**Official Sensitive Core Narrative - Restrictions Easing July 2021 Phil Copple Update**

Yesterday evening (5 July 2021), the Prime Minister updated the country on the progress being made in England towards moving to Step 4 of the roadmap. If adopted, it will see the removal of all COVID-19 restrictions within England on the 19 July and a move to a greater focus on personal responsibility. The Prime Minister was clear that he expected the final step would go ahead as planned but will give final confirmation on the 12 July after a review of the latest data.

The changes announced are for England only. We expect the First Minister of Wales to give an update on the 15th July but until that date current restrictions in Wales remain in place.

The announcement is positive news for all of us and marks a pivotal point in our recovery. The planned changes are intended to return much of life in the community back to how it was before the pandemic. Although we expect all restrictions to be lifted on the 19 July, what the Prime Minister also said was that the pandemic was far from over, something we are starting to see in our prisons each day. He was also clear that the country will retain its contingency measures to help manage the virus during higher risk periods such as the winter and this is something we will need to be prepared for.

The latest data suggest that we expect over 50,000 additional cases per day in the community by the 19 July with more deaths likely to follow. This stark reminder is why we must continue to proceed carefully in prisons which remain a high-risk environment and at a different pace to those in the wider community. We know all too well how quickly things can deteriorate across the prison estate. Public health experts are clear, prisons are vulnerable to prolonged outbreaks of infection because people live and work so closely together, and the general health of our population makes many prisoners more vulnerable to infection. Throughout the pandemic our priority within the prison community has been to keep our staff and those in custody safe and we must continue to make decisions that are right for the prison environment.

I do want to stress that we will progress with opening our regimes up and reducing the amount of restrictions we have in place, but that we must do it at a slower pace than the community. We will also use some of our learnings from COVID – and what we have heard from you, our partners and people in custody - to adapt our regimes in the future.

For the prison population vaccinations are key to reducing the need of returning to a more restricted regime in the future and we are making good progress in this area, but there is much more we can do. Already 42,500 of prisoners have had their first dose and 21,000 of prisoners are now fully vaccinated. Accurate reporting of vaccination levels remains vitally important, and Governors and Directors are asked to continue to encourage staff to also record their vaccination status on SOP. This disclosure of vaccination status is voluntary, but we would encourage everyone working in prisons to assist us.

If you have not had your vaccine yet or booked your second injection, it is strongly encouraged you do so. We have been focusing our efforts on informing everyone in prison about the vaccine and addressing their fears and concerns. You may have seen all the [materials on the intranet](https://hmppsintranet.org.uk/resources/recovery/prisons/) designed to help you feel confident about having these conversations with prisoners should you need to but hopefully they answer any questions you may have as well.  On the 73rd anniversary of the National Health Service, there is no better gift you could give than getting your vaccine when called up.

Thanks to the hard work and patience of everyone in our prisons, many prisons are today beginning to operate under less restricted regimes. I am pleased to say 13 prisons this week will now operate at Stage 2. I also understand the importance of family contact for prisoners and there are a range of ways prisoners can stay in touch with loved ones including family video calls, PIN phones and letters home. However, nothing can replicate physical contact during an in-person visit. We recently completed a pilot across a selection of prisons that allowed for social contact during visits. We are currently reviewing these results and I hope to update you on plans to roll this out further shortly.

This latest announcement signals that we are entering a new chapter of a long and challenging journey for all of us. We must continue to remain focussed on reducing the risk of hospitalisation and fatalities which dominated our earlier experience in the pandemic and continue to expand regimes cautiously. There may well be frustrations that the prison estate is moving more slowly than the wider community, but we have demonstrated that the steps we have put in place work and ultimately have saved lives.



Phil Copple

Director General – Prisons