**Update on the Delta Variant and Enhanced Response Areas in the Community**

HMPPS remain alert to the developing situation in the North West and the announcement that Lancashire and Greater Manchester would be Enhanced Response Areas.  We are of course all aware that the Delta variant is now dominant across the country and there are other areas outside of the North West with increased prevalence that requires our vigilance.

We continue to monitor the COVID-19 risk at each establishment weekly via our Heatmap Panel which is attended by public health representatives. We take a holistic view of all available data to inform decisions and ensure that the RAG ratings are appropriate to the local risk at each site. We are also able to make exceptional updates to RAG ratings if the risk requires immediate action.  We are currently revisiting the RAG ratings to give clearer guidance on what should and shouldn’t happen at Red, Amber and Green levels alongside the RCU considerations that are well understood.

We have recently issued national guidance about the impact of the Delta variant on ROTL and Social Visits. In undertaking risk assessments for ROTL Governors and Directors must consider the COVID risk as part of the wider risk assessment.  Of greatest concern area areas where there is enhance response in place including surge testing of the community in that area.  In all instances Governors may wish to:

* Permit the activity as per the original decision if the circumstances warrant this exception/risk is manageable;
* Amend the ROTL to another location [subject to suitable notifications being completed; or
* Suspend the proposed ROTL until the risk is reduced in that area.

Governors can also increase LFD testing and/or seek reassurance of Covid workplace practices were prisoners are known to be working within higher risk areas*.*

Governors in the effected regions have also been advised to run domestic day release/overnight release to private addresses on an exceptional basis during this period of heightened risk.

At this time we do not anticipate suspending social visits in the affected regions and these continue to be delivered (in a COVID secure manner) in areas where Gold agreement has been given previously.  Visitors should not travel if symptomatic or positive.

The best sources of live information of areas where the Delta variant is spreading the most and where there is enhanced local activity are via the following links:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do#if-youre-in-an-area-where-the-new-covid-19-variant-is-spreading>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/surge-testing-for-new-coronavirus-covid-19-variants>

We anticipate that as part of enhanced community response we will also see prisons requested to be part of surge testing arrangements and other response activity.

It remains vitally important that we maintain focus on our well established COVID controls and LOPs at this time.  This notably includes the continued uptake of staff testing (which we have seen decrease in some prisons recently) and the ongoing promotion and delivery of vaccinations to those that are eligible.

Thank you for your ongoing vigilance and hard work.