

Improving communications between staff and residents during the COVID-19 outbreak: The role of COVID-19 Communications Representatives

It is important that residents can understand why new processes have been put in place to respond to COVID-19. Given the current restrictions that are in place in prisons, good communication of important messages between staff and residents is essential to minimise the spread of the virus. To help with this some prisons have appointed residents to the role of COVID-19 communications representatives to help inform their peers of the developments and to reinforce the messaging to them. This work has to be undertaken in line with social distancing requirements.



Description of the COVID-19 Representatives Role

1. Attend and contribute to residents forums.
2. Be a point of contact for residents who have any questions or concerns about the impact of COVID-19 in the prison.
3. Set up and be responsible for a COVID-19 information station on your wing, ensuring all communication including those displayed on wings notice boards is accurate and up to date.
4. Work closely with staff to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on residential units, manage the expectations of your peers and promote a wider understanding of the current situation.
5. Ensure you understand the current regime and rules. Support those who are struggling with the regime and look at ways to enhance their engagement.
6. Raise any issues or questions with staff that you are unable to deal with or answer yourself.
7. Set a good example of compliance with hygiene and infection control requirements and encourage the community to do the same.
8. Work with the Library (where applicable) to co-ordinate the distribution of DVDs and books.

What are the benefits of the role?

As with all peer worker roles this is a trusted position, and an opportunity to gain a sense of achievement, increase self-worth and, self-esteem.

It allows those in the role to help and support others and to become involved in a 'community'. It can also help prevent the infection from spreading.

It can enhance self-awareness, understanding, compassion and empathy skills. As well as help develop a sense of responsibility; and improve social and communication skills.

Those carrying out the role are an integral part of the communications team, and will be invited to participate in any appropriate team meetings.

Performance in this role should be reviewed regularly and all incidents of positive behaviour passed to Offender Supervisors as part of sentence progression.

It also offers paid employment.

Support for COVID-19 Representatives

As with all peer facing roles, support must be made available for COVID-19 Representatives in line with the local arrangements in place in each prison.

Prisons should ensure that processes for selection, risk assessment, training, support and supervision are in place to ensure that both the reps and those who they are supporting are protected.

Those undertaking the role should also have the opportunity to speak to designated members of staff regularly to discuss any concerns they may have about the role.

Further information

Please see PSI 17/2015 - [Prisoners assisting other prisoners](#)

For the latest updates on COVID-19 for HMPPS staff please visit the COVID-19 Support section on the intranet: <https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/covid-19-coronavirus>

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