**Gold Briefing: Exemptions from Face Coverings & Masks in Social and Official Visits**

HMPPS issued guidance on exemptions from face coverings for social visitors in August, in line with their expanded usage in the community. Central Government acknowledge that a small number of individuals may have legitimate reasons for not adhering to the requirements around face coverings in the community. The purpose of this briefing is to reinforce the message around face covering exemptions and clarify that the guidance issued about exemptions in social visits is also relevant to the official visits setting. Establishments have a legal responsibility to facilitate official visits, and an exemption from wearing a face covering by an official visitor is not justification to cancel a visit or prevent it from going ahead.

Those citizens exempted from the requirements include (but are not limited to):

* Young children under the age of 11 (Public Health England do not recommended face coverings for children under the age of 3 for health and safety reasons);
* Those who are not able to put on, wear or remove a face covering because of a physical or mental illness or impairment, or disability;
* Those for whom putting on, wearing or removing a face covering would cause severe distress; and
* Those who are travelling with or providing assistance to someone who relies on lip reading to communicate.

The GOV.UK website provides further information on circumstances where citizens are exempted from the requirement to wear face coverings (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own). This website also contains templates for exemptions cards and badges for people to demonstrate that they have legitimate exemption from wearing a face covering. However, use of these exemption cards is currently optional and those who have an age, health or disability reason for not wearing a face covering should not be routinely asked to give any written evidence of this, this includes exemption cards.

Though the use of exemption cards is not mandated, it is possible that both social and official visitors to establishments may present an exemption card or badge on arrival and claim exemption from the HMPPS requirement to wear a face covering in visits. Staff booking visits must remind all visitors of the requirement to wear a face covering during a visit unless the visitor falls within the government exemptions. However, if a visitor states during the booking stage that they have an exemption from wearing a face covering, they must be informed that this will not prevent them from being able to access the visit and that other mitigations may be put in place during the visit to keep them safe.

Establishments must refer to the hierarchy of controls in place for social visits and seek to apply other alternative measures to mitigate the risk of transmission introduced by an individual being exempt from wearing a mask. This hierarchy of controls in place for social visits can be utilised to establish alternative measures for official visits, if they are required. Any additional measures must be in place to enable the visit to start promptly and as such, establishments should give consideration to how they would mitigate the risk and build local procedures for this eventuality in advance of the scenario arising.

Any further queries in regard to face coverings exemptions should be directed to: COVID19.Regimes&OpsGuidance@justice.gov.uk in the first instance.