners are increasing and we are subject to more outbreak sites. Keeping indoor gym facilities open is a risk that we feel is not worth taking.**

**However, we acknowledge that local POA committees are best placed to judge the feasibility of keeping indoor facilities open after considering their individual prison dynamics including mental wellbeing, infection rates and stability. It is worth noting that Prison stability and mental wellbeing can be adequately addressed in outdoor areas if there are concerns.**

### **WORKSHOPS**

Essential Services **only** to be maintained, following Social Distancing rules and cohorting in line with Stage 3 EDMs. Governors must be able to justify why a workshop needs to be open.

### **EDUCATION**

**Adult Education** – No face-to-face education. Remote education should be encouraged.

**YCS Education** - HMPPS support the continuation of Education for this cohort. This falls in line with national lockdown protocols in our communities.

### **REHABILITATION AND OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR PROGRAMMES**

HMPPS have confirmed that these may continue in line with the present agreed EDMs. 1:1 psychology work would need to continue for statutory work (Parole Assessments etc), and these are all completed under SSoW and with PPE where required in line with local arrangements and as per the EDM.

### **INTER PRISON TRANSFERS**

Transfers should be approved by Gold/Silver As per Stage 4 activity and during the 1<sup>st</sup> lock down. It should be noted that HMPPS are introducing a comprehensive testing regime that includes testing all Prisoners upon reception to a prison. Courts are still in operation which will create the need to meet capacity pressures and facilitate the use of prison transfers.

## **LIBRARIES**

Libraries will close in line with the community. Mobile services can continue in line with present EDMs. Establishments may by exception allow individuals or small numbers to attend the library where the suspension of this support would cause a significant detrimental impact.

## **FAITH SERVICES**

Church services and groups are to close in line with the community. Pastoral care should be provided as previously during the first lock-down. Establishments may still allow individuals or small numbers from the same regime group to attend an activity such as small prayer group where the suspension of this support would cause a significant detrimental impact or risk supports this activity.

## **ROTL**

Release on licence for work in 'Key Work' workplaces should continue. Governors must be in a position where they can justify the external work. ROTL for other reasons must be paused for the duration of the lockdown, except on the most pressing compassionate grounds.

## **MDT**

Mandatory Drug Testing can continue in line with present EDMs.

## **HAIR DRESSING AND BARBERING**

Must cease for the duration of the lockdown. Establishments may by exception allow individuals to attend a Barbering/Hairdressing facility under exceptional circumstances where the suspension of this facility would cause a significant detrimental impact.

## **CONTRACTORS AND AGENCY PROVIDERS**

Governors should allow contractors to continue to deliver urgent work and activity to ensure the H&S and vital services are maintained. Agency/third sector work to support rehabilitation can continue in line with present agreed EDMs.

## **COVID-19 TESTING**

HMPPS will introduce regular testing for all staff (voluntary). Public Health England Advice states;

*Prisons need to have an effective testing strategy in place to enable better risk identification through identification of infected individuals, staff, and prisoners.*

*In non-outbreak situations: for staff, PHE recommend weekly testing with turnaround times and appropriate reporting and surveillance infrastructure in place to inform the dynamic risk assessment. For prisoners, PHE will seek further advice from SAGE on testing interval recognising needs will differ depending on population dynamics in a prison.*

*In outbreak situations: PHE recommend whole prison testing (all staff and prisoners) to guide infection control measures including decisions on regime and population movement restrictions.*

### **INFECTION PREVENT AND FACE MASKS**

Please note Public Health England Advice in relation to this:

*Prisons need to fully implement all Infection Prevention Control (IPC) measures advised by PHE to prevent and manage outbreaks including use of appropriate use of PPE, social distancing measures and cleaning of spaces, places and surfaces as directed, and population management advice especially around isolating, cohorting and protecting clinically vulnerable people.*

*It would be wise to look into the further use of face masks. Although Fluid Resistant Surgical Masks are advised as an Infection Prevent Control measure HMPPS may need to look into the legalities of mandating them.*

### **BONUS PAYMENTS**

HM Treasury have confirmed they are not willing to fund any further bonus payments or schemes during this 4-week lockdown.

### **STAFF TRAINING**

All staff refresher training will be suspended during the lockdown including C&R and MMPR, except for staff on POELT courses. Fitness testing remains suspended until January 2021 at the earliest.

### **REGIMES**

No Prison will expand their regime during lockdown. There will be a hold at level 3 if staffing resources can maintain this level of regime. Individual establishments will revert to Stage 4 as required by local risk management such as during an outbreak or severe staffing constraints, but this will be determined on a site by site basis. **All establishments are required to carry out an immediate regime review to determine which live regime elements should continue to operate for the next four weeks. Local POA committees should ensure they are involved in this review.**

### **FURTHER STIPULATIONS**

Governors/Directors in red sites must mandate that FRSMs (Fluid Resistant Surgical Mask) are worn by staff in all areas for the duration of the new national restrictions period.

Governors/Directors in red sites may choose to mandate that face coverings are worn by prisoners in all areas for the duration of the lockdown period.

Governors/Directors in Green or Amber sites should consider widening the use of FRSMs for staff and face coverings for prisoners for the duration of the lockdown period if they assess that the risk warrants this approach.

All regime activities must be limited to one regime group at a time with a focus on reducing the mixing of different groups.

Hand-hygiene, cleaning, social distancing, compartmentalisation controls and Safer Operating Procedures (SOP) specific to all activities must be communicated and enforced effectively.

All contact and movements between wings/residential areas or within activities areas should be minimised. Establishments may need to review how essential services such as food, activities movements and medication collection take place during the next four weeks.

Consideration should be given to minimising or removing the cross deployment of staff maintaining consistency in the deployment of staff to regular work areas.

In-cell enhancements will continue to offset the impact of regime restrictions. Free PIN credit, supplementary food packs, payments for those not able to access work and suspension of the removal of TV for breaches of discipline are unaffected at this time.

It is essential that local committees agree how regimes and activities will operate safely. Please ensure your area NEC Representative is contacted if you cannot agree safe working practices in your establishment.

For and on behalf of the NEC.

Yours sincerely



**STEVE GILLAN**  
General Secretary

Yours sincerely



**MARK FAIRHURST**  
National Chair