Dear Prison Group Directors,

We have been asked whether we should relax our social visits measures further during festive period to try to mirror the community arrangements. One example that was given to us is to allow for more than one household to come and visit a prisoner between 23rd and 27th of December in line with the mixing of multiple households.

We have considered this and concluded that we are already responding to festive community arrangements in a tailored response  that takes into account both the public health guidance aimed at minimising the risk of transmission as well as recognising how important visits are during Christmas for many families and prisoners achieving legitimacy in our approach.

Where it is determined to be safe locally (e.g. based on OCT advice or local assessment) we have permitted social  visits to take place in all three tiers- for visitors coming from any of the tiers. This applies to an extended period of time to allow for sufficient visits to be facilitated in Tier 3 sites-or for visitors from Tier 3 to acknowledge that we do not deliver visits on the core holiday days and need sufficient time to deliver visits in a COVID secure manner.  Nevertheless this is a restricted period of exemption like the community.

Permitting multiple households to join one visit is not deemed appropriate. Community rules allow 3 households to mix only over a very short Christmas period, and it is important that HMPPS would not encourage individuals to go beyond this and permit something that you cannot do in the community without good reason.  Equally due to the practical difficulties of managing which households were mixing, and the extended operation of this for the two weeks it is not appropriate to deviate from the current single household visit throughout the festive period or on an ongoing basis.

Thank you

COVID Regimes and Operational Guidance Team