

COVID-19 LATEST NEWS

ISSUE 2

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HOW YOU CAN PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS FROM INFECTION

Cough and sneeze in your elbow or in a tissue, NOT your hand. Dispose of the used tissue immediately in a closed bin and wash your hands with soap and water.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth without washing your hands first.

Regularly wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

Don't share your property, especially towels or vaping devices.



Changes to Home Detention Curfew (HDC)

A notice to prisoners was issued this week about changes to the process.

It has been agreed that the presumptions against release will be removed from the guidance document as these issues are covered with the assessment of risk and supportive factors; and only individuals on high supervision level, will not be eligible to be assessed for HDC.

If you have previously been refused HDC, but are still within the relevant timeframe for consideration, you may re-apply under this new guidance.

The Scottish Government announced yesterday that the restrictions that are in place across Scotland at the moment will continue for at least another 3 weeks. It is vitally important that we continue to work together to prevent the spread of the virus and we want to reinforce some key messages about how we can do that.

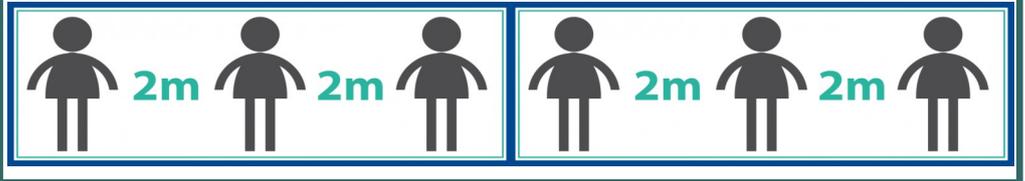
SOCIAL DISTANCING

The need for appropriate social distancing is being reinforced daily by the Scottish Government and we are doing the same with everyone living and working in our establishments. Your cell is effectively your house and the landing is your street. We are all being told to socially distance from others, including family and neighbours, to reduce the risk of infection. It is crucial that where possible you must keep a distance of 2 metres from others; fellow prisoners and staff. If we all follow this advice, we will be playing our part in the efforts to tackle this virus.

PERSONAL PROTECTION EQUIPMENT

We want to reassure you that staff are taking the appropriate and necessary safety precautions. The SPS is observing the same guidance as everyone in the community, where not everyone is expected to wear protective equipment at all times. You can help by keeping your living space as clean as possible and washing your hands as often as you can; hand washing is the most effective defence against the virus and every prison has good supplies of soap.

As we approach the end of another week, we would like to thank you for your continued support, patience and understanding as we work together to overcome the challenges. Should you wish to discuss any concerns you have, please speak to a member of staff.



Maintaining family contact during COVID-19

As you know, the SPS has had to make difficult decisions in the last few weeks in order to prevent the spread of the virus and protect those living and working our prisons. These decisions – particularly the suspension of visits - have undoubtedly impacted on you and your families and friends. We understand how difficult this has been and have been working hard to design and implement alternative forms of communication.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice has announced his intention to rollout restricted mobile phones to everyone in custody to allow you to maintain vital communication with their families and friends.

As with the current PIN system, there will be a number of security restrictions on these phones. You will only be able to make outgoing calls to the numbers already included on your existing call list. The phones will not be able to receive incoming calls and will not have a text messaging facility, or be internet enabled. As with the current phone system, the SPS will be able to monitor all calls made.

We are still in the process of establishing the robust systems necessary to roll out and manage this new approach across. As you will understand the introduction of the phones will require to be supported by an infrastructure that currently does not exist within SPS and in the initial stages this will mean your use of the devices will be restricted to set times and there may be some connectivity issues when multiple individuals are trying to make a call. This is being taken forward as a matter of urgency and will be implemented as quickly as possible.

A Q&A on how this will work in practice will be shared with you as soon as possible.

Message from HMIPS

A message to all those in custody from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland

INDEPENDENT PRISON MONITORING

As you know, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (HMIPS) has responsibility for monitoring conditions in Scotland's prisons, and the treatment of prisoners, and checking that prisoners' human rights are upheld.

You will be aware of the current global coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and the impact it is having across all parts of society, including the measures that the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) has been obliged to take.

Due to this outbreak, HMIPS has had to take the difficult decision to temporarily suspend all independent prison monitoring duties within Scotland's prisons. Accordingly, this means we cannot offer our usual monitoring services, including getting our independent prison monitor (IPM) volunteers to look into issues raised by prisoners.

Nevertheless, it is important to advise you that if you do need to raise a matter with the IPM team you can still do so by calling our Freephone number 0800 056 7476.

When contacting this number, please help us by being very clear on the phone about the specific issue you wish to raise.

We will, unfortunately, not be able to check our on site IPM request boxes for the foreseeable future. If you have recently placed a request in one of the IPM request boxes please raise the issue again via the Freephone number **0800 056 7476**. Our office will not be staffed over this period and so we will be unable to process any mail. We therefore request that you do not write to us at our headquarters address.

HMIPS staff will look into matters raised by prisoners, where necessary by contacting prison staff and reviewing information remotely. We will then write to you with relevant information.

We will, of course, need to prioritise the more urgent matters raised by prisoners and potentially deprioritise, or close, cases which we have thoroughly investigated previously. It will also take us considerably longer than usual to respond to less urgent requests.

We strongly encourage you use the complaints procedure offered by the SPS or NHS including, where appropriate, escalation to the SPSO, before contacting us.

We will seek regular assurance from SPS and NHS staff that treatment and conditions in prisons are acceptable, while taking account of the difficulties that the COVID-19 outbreak is causing. We will continuously seek information from the SPS on the conditions and regime available to prisoners, and our inspectors will still visit prisons when they can to assess conditions for themselves.

Please be assured that we will return to a full Independent Prison Monitoring service as soon as Government Guidelines allow and we are not compromising your safety.

Yours sincerely,

Wendy Sinclair-Gieben

