



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

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## **POA Circular 010/2020**

Dear Colleagues

### **COVID VACCINE DEPLOYMENT**

Please find attached the letter to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for COVID Vaccine Deployment) stating our case as to why POA members and more widely prison staff and those in our care should be in the priority group for vaccinations.

Yours sincerely

**STEVE GILLAN**  
General Secretary

**ENCLOSURE**



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**Our Ref: IR - 685 -21 - SG**

28<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Dear Minister

**COVID VACCINE DEPLOYMENT**

As General Secretary of the POA I am writing to you on behalf of my members in England and Wales who are employed by HMPPS and indeed those contracted out prisons to ask you and your colleagues to urgently consider the need for Prison staff and indeed those prisoners in our care to get the vaccine as a matter of priority before our prisons become overwhelmed. I recognise the vital work that you are responsible for on the COVID-19 Vaccine deployment.

Prison staff are keyworkers and do a vital job on behalf of society keeping the general- public safe but unfortunately all too often my members do not get the recognition they deserve. For some reason unknown to the POA we are not mentioned in the same manner as those deemed to be vital key-workers but I can assure you the work prison staff carry out is vital and certainly on par with other key-workers. This is not about pitching worker against worker or who is more important or deserving than any other group. This is about preservation of life.

The POA since the first lockdown on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 have worked tirelessly at National level and local level with HMPPS and other employers in the criminal justice system to ensure preservation of life was the top priority and in many respects joint working with HMPPS and indeed Ministers has been successful but sadly prisons are not immune from the pandemic and tragically we have seen deaths of staff and those in our care over the last year and it is on the increase since the second lockdown due to the variant which is more transmissible.

In a partnership approach HMPPS, NHS England and Wales with the assistance and support of the POA have had to implement severely restrictive regimes which

themselves have taken a heavy toll on the physical and mental health of both POA members and indeed prisoners in our care.

Prisons and other secure settings are struggling with the challenges in containing the spread and the deadly impact of the virus and therefore it is critical and essential that the high risk to my members and indeed all staff and prisoners in these environments are recognised as being a priority in any forthcoming decision on rollouts of the vaccine.

Ministry of Justice figures indicate a 36% prevalence in prisoners of physical and mental disability compared with 19% in the general population in England and Wales. Other factors have been highlighted over many years where evidence has been given to the National Audit Office which demonstrates that the rates of severe mental health illness in prisoners are four times higher than in comparison groups in the community.

Transmission of the virus in prison settings is similar to those in care homes which in itself is a high- risk factor but the prison system is overcrowded, poorly ventilated in many establishments and difficult to socially distance.

POA members are proud of the work that they do but research by Professor Gail Kinman indicates that it is one of the most stressful occupations. Prison staff have kept the prison system going against all the odds but the strain is very real and the daily problems incurred are stressful dealing with prison life during the pandemic and they continue to rise to the challenge with overcrowding, and regular movement within and between prisons. Physical layouts do not lend themselves to socially distancing and prisons are becoming breeding grounds for the virus.

International studies over the years have identified that prisons have struggled to deal with outbreaks including tuberculosis, influenza, measles and other harmful illnesses because of the layout and the population that it holds. In a recent study Professor Seena Fazel and international colleagues published a report in November 2020 in BMJ Global Health the difficulties and challenges that prisons face. It concluded which the POA endorse that “prisons present high- risk of rapid transmission from high population density and turnover, overcrowding and regular movement within and between establishments”.

The POA recognise that many key worker groups are deserving of the vaccine being rolled out as a priority, we believe we fall into that category as it is vital and essential if the transmission in our prisons are to be brought under control that vaccination of prison staff and those in our care is rolled out quickly and effectively otherwise the transmission will not be brought under control in our prisons and unfortunately transferred to the community and then back into our prisons in a vicious circle.

In conclusion for all the reasons outlined the POA request that you and your colleagues urgently consider the POA request for Prison staff and prisoners to be among the priority groups for COVID-19 vaccines to protect our communities and prisons against infection.

I look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely

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

**STEVE GILLAN**  
General Secretary

cc: The Rt. Hon Robert Buckland QC MP Lord Chancellor  
Prime Minister Mr Boris Johnson  
Labour Leader Mr Keir Starmer  
CEO Jo Farrar  
Director General Phil Copple  
Minister of State Lucy Frazer QC MP  
The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
Shadow Secretary of State for Justice David Lammy  
Sir Bob Neill MP Chair, Justice Select Committee

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Nadhim Zahawi MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment