



COVID-19

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers – Updated 28 April 2020

1. What is the SPS doing to protect people in prison from COVID-19?

Our number one priority is to ensure the safety of everyone who lives or works in our prisons. We are working with Scottish Government, Health Protection Scotland and a number of other partners to make sure everything we do is fully informed by the very latest public health advice and guidance.

Social distancing, alongside effective and regular handwashing are key in reducing the spread of COVID-19. Posters and information re-enforcing the importance of taking these measures are displayed throughout our prisons.

We have introduced a number of measures to further reduce the spread of COVID-19, these include suspending:

- all prison visits;
- all education classes;
- all non-essential prison work;
- communal dining; and
- all internal progression and all non-essential prison transfers.

We have also:

- restricted the number of people who can attend exercise, or recreation, at any one time;
- closed prison gyms; and
- increased the frequency of hygiene procedures.

The challenges presented by COVID-19 are ever changing and we are adapting to meet these in a flexible manner. Our approach will *always* be aligned with the latest public health advice.

2. What happens if someone in prison has COVID-19 symptoms?

If someone reports, or appears to have COVID-19 symptoms, they will be assessed by NHS healthcare staff, who are responsible for the delivery of all health services in Scottish prisons. If NHS healthcare staff suspect that an individual has COVID-19, then, as in the community, that individual will be required to self-isolate and confined to their own cell. If the individual is sharing a cell, then they can remain with that same person in a shared cell. All meals and prescribed medication will be provided in their cell.

Many prisons have set aside specific areas to accommodate those who are symptomatic and require to be kept apart from others.

3. How can you socially distance in a prison?

Notices are displayed across all our prisons explaining how everyone, including staff, should keep a minimum of 2 meters apart.

All prison activity is being delivered with additional controls and with fewer people in communal areas to allow everyone to follow social distancing guidelines.

4. How are those with underlying health conditions being managed?

People in prison who have an underlying health conditions have been advised by the NHS to stay in their cell as much as possible and follow social distancing guidance.

The NHS has also identified those who are clinically vulnerable due to certain underlying health conditions, including cancer, cystic fibrosis and organ transplant patients, and are therefore at greater risk from COVID-19. People in this group have been advised, through NHS letters and discussions with healthcare staff, that they should self-isolate for up to 12 weeks. This process is known as “shielding”.

Anyone shielding is accommodated in a single room and their meals and any prescribed medication are provided to them in their cells. They will continue to be given access to the phone and showers. Both phones and showers are regularly cleaned and these will be thoroughly cleaned before they are used by those who are shielding.

5. Are prisons overcrowded and does this mean COVID-19 will spread more quickly?

Scotland’s prison population has been high in recent years. However, the prison population has dropped significantly in recent weeks and, as a result of changes to the application of Home Detention Curfew(HDC) and the Early Release legislation, the population is expected to continue to fall.

There are today over 1,000 fewer people in custody than there were at this time last year. This smaller prison population will reduce the need for people to share accommodation and so allow us to better adhere to national guidance and help to limit the spread of COVID-19.

6. Does the SPS test anyone for COVID-19?

The NHS is responsible for all healthcare and testing in prisons. In line with Health Protection guidance, testing is not routinely carried out on admission to Scottish prisons. However, testing is available for SPS staff, as key workers, if they report COVID-19 symptoms.

Those who have symptoms of COVID-19 and are required to isolate may undergo testing, although this would be carried out by the local NHS board responsible for health care within that particular prison.

As part of any outbreak management there will greater access to testing for staff or prisoners who were in close contact with confirmed cases.

7. How can I keep in touch with my family member in prison?

People in custody can continue to communicate through mail and the phone system. We are providing everyone in custody with a free allowance of £2.50 per week on their phone balance.

We have expanded and encouraged access to the Email-a-Prisoner scheme and Prisoner Voicemail will be activated this week. Families can subscribe to this at: <https://prisonvoicemail.com/>

8. When will mobile phones be available?

It was recently announced that restricted mobile phones will be provided to people in custody to allow them to maintain family contact. We are working with the service provider to introduce mobile handsets as quickly as possible.

There are some technical and legal issues that we have to overcome before mobile phones can be distributed. In order to ensure appropriate signal strength at each prison, work is underway to assess any requirement to boost mobile telephone signals.

9. Will the SPS introduce Virtual Video Visits?

We are exploring the options to provide virtual video visits. We are working to secure the additional equipment needed to facilitate these visits and ensure the booking process is as simple as possible.

Further communication on how and when the service will be available will be published as soon as possible.

10. Where can I find updates about what is happening in prison?

We have established a dedicated family helpline, available on **0131 330 3888**, and website <http://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Information/covid-19.aspx> to provide families with regular updates. Information on the number of people self-isolating across our estate, as well as the current number of confirmed cases, is updated daily and also available on this page.

We recognise that the situation often changes quickly and that is why we regularly update the information.

11. Why can't I be given specific details about my family member when I call SPS' family helpline?

The Data Protection Act 2018 does not allow us to share personal information relating to anybody in custody, without their explicit permission.

12. How will I know if my family member is being isolated?

When anyone is to be isolated, as a result of showing COVID-19 symptoms, then they will be asked if they would like a family member or friend to be informed. A member of our staff will then make sure the family member or friend is kept up to date.

Should anybody become seriously ill, or be admitted to hospital, then, where possible, the person will be asked who they want to be informed. If they are not able to communicate this information, then their next of kin will be contacted.

13. How is the SPS making sure that COVID-19 doesn't spread through communal phone use?

Access to phones is currently being delivered in a controlled manner with appropriate social distancing. Additional cleaning is also in place.

The introduction of mobile phones will reduce this risk further.

14. Do prison staff have enough Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

We have sufficient Personal Protective Equipment in stock for all staff to use as required

We have issued clear guidance to staff on the appropriate PPE to be worn when carrying out a range of prison duties. This guidance is fully aligned with the most up-to-date Health Protection Scotland guidance.

Public Health guidance advises that our staff only require to wear PPE when they are unable to maintain a 2-metre distance from others or when they are working in direct contact with anyone who has been confirmed as having COVID-19.

15. Do people in custody have access to PPE?

People in custody do not routinely require to have PPE as they are able to maintain a safe social distance at all times. If someone is confirmed to have COVID-19 and they require to be transferred to hospital, then they may be required to wear a mask.

16. How do I give money to someone in prison?

Prisons are not currently accepting money being handed in. However, money can be sent in the post. If you intend to send cash in the mail, please refer to Royal Mail for guidance.

We can also now accept money transferred via an online banking facility. Money is transferred from your own personal banking app and not via a Government or SPS website. Further details on this can be found on the SPS website at:

<http://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Information/covid-19.aspx>

International money cannot be transferred using this service and can only be sent in the mail.

17. How will the SPS look after my family member's mental health in prison?

Our staff have been provided with information on how to identify those who may be struggling whilst in isolation. Staff are used to dealing with people who have mental health problems and are trained to support them.

Self-help support leaflets, designed by SPS Psychologists, have been issued to everyone in custody and these provide information and tools which can be used to maintain a sense of wellbeing.

The SPS and NHS Health Boards are providing additional in-cell activities and additional in-cell education activities delivered by Fife College will be available soon. Relaxation and mindfulness exercises are also available on in-cell televisions and radio.

Prisons are also encouraging greater outdoor exercise activities in line with public health advice.

18. Why are people in prison spending more of their day locked in their cells?

As in the wider community, all non-essential work has been suspended and people are required to stay home in their living areas. In prison only those delivering essential services, such as catering, laundry and cleaning, continue to work. The SPS is ensuring that nobody is financially disadvantaged as a result of being unable to work, through no fault of their own.

Most Scottish prisons have moved to a single shift 'core day' to allow more flexible deployment of our staff. All prison activity is now being delivered with enhanced controls and additional hygiene measures in place.

19. How is the SPS making sure prison exercise and recreation is safe?

People in custody continue to be offered exercise and recreation. However, restrictions have been introduced to maintain social distancing.

Exercise and recreation are being delivered in significantly smaller groups than previously was the case. People must not gather in groups of more than 2 people and they must maintain a 2-metre distance throughout.

The number of people unlocked at any time will depend upon the facilities of the individual prison.

20. Will my family member still be able to shower?

Yes. Whilst many prisons have in-cell showers, there are some where people need to use communal showers. Communal showers are being cleaned more often between use and this means there is a reduction in the time available for people to access these.

In line with advice from Health Protection Scotland, those who are have symptoms of COVID-19 will not be given access to communal showers for the 7 days they are in isolation. However as there is access to soap and hot water in all cells, they will still be able to wash every day.

It is hoped that the SPS will be able to continue to provide showers on a daily basis, or at least every second day.

Those who are required to self-isolate will only be able to access showers if they have these in-cell.

21. Will my family member qualify for release on Home Detention Curfew (HDC)?

Home Detention Curfew (HDC) is available to some people nearing the end of their sentence. A number of presumptions against HDC release have been removed and it is thought that more people will now be released on HDC.

It should be noted that HDC is not an automatic entitlement and people will only be released after robust risk assessment.

22. Will my family member qualify for early release?

The Scottish Government recently announced plans to enable the SPS to release some individuals early. Only those serving sentences of 18 months, or less, with 90 days, or less, of their sentence remaining will be considered for early release.

Again it should be noted that this is not an automatic entitlement and people will only be released after an assessment of individual risk.

23. How much money will my family member be given when they leave prison?

Everybody who is liberated from a Scottish prison will receive a liberation grant. Young people will receive a liberation grant of £58.03 and adults will receive a liberation grant of £72.64.

Any unspent Prisoner's Personal Cash (PPC) or wages of will also be provided on liberation.

24. How will COVID-19 affect my family member's progression?

Normally we would offer people in our care the opportunity to progress to less secure conditions. However, in order to adhere to public health advice, the SPS has taken the decision to suspend all progression.

There is currently no opportunity available to test individuals in the community and therefore no opportunity for people in custody to demonstrate a reduction in the level of their risk.

We realise that individuals who are seeking to progress may be disappointed. However, this suspension of movement will limit the risk of COVID-19 being transmitted from the community, or from new arrivals, to other prisons or residential areas.

There is a single national waiting list for progression to our National Top Ends and HMP Castle Huntly. This waiting list will ensure a clear and fair decision making process when progression resumes. Those who are approaching critical dates will be prioritised for consideration.

All pre-release case conferences continue to take place.