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| Handling Prisoners’ Property |
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| **May 2020** |

**Handling Prisoners’ Property during COVID-19**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that establishments mitigate the risk of transmission of the virus in every element of their operational practice. Due to changes in the prison population management strategy and the operation of courts during COVID-19, situations may occur when prisoners go to court from one prison and then are relocated at a different prison following their court case, meaning that their property will have to be sent onwards.

This document will provide guidance to prisons about the processes surrounding handling of prisoner property, transfer of prison property and the methods that can be taken to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Whilst it will refer to specific examples of scenarios where prisoners go to court and do not return, it is applicable to all circumstances where an individual is unable to move their own property, and where the management of it is therefore the responsibility of staff.

This guidance will make the assumption that in line with the Population Management Strategy, prisoners who are symptomatic will not be transferred and therefore will refer to property of prisoners who are not symptomatic. Establishments and staff should however be aware that individuals can be infected with COVID-19 without having any symptoms and therefore precautions must still be taken in handling their property.

In all situations it is preferable for prisoners to pack their own property and for them to be transferred with their property. It is therefore recommended that when a prisoner is due to attend court, they are asked to take their property with them. It should be explained to prisoners that in the event they do not pack their own belongings, they should expect a delay in receiving their property due to COVID-19 arrangements surrounding staff packing it for them.

This guidance makes continued references to Safe Operating Procedures (SOPs). These can be found on the Operational Guidance Platform.

**Procedure for Conducting a Cell Clearance during COVID-19**

Current Government guidance suggests that COVID-19 can be present on hard surfaces for up to 72 hours. Therefore, if a scenario occurs where staff are required to conduct a cell clearance during the COVID-19 period, where possible establishments should allow 72 hours to pass before staff conduct the cell clearance. If it is operationally impossible to allow this time period to pass before conducting the cell clearance, staff should don appropriate PPE and follow good hygiene procedures. This must include washing hands with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds, and should be done at the first opportunity. Please refer to the latest SOP on Operational Tasks for the most up-to date guidance on the PPE required for cell clearances.

The protocols mandated by PSI 2011/012 Prisoners Property about cell clearances must be adhered to as normal. This includes the requirement for 2 members of staff to be present to conduct a cell clearance. They should maintain social distancing during this process as much as possible. It may be necessary for one member of Staff to enter the cell and do the clearance, witnessed from the doorway by another member of staff.

If there are any suspicions that the previous occupant of the cell may have COVID-19 (E.g. information from the court that they have become symptomatic on arrival), staff should wear appropriate PPE as mandated in the latest SOP on Operational Tasks.

Establishments should recommend all property is double-bagged to further reduce any risk of transmission from prisoner property.

**Cleaning and Re-occupancy of Vacated Cells**

In line with current guidance, vacated cells should be left empty for 72 hours prior to cleaning and re-occupation to ensure that any traces of the virus have decreased significantly. Following this time period, an uninfected cell can be cleaned as normal. Population Management must be informed that the cell is offline for 72 hours.

For cells which are suspected to be infected, the latest SOP on Cleaning during COVID-19 should be referred to.

**Transferring Prisoner Property during COVID-19**

Establishments should refer to the latest SOP focused on the handling of prisoner property through reception departments and in transfer of the property. All staff involved in handling prisoners’ property should ensure that they follow good hygiene and hand-washing procedures (as dictated in the COVID-19 cleaning guidelines) to further prevent themselves becoming infected.