



**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
w. 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

Northern Ireland
Castell House
116 Ballywalter Rd.
Millisle Co Down
BT22 2HS

t. 02891 861928
f. 02891 861839
e. 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

POA Circular 172/2020

22nd December 2020

Dear Colleagues

CHANGES TO RESTRICTIONS

For your information HMPPS have forwarded the following briefing to all Prisons in England and Wales.

For and on behalf of the NEC.

Yours sincerely

STEVE GILLAN
General Secretary

Yours sincerely

MARK FAIRHURST
National Chair

ENCLOSURE

Gold briefing: prison response to Enhanced Tier 4 restrictions.

Introduction

As you will be aware on 19 December the Prime Minister announced enhanced Tier 4 COVID-19 restrictions for London and the South-East and East of England which took effect on 20 December. This announcement also included changes to Government guidance for the festive period which had previously permitted household mixing for five days from 23 December. Revisions now restrict household mixing to Christmas Day in Tiers 1 to 3 and households in Tier 4 are not permitted to mix. The Welsh Government has similarly announced that the Alert Level 4 restrictions due to be introduced on 28 December have been brought forward to align with Tier 4 restrictions in England. A further Government review is scheduled to take place on 30 December in England.

The purpose of this briefing is to outline the latest position on specific elements of regime that accompany the additional restrictions in Tier 4. Establishments should assume that delivery/activity is unaffected in any areas not referred to within this briefing. Delivery can continue in other areas subject to existing COVID controls and resource levels remaining conducive.

We recognise that these latest restrictions will be a further significant challenge for staff and prisoners after the difficult year we have had. Clearly, we need to be alert to safety and stability concerns that arise from suspending visits and ROTL and must continue to maximise the mitigations we have in place with access to telephones and family video calling (Purple Visits). We should try to offer those that have been due a face to face visit a Purple Visit as a priority or additional phone access. We must continue to support those in our care particularly at this difficult time of the year. However, we should also be alert to the impact that the restrictions on travel and seeing loved ones will have on colleagues and their families also and we must continue to support one another.

The following regime guidance should be noted by all prisons:

Social visits should be suspended in all Tier 3 and 4 located prisons and only approved for exceptional compassionate cases. The expectation is that visits will not generally take place to achieve parity with increased community restrictions and controls. We broadened our compassionate considerations over the Christmas period to align with the wider access to families being facilitated in the community. As this permission has now been removed in Tier 4 areas and reduced significantly to one day in the rest of England to prevent the transfer and spread of the new variant of the virus, it is sadly essential that we suspend all but the most exceptional compassionate cases. This compassionate exception continues to cover access to visit children in custody meaning that social visits will continue to be provided in the Youth Custody estate. Tier 1 and 2 prisons remain able to operate social visits but visitors from Tier 3 and 4 areas will not be permitted to visit.

ROTL (release on temporary licence) should be suspended in all Tier 4 area prisons. As per measures in place during the November national restrictions; “essential workers” in paid employment in the community can continue to attend work. Establishments should determine whether specific placements that are permissible under the “essential worker” definition should continue and may deem that individual placements create an additional risk and therefore suspend them temporarily. This should include consideration of the “keep local” principle and prevent cross Tier movement for non-essential workers.

Work, Education, Gym and other regime activities may continue as per the current Regime Stage in operation in the prison in all Tiers including the new Tier 4. There is no requirement to regress to a Stage 4 regime level in prisons that are able to operate above this safely. However, based on the

raised risk in Tier 4 areas; Governors should review their regime to ensure that the risks are manageable within the current regime. As we operated during national restrictions access to staff fitness and well-being sessions is permitted under Tier 4 (not full gym access) however this must be subject to risk assessment and structured to prevent cross contamination between staff groups.

Communal worship can be attended in all tiers within the community provided this is facilitated in a COVID safe way. We previously asked establishments to prioritise provision of faith services over the festive period in guidance issued following cessation of national restrictions in November. This has been confirmed as still appropriate in Tier 4 prisons subject to local risk assessment. Based on Public Health England (PHE) advice, in maintaining corporate worship and group worship, establishments should limit the regime groups that attend each activity to minimise opportunities for mixing.

Canteen and food provision remain unaffected in Tier 4 (and nationally) despite the current port restrictions. HMPPS has received assurances from contracted suppliers that the current logistical issues created by COVID will not currently affect supplies of key goods over the festive period. PSPI has agreed contingency arrangements with each supplier which will be activated in the event of further issues and as we transition from the EU.

Prison movements and inter-prison transfers will not automatically change. Movements between regions that are operationally imperative for capacity management will continue in a COVID safe way, this includes movements into and out of tier 4 locations. We must though act to minimise these wherever possible. All prisons in tier 3 and 4 locations will need to reverse cohort every prison arriving for a period of 14 days (or less with reception testing in place). This includes those prisoners received on inter prison transfers.

Shielding of clinically extremely vulnerable staff

Government guidance has been updated following the latest restrictions. Latest guidance states that clinically extremely vulnerable staff should not go to their workplace if they live and/or work in a Tier 4 area. In all other tiers, the guidance remains that individuals can still attend work if they cannot work from home. All clinically extremely vulnerable staff should have a local risk assessment in place defining their duties and work location. Establishments should review any risk assessments potentially affected by the restrictions and Tier 4 sites should permit clinically extremely vulnerable staff to work from home or from a non-tier 4 location if possible. The latest Government guidance is provided on Gov.UK accessible via the link below (open via Firefox):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

Cross-site working and staff cohorting

Though travel to HMPPS workplaces is excluded from Government guidance, latest restrictions state that all non-essential travel should cease. As such all non-essential cross-site working should cease in tier 4 areas and be minimised in Tier 3. We cannot eliminate all cross-deployment that is vital to operational delivery such as regional healthcare services or redeployments during live outbreaks however Governors are encouraged to minimise cross-site working where this can be achieved with no detriment to delivery. Where possible staff mixing should be reduced – where sites are continuing to offer structured physical activity for staff, sessions should be scheduled to ensure that staff only attend with those staff they would “normally mix with” i.e. those from the same residential unit or function. In other areas, staff mixing should similarly be minimised wherever possible.

Face masks and face coverings

The tiered model governing the deployment of face masks and coverings has not been amended in light of new restrictions, however Governors of sites operating at either tier 3 or tier 4 should consider temporarily widening the deployment of Face masks and face coverings at their sites during this heightened risk period in conjunction with local health practitioners and other stakeholders.

REGIME OVERVIEW

TIER 4	TIER 3	TIER 2 & 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suspend Social Visits including the wider compassionate visits offered, therefore keeping this to just “exceptional compassionate” visits and visits to children. • Governors to review regime but operate as per current regime level. • Communal worship permitted. • Barbering/Hairdressing suspended. • Staff fitness sessions permitted subject to risk assessment and controls. • People in Tier 4 areas can’t travel to visit others in Tiers 1-3. • ROTL for essential work activity only • No change to Legal visits • Heightened risk warrants a review of face mask and covering protocols. • Any regime restrictions to remain under periodic review. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revert to “exceptional compassionate” visits and visits to children only – suspend wider compassionate visits offered for Christmas. • No change to Legal visits. • People in Tier 3 areas can’t travel to visit others in Tiers 1,2 & 4. • Regime operates in accordance with current regime stages (subject to ongoing review). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No change to current Regime stage operating • Visits continue but do not permit visits from those visitors travelling from Tier 3 or 4 areas.