**PRISON VISITS Q&A 23/07/23**

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**COVID restrictions – general

If since 19 July there is no enforceable legislation around COVID restrictions, and it is just down to personal responsibility, how can the prison service be exempt from the guidance around COVID if there are no legislated rules to be exempt from? Is there a legal basis for prisons to require extra precautions for visits?**From 19 July, some restrictions such as social distancing may remain in place in prisons because they are high-risk environments due to the high number of people living and working together, making the spread of infection more difficult to control and the risk of outbreaks more acute. Assessments will be carried out by service managers in consultation with or as a result of advice from Directors of Public Health, who will be able to continue to advise on social distancing measures to control and prevent outbreaks.

The use of social distancing will be targeted, time-limited, and kept under review.

You can [read more on Gov.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-and-prisons)

**What precautions will be taken to protect prisoners from COVID once staff no longer have to adhere to any restrictions when in the outside world?**

We are continuing with our preventative measures in prison and our youth estate because the health advice is that they are high-risk environments where infection can spread rapidly. Staff will continue to be offered free testing and will continue to wear masks. We will also keep social distancing in place in our prisons and youth estate.

**Vaccination status**

**What role will vaccines play? Will double-jabbed prisoners be able to have less restricted visits with double-jabbed visitors?**No. Less restricted social visits, i.e. those which allow physical contact, are dependent on visitors testing negative for COVID rather than their vaccination status.

Visitors and prisoners or children in custody do not have to have received two doses of the vaccine to have physical contact.

Following pilots at several prisons, establishments in the adult and youth estates in England and Wales will begin [testing social visitors](https://lnks.gd/l/eyJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJidWxsZXRpbl9saW5rX2lkIjoxMDcsInVyaSI6ImJwMjpjbGljayIsImJ1bGxldGluX2lkIjoiMjAyMTA3MjIuNDM1NDI0MzEiLCJ1cmwiOiJodHRwczovL3d3dy5nb3YudWsvZ3VpZGFuY2UvdmlzaXQtc29tZW9uZS1pbi1wcmlzb24tZHVyaW5nLXRoZS1jb3JvbmF2aXJ1cy1jb3ZpZC0xOS1wYW5kZW1pYyN2aXNpdGluZy1ydWxlcyJ9.HSbN9aafJPgXLCuQLSQQG9MJu4BDmertMOvc3JXHkLI/s/1199657036/br/109743399319-l) so that they can have physical contact with the people they are visiting. Physical contact may be permitted if visitors can show they have had a negative test on the day of the visit. The timing of when individual establishments implement these changes will be subject to local risk assessments.

Read more about how to get tested and how to register your result on [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/visit-someone-in-prison-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic#visiting-rules).

**Physical contact and testing**

**Will prisoners and/or visitors have to agree to testing in order to have physical contact if they are double-jabbed? Is being double-jabbed enough on its own?**No, being double-jabbed is not enough on its own. While having the vaccination prevents people from getting seriously ill with COVID, they may still be able to pass it on. That is why it is important to continue testing so we can catch any cases and prevent them entering the prison and youth estate.

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**Will children over 11 be able to have physical contact?**In England and Wales, anyone can have physical contact with their loved ones if they can show they have had a negative test on the day of the visit. Children under 11 do not need to be tested and are allowed contact if it is in line with the prison’s [normal rules](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/visit-someone-in-prison-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic#visiting-rules). Visitors and prisoners or children in custody do not have to have received two doses of the vaccine to have physical contact.

Read more about how to get tested and how to register your result on [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/visit-someone-in-prison-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic#visiting-rules).

**Will different prisons’ ways of offering Lateral Flow Device testing be made consistent, or will it be decided at a local level?**Some prisons may be able to offer testing on site, but not all will able to offer this. [Please check with individual prisons.](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prisons-in-england-and-wales)

**Masks and hygiene

Will I have to wear masks during the visits?**

Yes, we are keeping masks and temperature checks in place for visits. You will also need to follow the social distancing guidance in place in the prison you are visiting.

**Will staff be required to wear masks and adhere to social distancing when inside prisons after 19 July? Or will it be their choice?**

Yes, they will still be required to wear masks and adhere to social distancing when at work.

**Will I still have to wait outside and be temperature-checked wear a mask and sanitize my hands, or can I book in and sit straight down; will I be safe visiting with no PPE?**

We will still be checking people’s temperature and asking visitors to wash their hands and wear a mask. Health officials have said there is a high risk of an outbreak if we get an infection in to the prison so we want to do all we can to prevent COVID from coming in.

**Sending things to family members in prison**

**When will families and significant others be able to send clothing and other packages to their loved ones?**

Property can be posted to prisons in the normal way. At the moment, no property may be brought or handed in by visitors on visits to reduce delays and maximise the amount of time with loved ones. Some establishments have made alternate arrangements for sending/receiving prisoners’ property which are separate from social visits and are COVID-19 secure, so you can enquire about this locally.

**Visits frequency, length and number of visitors allowed**

**When will other people be able to visit, i.e. when will the limit of two households be lifted?**We will continue to review the preventative measures we have put in place and to make changes in line with the public health advice we are given.

We can’t say yet when the limit will be raised because of the need to continue social distancing in prisons for everyone’s safety. Social distancing measures are being maintained in prisons because they are high-risk environments due to the high number of people living and working together, making the spread of infection more difficult to control and the risk of outbreaks more acute. We want to increase the number of children that can be brought on a visit as soon as it safe to do so, and in the meantime individual prisons will make local assessments of how many people can be accommodated safely.**When will I be able to bring more than two children with me on a visit?**We can’t say yet when the limit will be raised because of the need to continue social distancing in prisons for everyone’s safety. Social distancing measures are being maintained in prisons because they are high-risk environments due to the high number of people living and working together, making the spread of infection more difficult to control and the risk of outbreaks more acute. We want to increase the number of children that can be brought on a visit as soon as it safe to do so, and in the meantime individual prisons will make local assessments of how many people can be accommodated safely.

**When will visits times and durations return to normal?**

For the moment we will continue to offer monthly visits. Where face-to-face visits are temporarily suspended, we will ensure families can continue to stay in touch with significant others through phone calls, for which additional PIN credit continues to be provided, video calls, letters and the Email a Prisoner and Prisoner Voicemail services. There is currently no charge for secure social video calls. All prisons and youth custody sites now have video calling, and [guidance on secure video calls with prisoners can be read here](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/visit-a-prisoner-using-a-video-call).

There are a number of other ways to contact someone in prison if you are unable to visit them. For example you might be able to leave a voice message using the [Prison Voicemail Service](https://prisonvoicemail.com/) or send them an email using the [email a prisoner](https://www.emailaprisoner.com/) service. You can also [write to them](https://www.gov.uk/staying-in-touch-with-someone-in-prison).

If you have urgent concerns about someone in prison you should call the prison direct. Contact details are available on the [Prison Finder](https://www.gov.uk/find-prison).

**Can I have more visits now instead of monthly visits?**

For the moment, establishments will continue to offer monthly visits where possible, and any changes in the number of visits offered is for individual prisons to decide based on their local circumstances. Considerations include the space and capacity available in visits halls in light of the COVID-19 controls that remain in place, and the resources available to facilitate them.

Where face-to-face visits are temporarily suspended, we will ensure families can continue to stay in touch with significant others through phone calls, for which additional PIN credit continues to be provided, video calls, letters and the Email a Prisoner and Prisoner Voicemail services. There is currently no charge for secure social video calls. All prisons and youth custody sites now have video calling, and [guidance on secure video calls with prisoners can be read here](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/visit-a-prisoner-using-a-video-call).

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**Visits facilities

Will the play areas be reopened?**For the moment, we are unable to reopen our play areas**.** We will continue to review this and to make changes in line with the public health advice we are given.

Some prisons have outdoor play areas which may be open subject to local assessment. Indoor play areas will remain closed for now due to social distancing continuing in prisons.

Social distancing measures are being maintained in prisons because they are high-risk environments due to the high number of people living and working together, making the spread of infection more difficult to control and the risk of outbreaks more acute. This makes increasing frequency of visits difficult.