**Restrictions easing in the community from 19th July**

Last night, the Prime Minister confirmed that the easing of restrictions in England will go ahead on Monday, July 19th and that there will be a greater move to personal responsibility.

As Phil Copple outlined in his governors’ call and subsequent note to staff last week, our response must continue to reflect the increased risk in our environment and so next week will highlight the areas where our response differs from the community.

We can anticipate that we will come under more pressure, both at a national and local level, to justify why we are not moving in line with the community in England. There are some things we are starting to see which helps explain the need for greater caution in custody including:

* an increase in cases in prisons
* an increase in staff absences, either through illness or through contact with someone with COVID
* lower vaccination uptake in prisoners compared to the community, meaning less protection in the event of an outbreak

In addition, public health officials have urged the community to take this next step cautiously to prevent a rise in cases and hospitalisations. We know that any increase in cases in the community is likely to find its way into prisons and our current response is proportionate to the risk the country still faces.

We know that this will cause frustration for prisoners and their families, and that managing stability will be challenging over the summer.

Prisons will continue to gradually move from stage three to stage two and then to stage one, but they will do so at different paces. We know that prisoners talk to each other and compare what is happening in the different establishments, particularly if they have been recently transferred. Please continue to provide regular updates on exactly what is happening in your prison and highlight areas of progress to help manage this.  Whilst we are proceeding with caution we also need to ensure that our pace of recovery and progression remains proportionate to the risk we face, maintaining legitimacy in our actions.

We also really need to keep promoting vaccination uptake for prisoners so we can be confident that outbreaks will not have the same impact as last year or earlier this year. Prisoners need to understand that a low vaccination rate means we are more likely to have to maintain restricted regimes or introduce restrictions again in the event of an outbreak. Public health advice is clear: we cannot risk high numbers of unvaccinated vulnerable people getting COVID, and vaccinations are the way we can impede the virus from spreading and prevent future significant outbreaks.

The First Minister in Wales is due to give an update this week on progress in Wales.

Please remember that staff and visitors from England will be used to no restrictions in the community. Make sure you have signs and posters clearly visible. You can find existing social distancing material [in the resource section](https://hmppsintranet.org.uk/resources/recovery/prisons/) of the intranet and the central communications team will be sending updated materials next week.

**Ed Cornmell**

**HMPPS Covid-19 Gold Command**