**Gold Briefing – Regime Delivery from 29 March 2021.**

**Purpose**

Monday 29 March marks the next step in the easing of community restrictions in England and the ‘stay at home order’ put in place in January for the National Lockdown comes to an end. This briefing is to update you on the implications of that change for prison regimes.

In Wales, as of Saturday 27 March the stay local rule will be replaced by an interim all-Wales travel area, which will remain in place until April 12, subject to the public health situation. For the next two weeks, only those with a reasonable excuse, such as work, will be able to travel into or out of Wales (there is an exemption for social visits – please see social visits below).

**Progression to Stage 3 Regimes:**

The process for progression of establishments to Stage 3 remains unchanged from the Gold Brief issued on 1 March (see attached).



That process is summarised in the following flow chart:



**Note: YCS establishments have remined at level 3 throughout the lockdown period.**

**Changes to Regime delivery from 29 March:**

29 March does not signal a relaxation in our response to COVID-19 in prisons. The increased numbers of staff, prisoners and children agreeing to take part in testing regimes are encouraging, as is the progress our Health colleagues are making to roll out the vaccination programme in the community and in prisons. But we cannot afford to be complacent and must continue to ensure Safe Operating Procedures and Local Operation Procedures are followed (SOPs and LOPs) and that local risk assessments are up to date to ensure we continue to protect our staff and those in custody.

The end of the stay at home order from 29 March (and the relaxation of travel restrictions in Wales from 27th March) does mean that there are a number of changes to what can be delivered in a Stage 3 regime. Please note that establishments at Stage 4 should not be lifting regime restrictions until approval has been granted for a move to Stage 3 but may wish to note the following updates when planning for progression when the time is right.

Social Visits – after 29 March, all establishments at Stage 3 in England and Wales can resume offering face to face social visits.

* In order to keep staff, prisoners, children and their visitors safe, visits will be subject to the same restrictions as prior to the National Lockdown and as set out in the existing EDM and SOP – this includes the need to maintain hygiene arrangements, COVID-19 cleaning, social distancing and the use of face coverings and face masks as per relevant LOPs. Refreshments counters and creche facilities will need to remain closed until further guidance is published on this.

We recognise that maintaining these restrictions on social visits will be disappointing for some but, in line with our approach to all elements of recovery we must be careful to balance progression with the management of risk. However, work is underway to consider the ways that the social visit experience can be enhanced as we continue to recover, and you will be updated on this work in due course. In the meantime, sites are encouraged to reflect on the lessons learned from last year’s experiences of restarting visits and how we can use learning to improve the experience and take up of visits and to engage with their local Family Service Providers to plan for the resumption of face to face visits.

Welsh Government have confirmed that social visits will be regarded as a reasonable excuse and therefore individuals from England are able to travel to visit offenders in Welsh prisons (and vice versa).

* Shielding (prisoners/children)- From 1st April, shielding will be paused in the community. Due to the high-risk nature of the prison environment, the opportunity to shield will continue to be available for any prisoner/child who wishes to do so.

Further guidance on the facilitation of prisoner shielding can be found in the attached briefing document below, along with an NHS letter (which will be issued to prisoners in England by health providers), and a briefing document for prison officers to assist in conversations around shielding. A letter to prisoners in Wales is currently being developed with Welsh Government. The cohorting and compartmentalisation guidance will be updated in due course to reflect these changes.

 

* Shielding (staff) – Please find attached revised guidance for the clinically extremely vulnerable who may be able to return to the workplace with effect from 1st April.  This is a minor revision to the guidance we provided last summer when shielding was paused.



* ROTL - Open establishments can reintroduce the forms of ROTL permitted at Stage 3 (e.g. for work, for education, medical appointments and resettlement etc), similarly Closed prisons at Stage 3 may resume work ROTL to maintain outside grounds and all must comply with community restrictions on travel and household mixing and social distancing in force within the country where the activity is taking place. We will review this approach in line with expected relaxations on restrictions in the community and more detailed guidance will be published in due course.  Open prisons operating Stage 4 regimes can consider those prisoners enrolled in full time education as essential workers.
* Chaplaincy, Faith and Pastoral Care – in line with the position in the wider community, establishments at Stage 3 can reintroduce Holy Communion where it is assessed as appropriate and the necessary risk assessments have been completed. The celebration and sharing of Holy Communion is permitted but the Government guidance for places of worship and the specific guidance for the relevant Christian denomination must be followed. This is noteworthy ahead of Easter. This can be found in Annex 1 of the EDM. Please note that corporate worship has been able to re-commence in Stage 3 sites since the publication of the Gold Briefing of 01/03/21.

The 12 April marks the start of Ramadan – establishments will be provided with further guidance on the delivery of Ramadan during COVID-19 by the HMPPS Chaplaincy Team in due course.

* Physical activity and PE –All adult establishments may continue to offer indoor and outdoor structured activities for both staff and prisoners as communicated in the Gold Brief from 01/03/21. Free access to indoor gyms is not permitted at this time in line with the community. England will allow indoor gyms to reopen in the community from the 12th April, but social distancing restrictions will still be in place. Therefore, free access will still not be permitted in prisons in England until at least 12th April. There is not yet an agreed date for the re-opening of gyms in Wales, and further information will be shared when there is a date agreed. Guidance is contained in the Structured Physical Activity document.



Parkrun returns in England in the community from 5th June and we are awaiting further news on when this will apply in Wales. Prisons must be at Stage 2 before Parkrun can return in custody (post 5th June) and agreement with PE HQ will be required (contact Head of PE Wendy Limb wendy.limb@justice.gov.uk).

YCS sites will continue to offer activities as per the YCS EDM on Education, PE and Libraries.

Further updates will be provided as community easements are announced in relation to Sport and Physical Activity.

* Barbering and Hairdressing – In line with the community, barbering workshops and hairdressing salons remain closed in England until at least 12 April and establishments in England cannot re-start on-wing provision of barbering and hairdressing until at least this date. In Wales, on-wing provision of barbering is permitted at Stage 3 under current Welsh Government regulations. Guidance on the provision of barbering and hairdressing at Stage 3 will be shared in due course.

Please direct any queries to: COVID19.Regimes&OpsGuidance@justice.gov.uk.