**Gold Briefing – 27 May 2021**

**Physical contact during social visits**

Purpose

To inform establishments that, where social visits are available, the following is now permitted:

* physical contact between prisoners and children under 11 is permitted during social visits.
* Visitors to an individual prisoner can come from up to 2 households.

These changes apply to prisons in both England and Wales.

Summary

Recent changes in the community guidelines have seen an easing of some restrictions around physical contact with family members and some limited indoor mixing of households. Therefore, Ministers have agreed that we can introduce similar provisions for social visits in prisons.

Public Health England (PHE) and Public Health Wales (PHW) are supportive of the proposed changes for the reintroduction of physical contact with those under 11. While children of all ages are susceptible to and can transmit COVID-19, children in this younger age group are not required to undergo routine testing in the community and are exempt from some other controls.

Until now social visitors to prisons must come from single households where all adults and children live together or are part of the same childcare bubble. We are now allowing for adults and children to come from up to two households to attend one visit. This is the equivalent of the English community guidance on indoor mixing and, whilst there is no change to the rules on indoor mixing in homes the community in Wales at this time, the Welsh Government have confirmed that prisons can apply the same rules, as social visits are considered to be a regulated setting..

In making these changes to social visits, establishments should take account of the following considerations:

* Governors should keep under review whether physical contact in visits for those under 11 should be paused at any time, if the prison is rated as being at a higher risk e.g. it experiences an outbreak or is at heightened risk due to the surrounding community outbreak situation.
* Social visits should not take place if either the prisoner or visitor is symptomatic.
* There are no restrictions to the contact children under 11 can have with the person they are visiting, provided it is in line with the prison’s normal rules.
* Children can leave their seat but will need to stay in the area marked out during this visit.
* Visits halls should continue to operate with a reduced capacity to enable social distancing between visiting groups and maximising ventilation should remain a control measure;
* Face coverings (for adults), good hand hygiene (for all) and cleaning protocols should remain in place as crucial infection prevention measures.
* Care should be taken to support visitors to maintain distance and minimise contacts when visitors are moving along access routes to and from visits halls.
* Everyone on the visit will need to follow social distancing guidance when they are arriving or leaving the visits hall so we can continue with social distancing between people who don’t know each other which is in line with the community guidance.
* All adults attending visits should be encouraged to access testing in the community the day before the visit and on the day of a visit (in England), or to accept the offer of an onsite test (at those prisons where this is being piloted). We are seeking agreement from the Welsh Government for visitors to gain access to community testing for the purpose of prison visits.
* Prisons are encouraged to provide testing for prisoners before and after visits where resourcing allows. This is not mandatory as we recognise the challenges this creates but is best practice.
* It is not necessary or proportionate to introduce reverse cohorting for prisoners after a visit.

Attached here are some communications materials to support you in conversations with staff, prisoners and their families about these changes

  

Products for the youth estate will be sent directly to those governors and posters and social media templates will follow later this week.

We will be sharing the core lines with Prison Radio later today in order to run tomorrow and will be updating [gov.uk](http://gov.uk) and the HMPPS social media account. The visits booking line will also be updated.

Physical Contact with older children and adults

At this stage we are not reintroducing physical contact between prisoners and older children (i.e. 11 years or over) or adults because of the increased risk of transmission posed. PHE and PHW support our phased approach.

We are however, exploring the extension of the existing pilots that have introduced testing ahead of social visits and require any visitor age 11 or over to accept the offer of an on-site LFD test before being permitted physical contact during the visit (face coverings will still be required). This work will include consideration of whether we can move more quickly in the youth estate. Further communication will be issued to these sites in due course and no contact should be permitted at this stage.

We will keep you informed of the outcome of these pilots.

Visitors from areas effected by Variants of Concern

As set out in the Gold Briefing of 25 May regarding Variants of Concern (VOC), social visits, where available, should continue to be run in a COVID secure manner.  Visitors from areas effected by a VOC are advised to stay local but this is not a stay-at-home directive.  We should encourage all social visitors from such areas to be mindful of both the necessity and the potential risk to health of their visit. We are however not specifically instructing visitors to stay away.

If any visitors from an area effected by a VoC do decide to cancel their visit, or, for example, if they are required to self-isolate and cannot attend, then establishments should continue to ensure that the prisoner is given an opportunity to contact their family/friends by video call or telephone.

**Covid-19 Gold Command**

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