

**Funeral Escorts and Visiting Dying Relatives**

**Updated COVID-19 Guidance – May 2021**

**Purpose of guidance**

* To provide updated guidance on funeral escorts and on prisoners visiting dying relatives, in line with government community guidelines.
* In some cases, prisoners may be given Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) to attend a funeral or visit a dying relative. They may apply for an escort for the funeral or to visit their dying relative if they are not otherwise suitable for ROTL. This guidance applies only to funeral escorts; separate [guidance on ROTL](https://hmppsintranet.org.uk/ersd-guidance/2020/04/15/hdc-and-rotl/) is available.

This information should be read in conjunction with [PSI 33/2015 – External Prisoner Movement](https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/policies-and-subjects/prisons/national-security-framework/external-movement/psi-2015-33).

**Current situation**

Currently in England and Wales, COVID-secure arrangements are in place to allow visits in inpatient settings, such as hospitals. From 17th May, the number of attendees at a funeral will be determined by how many people the venue can safely accommodate with social distancing measures in place, including anyone working. There will no longer be a maximum number of attendees defined in regulations.

**Funeral Escorts**

[PSI 33/2015 – External Prisoner Movement](https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/policies-and-subjects/prisons/national-security-framework/external-movement/psi-2015-33) should continue to be followed when considering permitting prisoners to attend funerals.

There is no absolute ban on prisoners in any security category attending a funeral of a close relative, as detailed within the policy. During the COVID-19 period, applications for these requests should be assessed against the risk assessment provided in the policy. It must consider whether on the grounds of security the prisoner would or would not satisfy the criteria of a funeral escort. All decisions must be clearly evidenced in the risk assessment.

It is essential that the necessary and proportionate COVID-19 controls are in place during a funeral escort. If a prisoner is displaying symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19, they should not be permitted to attend a funeral.

The Governor will need to decide on the following operational points after the risk assessment has been completed and the request permitted. This must take into consideration local outbreaks and subsequent local restrictions.

* the **distance required between staff and prisoner** to facilitate the escort. This must take into consideration the practicality of managing COVID-19 transmission risk during the whole period outside of the prison. If a long-distance escort is supported and a prison transfer is recommended, this must be escalated as per regular policy, with relevant COVID controls;
* there may be **specific limits on numbers to attend funerals** and therefore, confirmation should be sought that these limits would not be exceeded by the prisoner and members of staff attending. The level of restrictions may also depend on the community outbreaks and local lockdowns arrangements;
* in addition to national limits, there may be **local restrictions on how many people can visit a dying person at any time**. Confirmation should be sought from the relevant institution, such as a hospital, that a prison escort would be in line with their requirements. If their visits protocols only allow for one person visits, confirmation should be sought as to whether the exception can be made to include escorting staff. The level of restrictions may also depend on the community outbreaks and local lockdown arrangements;
* the **level of restraint** to be applied, in line with PSI 33/2015 and the most up to date External Escort Guidance;
* The **level of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)** to be used, in line with the most up to date External Escort Guidance and Safe Operating Procedures (SOP). PPE must be provided to staff and the prisoner. Refer to SOP – Escorts and Bed watches

[Safe Operating Procedures (SOP) – Prisons Exceptional Regime & Service Delivery (hmppsintranet.org.uk)](https://hmppsintranet.org.uk/ersd-guidance/2020/04/15/safe-operating-procedures-sop-using-ppe/)

* The **method of transport** that will be used for the escort. The SOP details the requirements of using official vehicles or taxis during the COVID-19 period. . Refer to SOP – Use of Vehicles and Decontamination

[Safe Operating Procedures (SOP) – Prisons Exceptional Regime & Service Delivery (hmppsintranet.org.uk)](https://hmppsintranet.org.uk/ersd-guidance/2020/04/15/safe-operating-procedures-sop-using-ppe/)

All of the above considerations must be clearly documented in the COVID-19 Decision Log. Please see [External Escort Guidance](file:///C:\Users\QVP31R\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\NS36IEF6\COVID-19-External-Escorts-and-Bedwatches-guidance-v.5.1%20(5).docx) for further information about defensible decisions.

**Virtual Funeral Services**

For the duration of COVID-19, some funeral homes have the facilities to stream their services online. Governors should use technology to enable the viewing of funeral ceremonies, if possible and appropriate, together with supportive measures from chaplaincy and other colleagues if a prisoner is not able to attend a funeral via ROTL or an escort. The availability of technology should not encourage refusal of attendance in the first instance but may be used where a physical visit is not supported.

**Virtual Hospital Visits**

Many institutions allow for “virtual visits”. Governors should use technology to enable the contact if possible and appropriate, together with supportive measures from chaplaincy and other colleagues, if a prisoner is not able to visit their dying relative through ROTL or on escort. The availability of technology should not encourage refusal of attendance in the first place but may be used where a physical visit is not supported.

Please see the [iPad Briefing](file:///C:\Users\gob79o\Documents\IPad%20Briefing%20v1.6.docx) for further information.

**Cohorting Arrangements**

In line with the [HMPPS Cohorting Guidance](file:///C:\Users\QVP31R\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\NS36IEF6\HMPPS-Cohorting-and-Compartmentalisation-Guidance-v5-171220.docx) (issued December 2020), Public Health England (PHE) has stated that establishments are not required to reverse cohort prisoners who have been on one day escorts. This is because contact should have been minimised and social distancing should have been in place throughout, in line with guidance.

Escort staff should promote distancing and hand washing during the escort period and should record any breaches. In the event of contact breaches, which meet the exposure criteria for contact with known cases set out in [HMPPS Contact Tracing Guidance](file:///C:\Users\QVP31R\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\NS36IEF6\HMPPS-Contact-Tracing-V6-FINAL.docx) (issued November 2020), a decision should be made jointly with the Prison Healthcare Service on whether reception to the Reverse Cohort Unit (RCU) is appropriate. Prisoners must be advised in advance that they may be located in the RCU if they do not maintain necessary COVID-19 preventative behaviour during the escort.

If distancing and hygiene requirements have been followed, the prisoner can return to their original location.

**Wellbeing**

Attending a funeral escort or visiting dying relatives can be potentially traumatic for our staff. It is important to ensure they are accessing appropriate support, if requested. Manager’s should be conducting welfare checks with staff before and after escorts and understand the symptoms of acute stress post trauma. It may be appropriate to support staff through a variety of avenues including the local Care team, TRiM team, PAM assist/EAP Services. Including the staff members line manager would also be beneficial to provide “active monitoring” and ongoing support.

**Useful Contacts**

* Security Procedures FMB: [SOCT.Procedures@justice.gov.uk](mailto:SOCT.Procedures@justice.gov.uk)
* COVID GOLD FMB: [HMPPSCOVID19@justice.gov.uk](mailto:HMPPSCOVID19@justice.gov.uk)

**Supporting Documents**

* [PSI 33/2015 – External Prisoner Movement](https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/policies-and-subjects/prisons/national-security-framework/external-movement/psi-2015-33)
* [PSI 16/2011 – Providing Visits and Service to Visitors](https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/policies-and-subjects/prisons/visits-and-movement/psi-2011-016)
* [COVID-19 – External Escorts and Bedwatches Security Guidance (January 2021)](file:///C:\Users\QVP31R\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\NS36IEF6\COVID-19-External-Escorts-and-Bedwatches-guidance-v.5.1%20(5).docx)
* [Briefing: Hospital Escorts and Bedwatches during COVID-19 (January 2021)](file:///C:\Users\QVP31R\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\NS36IEF6\Briefing-escorts-bedwatches-for-staff-Final%20(1).docx)
* [SOP v6.2 – Escorts and Bedwatches (February 2021)](file:///C:\Users\QVP31R\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\NS36IEF6\6.SOP-V6.2-Escorts-and-Bedwatches%20(2).docx)
* [SOP v6.2 – Operational Tasks (February 2021)](file:///C:\Users\QVP31R\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\NS36IEF6\9.SOP-V6.2-Operational-Tasks-Covid-19%20(1).docx)
* [HMPPS Cohorting and Compartmentalisation Guidance (December 2020)](file:///C:\Users\QVP31R\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\NS36IEF6\HMPPS-Cohorting-and-Compartmentalisation-Guidance-v5-171220.docx)
* [iPad Briefing](file:///C:\Users\gob79o\Documents\IPad%20Briefing%20v1.6.docx)
* [Government COVID-19 Response: Spring 2021](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021)

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**May 2021**