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| A picture containing table  Description automatically generated | **Staff access to fitness programmes during the current national restrictions**  **(Nov – Dec 2020)** |

**Introduction**

HMPPS issued operational guidance on prison regimes during the current period of national restrictions in England, on 5 November. This recognised the need to maintain a decent and purposeful regime for prisoners during the second wave, albeit with restrictions in place. This included provision for prisoners to exercise, including accessing prison PE facilities where necessary, recognising the vital importance of maintaining prisoner physical and mental health and the fact that prisoners have no alternative means of remaining active.

Staff were not immediately granted equivalent access, while we reviewed the separate legal, public health, health and safety and practical considerations of running staff fitness programmes during this period.

We are satisfied, following consideration of specialist advice in the relevant areas, that staff fitness programmes may go ahead. We have taken into account the need for staff to retain sufficient physical fitness to undertake their roles effectively, and the benefits for physical and mental health as part of our wellbeing strategy. We also recognise that staff have reduced opportunities to exercise when off duty, due to restrictions in the community, shorter daylight hours and longer hours of working in many cases.

During this current period of restrictions, staff exercise programmes can take place within establishments when staff are off duty, including indoors where necessary. These are subject to local risk assessments and the constraints set out below. This briefing introduces the operating model for facilitating structured staff fitness programmes in all English and Welsh prisons.

HMPPS staff fitness programmes outlined within this document are supported and permitted by HMPPS legal advisors (Government Legal Department (GLD)), HMPPS Health and Safety and HMPPS Health Liaison Team following consultation. The regulations in force in the community have an explicit exemption for prison accommodation. This means that HMPPS has the ability to determine what activities operate, subject to appropriate COVID controls. We are therefore providing a programme of structured staff fitness activities on the basis that our staff must retain sufficient physical and mental fitness to operate in challenging roles.

The HMPPS model draws on equivalent models of staff fitness programmes operating at this time in the Armed Forces and Fire Services where physical and mental fitness are equally imperative. It is acknowledged that Prison staff are working longer hours in challenging circumstances during COVID to deliver safe regimes and the preservation of their health and wellbeing of staff are crucial at this time.

**Operating model**

**Structured staff fitness programmes**

As part of the HMPPS staff wellbeing strategy, Governors and Directors are encouraged to develop and introduce a programme of structured staff fitness sessions during the current period of national restrictions and potentially the longer term. All activities must be COVID-safe and structured in such a way as to minimise the risk of infection for all staff. Staff cannot have free access to fitness facilities. Programmes must be developed that consist of supervised sessions designated for staff from particular work areas or groups and consisting of activities that can be delivered in accordance with social distancing.

Staff numbers in each session must be limited to permit COVID controls (social distancing, individual issue equipment, hygiene and ventilation) and to minimise staff congregating in close proximity and prevent those from different areas of the prison mixing. Staff mixing is known to introduce a significant risk of COVID contamination. As such we must take all available precautions to minimise opportunities for staff to meet and mix. Sessions must be designated to staff from particular areas and opportunities for mixing must be reduced. Staff must book sessions for purposes of contact tracing and to regulate numbers. A booking system must therefore be operated locally.

Sessions within the programme must provide fair and equitable access for all and cater for all needs. Staff from different locations/disciplines should have designated sessions tailored to different requirements – e.g. cardiovascular sessions, high intensity and low impact sessions etc. Team or contact sports cannot take place and equipment cannot be shared. A robust cleaning programme must be in place to ensure equipment is cleaned before and after every session. All programmes must be covered by a robust local risk assessment covering the full range of activities.

Establishments are encouraged to utilise their PE teams to develop and oversee innovative and inclusive programmes tailored to the needs of the local staff group. Activities could consist of outdoor and indoor activities and should not be confined to gymnasiums where additional space exists. Staff running and walking routes and external activities should be incorporated in which staff can participate without supervision. Programmes should work around the core-day and not exclude particular groups or grades by operating sessions at times when particular grades are engaged in regime delivery.

Establishments should promote fitness programmes as part of their local wellbeing and mental health strategies. Where possible establishments should incorporate elements of prison wellbeing events that can be undertaken safely, such as BMI checks and tailored health advice. In all cases, programmes must minimise mixing between areas and be run in the most appropriate location that is conducive to social distancing and effective ventilation. Sufficient facilities must be provided for staff to shower and change, with robust social distancing and cleaning procedures incorporated into all areas.

**Summary of safeguards**

Sites with active COVID-19 outbreaks should follow the recommendations of the Outbreak Control Team, which may place additional limitations on the type of programmes that can be safely run.

In addition to existing COVID controls outlined under Safer Operating Procedures (SOP) plus any local measures identified via pre-existing risk assessments related to fitness activities, establishments must also make sure the following are provided as part of their local programme:

* An opportunity for staff to sanitise their hands on entry into and exit from any location where fitness sessions are being facilitated
* Sufficient paper towels in all areas for staff to clean surfaces as they use/contact them, particularly where staff are accessing equipment
* An enhanced schedule of cleaning of equipment between uses
* High visibility social distancing prompts and markings in all areas
* Clear walkways between fitness facilities/areas and one way systems where possible
* High visibility signs explaining procedures and safeguards
* A booking system providing fair and equitable access to all and contact tracing records
* FRSMs must be worn en route to the session (not during exercise) and re-applied after.
* A supply of FRSMs at all locations and a facility for safe disposal of soiled masks.
* All supervised activities must commence with a COVID safe briefing outlining the safeguards

Where possible all indoor activities must be supervised by a PEI or trained instructor. Establishments have local autonomy to determine whether trained Prisoner Instructors/Orderlies are engaged in this activity and can do so where appropriate under local risk assessment. It is important that the programme of activities minimises mixing between different staff groups (i.e. staff who do not ordinarily have to come together during the working day) but provides a range of activities for staff of all abilities, fitness levels and interests. Staff members are required to maintain a level of physical fitness and it is vital that all colleagues have access to the programme. Ideally staff should be given the opportunity to contribute ideas to those given local responsibility for the programme’s development.

During this period and potentially beyond, we are at heightened risk of COVID incursion into our prisons and transmission between colleagues. HMPPS and PHE outbreak analysis demonstrates that staff represent our biggest risk of bringing COVID-19 into our establishments as we have greater freedom of movement. Staff must therefore act responsibly during all fitness activities and must be made aware that, in the event of a local outbreak, HMPPS will have to review access to facilities as part of outbreak control measures at an individual site. Whilst the aspiration is to enable staff to access programmes throughout the period, this is dependent on the outbreak status of individual sites and staff compliance with COVID controls. Local decision making at establishment level based on risk will therefore determine whether this activity can be supported. HMPPS may have to centrally withdraw access to programmes at individual or all sites at short notice based on emerging risks.

Establishments will develop their own local programmes but are advised to follow the three-tier model outlined below:

*Self-Led fitness sessions*

* Staff should be encouraged to walk in external areas during breaks including sports fields and prison perimeters (where safe to do so)
* Meditation mindfulness practice

*Instructor-led fitness Sessions*

Where local resources allow and only using equipment outlined in the current Local Operating Procedure (in adherence with the national PE EDM):

* Cardiovascular sessions
* Strength sessions
* Step, Zumba, Yoga, HIIT or other exercise to music
* Field fence runs
* Body weight exercise circuits
* National Custodial Indoor Rowing League (contact [PEreturns@justice.gov.uk](mailto:PEreturns@justice.gov.uk) for details)

*Fitness Activities – Supported by PEIs wherever possible*

* Multi-stage fitness practice i.e. the Bleep test
* Speed and agility circuits
* Dynamic upper body sessions
* Strength sessions (using equipment outlined in the PE EDM)
* Remedial fitness sessions (for staff who have failed their last fitness test)
* Specialist staff sessions to maintain overall condition – PEIs, C&R Specialist staff, NDTSG and NTRG

**All cleaning, hygiene and social distancing guidance in the PE EDM and SOPs, LOPs and local risk assessments already in place must be adhered to.**

This guidance has been produced jointly between the HMPPS Physical Education Team and COVID-19 Prison Regime Management Team on behalf of Gold Command. For further information or enquiries please contact the regime management team functional mailbox at the following address:

[**COVID19.Regimes&OpsGuidance@justice.gov.uk**](mailto:COVID19.Regimes&OpsGuidance@justice.gov.uk)

**End of guidance, produced 12 November 2020**