**Gold Briefing – Planning for the Third Wave – 25/06/21**

**Purpose**

To provide an update to prisons on the resurgence of new infections in the community and the consequential risk of a third wave of infections in the custodial estate. This briefing provides an update on the position to date and the key COVID-19 controls in place to protect our staff and those in custody.

**Summary**

We are now seeing a significant resurgence of new infections in the community driven by the Delta variant across the UK with R (the number of people that one infected person will pass on a virus to, on average) rising substantially in the previous two weeks across all areas. There remains considerable uncertainty about the scale and duration of the expected resurgence, but evidence suggests that there will be substantial differences between regions.

Each area will have its own local dynamics, and this will make projecting the timing and size of any peak (both regionally and nationally) very difficult and imprecise. The peak is unlikely to happen simultaneously or consistently across the country and so understanding local situations, as well as the national one, will be critical over the coming weeks.

Data highlights that we are now experiencing the third wave of infections in the community. Whilst we have yet to see these impacts mirrored in the custodial estate, we know that there is a lag between community impacts and the effect on prisons and we are beginning to see rises in the numbers of cases being reported, with 2 new outbreaks being reported this week. With significant numbers of unvaccinated or partially vaccinated adults across the estate there remain significant proportions of our population still vulnerable to infection, severe illness and death.

As per the Gold briefing issued on 15 June, the delay in the easing of community restrictions until 19 July is intended to allow time for more people to be vaccinated. Within the prison setting, this means that the Stage 1 Gateway will remain closed for the time being, but the Gateway to Stage 2 remains open and establishments are able to progress where the risk is deemed to be controlled, and public health and trade union partners are consulted.

We are aware that a number of establishments are beginning to review their usage of **face masks** and **face coverings**, reducing the areas where they are locally mandated. The respective [policies](https://hmppsintranet.org.uk/ersd-guidance/2020/10/12/face-masks/) for use of face masks and coverings remain in place, and whilst establishments remain able to conduct risk assessments to determine where their use is locally mandated, sites are encouraged to maintain usage of them during this period of increased risk. As regimes open up at Stage 2, widespread usage of masks and coverings remain a critical tool in the reduction of transmission. Any reviews of establishments risk assessments and local processes must continue to involve meaningful consultation with recognised trade unions at a local level.

It is important that establishments continue to utilise up-to-date versions of all guidance and SOPs. COVID-19 guidance for prisons continues to be accessible via the Operational Guidance Platform at <https://hmppsintranet.org.uk/ersd-guidance/>. Please remember that this link is best accessed via Firefox, and the link is not to be shared externally.

**Social distancing** must remain in place across the estate, with all staff and prisoners asked to remain 2m apart. In areas where 1m+ distancing has been approved (POELT training, reception and social visits), sites must continue to follow agreed [SOPs](https://hmppsintranet.org.uk/ersd-guidance/2020/04/15/safe-operating-procedures-sop-using-ppe/) to reduce risk. Please note that this applies to England only and in Wales, 2m social distancing remains in place without exception.

It is critically important that staff do not attend establishments if they are unwell or showing signs of symptoms, or if they or members of their households have tested positive. Staff should be encouraged to participate in regular **testing** and at the earliest opportunity. Testing remains our best defence in detecting outbreaks and all staff and prisoners should be encouraged to engage in testing to allow us to detect cases, prevent outbreaks and avoid the need for further restriction of regimes.

All adults in both England and Wales are now eligible for Covid-19 **vaccination**. This is a significant milestone and good news for all those living and working in prisons. Phil Copple, Director General of Prisons, has written to senior prison leaders, making it clear that supporting the vaccination programme is an operational priority for us all.



HMPPS continue to commit to support staff who have COVID-19 or dependents or are in the clinically extremely vulnerable category. Guidance around supporting CEV staff is available at:  <https://hmppsintranet.org.uk/ersd-guidance/2020/04/15/staff-family-shielding/>

**Infection prevention and control** measures such as good hand hygiene and cleanliness remain crucial and it is important that standards of hygiene remain high during this period of risk. Increased frequency of cleaning, disinfecting of general room surfaces, and regular hand washing reduces the presence of the virus and the risk of contact. Following the detailed guidance and using the correct products reduces this risk and has allowed us to not need to leave cells empty for 72hrs between occupants for example. We must also continue to ensure the best possible fresh air **ventilation** in all areas.

The response to Covid-19 incidents and outbreaks which do occur will continue to be led by Public Health and engage multi-agency outbreak control or incident management teams. It’s important that we enable a **rapid and robust intervention** against outbreaks. Where possible and appropriate, a rapid response may increasingly involve a mass test of the whole prison which will require temporary suspension of some services. We are confident this is the right approach. It may seem disproportionate to a small number of cases, but it is more likely that we can reduce the duration and scale of outbreaks by intervening early and, in so doing, avoid some of the major impacts we have seen in previous waves.

Please direct any queries to [COVID19.RegimesOpsGuidance1@justice.gov.uk](mailto:COVID19.RegimesOpsGuidance1@justice.gov.uk) in the first instance.

Kind Regards,

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