



COVID-19

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers – Updated 6 August 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 continue to work 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.

Physical 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.

As part of our response to the pandemic, it has been necessary to introduce a number of measures to further reduce the spread of COVID-19, however as in the community, we are working towards lifting some of these restrictions.

2. When will restrictions be lifted?

We have published our Operational Planning Route Map which details the plan we will follow as we reintroduce elements of prison regimes in light of the easing of restrictions across Scotland. In planning this, our key consideration has been to ensure that any changes we make are appropriate and safe.

Prisons are unique environments, which accommodate many vulnerable people. Therefore, it is important to note that the timing of changes that occur in the wider community may not be immediately realised in the prison setting.

Whilst we would prefer to ease restrictions in a consistent manner, regimes will ease at differing rates and may be slower than some people would wish. Whilst this may understandably cause some frustration, our approach will always be aligned with public health advice to best protect all those who visit, live and work within our prisons.

As certain activities resume, it is also likely that many of these health protection measures will be adapted and some restrictions may remain in place, particularly in terms of the numbers of people who can participate and the frequency of provision.

3. When will physical visits resume?

As of Monday 3 August, physical visits have resumed in all establishments. Unfortunately, due to the local 'lockdown' in Aberdeen announced by the Scottish Government on 5 August, physical visits in HMP Grampian have been temporarily suspended. Across the rest of the estate, any visitor from Aberdeen City should not attend any scheduled visit on **any** SPS site

until any subsequent review of the Aberdeen specific guidance or removal of current restrictions.

Please be aware that visits will not simply return to operating as they previously did. In order to adhere to the current guidance from Scottish Government and Health Protection Scotland, we have had to implement a number of new procedures.

For more information, please follow this link –

<http://www.sps.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?IID=4713&SID=1579>

4. When will mobile phones be available?

Mobile Phones are now available in 13 establishments - HMYOI Polmont, HMP & YOI Cornton Vale and HMPs Castle Huntly, Dumfries, Glenochil, Inverness, Greenock, Grampian, Perth, Edinburgh, Barlinnie, Low Moss and Addiewell.

HMP Kilmarnock opted not to introduce mobile phones and instead have implemented landline telephones in each cell.

Unfortunately, the geographical location of HMP Shotts has very limited signal availability. SPS is therefore working with British Telecom to enhance the network signal at this location. Mobile phones will be distributed at HMP Shotts as soon as this work is complete.

Please note that the existing PIN phone system continues to be available in all establishments.

5. Who will pay for the costs of the calls?

The SPS will pay for the cost of all calls from the mobile phones whilst current restrictions remain in place. Each individual will have a maximum of 310 minutes of calls per month.

For those in HMP Kilmarnock, they are provided with a credit of £5 per week.

However, at any time deemed appropriate, there remains the option to apply a charge for the service.

6. Are Virtual Visits still available?

Yes, Virtual Visits are available in every prison in Scotland.

We have created an information Video which explains how they work. Please follow this link - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0SFZZoGbmM>

There is also a Q&A document available here -

<http://www.sps.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?IID=4628&SID=1581>

7. What other ways can I keep in touch with my family member in prison?

People in custody can continue to communicate through mail and the prison phone system.

We have expanded and encouraged access to the Email-a-Prisoner scheme. The Prisoner Voicemail scheme also allows individuals in custody and their loved ones to exchange voicemails through the prison phone system. Families can subscribe to this at: <https://prisonvoicemail.com/>

8. 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 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.

9. 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.

At the appropriate date, SPS automatically generates a list of those who are eligible to be considered for HDC release. Individuals are then asked to complete an application form if they wish to pursue the application.

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

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

In order to limit the risk of Covid-19 being transmitted from the community, or from new arrivals, to other prisons or residential areas, it has been necessary to suspend progression to less secure conditions and temporary absence over the past 4 months.

As part of our plans for the easing restrictions, we will be in a position to have resumed transfers to less secure conditions by 15 August 2020. Access to work placements and SELs will resume by 31 August with home leaves being the final element to be re-introduced thereafter.

SPS has a single national waiting list for progression to our National Top Ends and HMP

Castle Huntly and this will ensure a clear and fair decision making process upon resumption. Those who are approaching critical dates will be prioritised for consideration.

11. 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.

12. Does the SPS test for COVID-19?

Yes, all NHS Health Boards will test anyone in custody who is showing symptoms associated with COVID-19. Results of tests are being returned within 6 and 48 hours depending on the Health Board administering the test. A person who displays symptoms but tests negative for COVID-19 will therefore spend no longer than 48 hours in isolation.

Testing is also available for SPS staff, as key workers, if they report COVID-19 symptoms.

13. 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.

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

In line with advice from Health Protection Scotland, individuals who are self-isolating will be located in a single room with en-suite facilities, where possible. If an in cell shower is not available, they will be allowed to leave the room to undertake personal hygiene.

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.

We continue to provide opportunity to shower on a daily basis, or at least every second day.

15. How can you physically distance in a prison?

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

All prison activity is being delivered with additional controls and with fewer people in communal

areas to allow everyone to follow physical distancing guidelines.

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

Scotland's prison population has been high in recent years. In March 2020, there were approximately 8,000 individuals in custody, now there are closer to 7,000. This drop was due to the suspension of court business and the Early Release Scheme.

A smaller prison population has reduced the need for people to share accommodation which has allowed us to better adhere to national guidance and help limit the spread of COVID-19.

Now that courts have reopened, our population is starting to rise. We are closely monitoring this alongside the Scottish Government.

17. 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 physical distance at all times. If someone is self-isolating due to having symptoms or has had a positive result for COVID-19, they are provided with a mask to wear when accessing the telephone or attending outdoor exercise.

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

We are beginning to lift some restrictions in our prisons in order to allow activities such as Work Parties, Education and Programmes to resume. However due to the necessity to maintain 2 metre physical distancing, activities will not simply return to the way they operated before.

The frequency and capacity of certain activities may be reduced meaning that fewer people can attend at one any time. This may result in individuals spending more time in their cells than what they were used to prior to the outbreak of Covid-19.

However, this will be kept under continuous review and as guidance changes, we will make changes as appropriate to ensure the maximum out of cell time possible.

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

We are aware that social isolation in a prison environment can have a detrimental effect on mental wellbeing. 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 and audio files, designed by SPS Psychologists, have been issued to everyone in custody providing information and tools which can be used to maintain a sense of wellbeing.

Prison Chaplains continue to provide pastoral, spiritual and faith-specific care within establishments.

The SPS and NHS Health Boards are providing additional in-cell activities and Fife College have provided learning packs and other educational activities. 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.

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

People in custody continue to be offered exercise in the open air and recreation time. However, restrictions have been introduced to maintain physical distancing.

Exercise and recreation are being delivered in significantly smaller groups than previously was the case. The precise number unlocked at any time is judged by each individual prison and this activity is supervised so as to maintain physical distancing.

21. 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 physical distancing. Additional cleaning is also in place.

The introduction of mobile phones will reduce this risk further.

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

People in prison who have certain underlying health conditions were advised by the NHS to shield by staying in their cell as much as possible and by following physical distancing guidance.

The Scottish government announced that from 1 August, shielding was paused and those who had been isolating could now begin to meet with other people from different households. Those who were shielding in prison have been given advice to identify a small group of people they may wish to go to outside exercise and socialise with.

23. 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.

24. 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.

25. 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.