**Gold Briefing – Social Visits: Change in Testing Requirement**

**17 December 2021**

**Purpose**

Further to the recent Government announcement around Plan B and the temporary reversion of all sites across the estate to a minimum of Stage 2 of the National Framework, HMPPS have been urgently considering how we can manage the increased risk from the Omicron variant. The purpose of this briefing is to communicate urgent updates to the testing requirements of Social Visitors.

**Expansion of Testing Requirement to ALL Social Visitors**

We are aware of the importance of social visits and at this time there are no current plans to suspend them, but we will now have to take some extra precautions in order to help to reduce the risk for the people in our care, those who visit them and our staff.

To help reduce the spread of the virus in our prisons, **ALL** social visitors need to provide evidence of a negative lateral flow test,

If the visitor claims to be exempt due to having a positive PCR in the last 90 days, they will not be required to provide a negative LFD test on the day, however, If the visitor claims to be exempt due to having a positive PCR in the last 90 days they must evidence this. If the visitor is unable to show proof of this, the visitor may take an LFD test in order to attend the visit.

All visitors **MUST** be informed of this when booking their visit, and pre-booked visits must be informed ahead of the visit date to ensure that they are aware of the change and understand that if they cannot provide evidence of a negative test then the visit will be denied.

Prisoners attending visits must continue to be encouraged to take a test, but this remains voluntary at this time.

Please don’t post on social media about this yet, we will send an updated global with social assets and messaging. This is because we need to make sure GOV.UK pages are fully cleared and updated as well as call centres having the right scripts to avoid confusion on the frontline and for family and friends as much as possible.

We ask that you implement this as soon as possible, communicating locally the cut off point where visitors will not be admitted without a negative test and this must be no later than 27th December 2021.

**Testing Guidance**

The HMPPS Social Visits Testing Guidance has been updated to reflect the changes outlined in this briefing and is accessible [here.](https://pogp.hmppsintranet.org.uk/2020/07/15/visits-supporting-material/) It is also embedded below for ease.



Establishments must be clear in their communications to families that they should be mindful of the latest [Government guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/daily-rapid-testing-for-covid-19-contacts-launches-this-week) when planning their visit. This states that people who are fully vaccinated and identified as having contact with someone with COVID-19 – whether Omicron or not – should take an NHS rapid lateral flow test every day for 7 days and are strongly advised to **limit close contact with other people outside their household, especially in crowded or enclosed spaces and with anyone who is more vulnerable.** Prisons are deemed high risk environments and are enclosed and therefore it is not recommended that contacts visit a prison during the 7 day period, although we are unable to ask for evidence of this.

**Other Controls**

The relevant social visits SOPs will also remain in place, setting out the face mask requirements. Establishments are reminded that due to the reversion to Stage 2, they should be utilising the current [v8 SOP](https://pogp.hmppsintranet.org.uk/2020/04/15/safe-operating-procedures-sop-using-ppe/) for social visits.

At this time there are no other changes to the delivery of social visits and establishments are able to continue serving refreshments in line with the associated guidance available here. Similarly, establishments operating at Stage 2 continue to be able to offer contact visits in line with the published guidance.

**Cancellation of Social Visits**

Given the continuing COVID-19 situation in the community and the increased number of outbreaks that are being experienced across the estate,there may still be scenarios where individual establishments have to alter the way they operate visits, or where recommended by an OCT cancel them. Ensuring that the controls set out here are followed is critical. Where they are unfortunately required to be temporarily cancelled establishments may wish to offer additional video calls to those impacted wherever practicable and deliverable. As per recent guidance published, due to the increased value placed on the regime mitigations during this period, we will be simplifying the process for reintroducing any additional mitigations. Establishments are now able to request the reintroduction of mitigations via their PGD. The full detail of this guidance is set out [here.](https://pogp.hmppsintranet.org.uk/2020/04/15/phone-access/)

**Supporting Communications**

It is understood that this change has come in at short notice and therefore the below communications materials have been provided to support establishments in communicating this change with their staff, prisoners and families.



Please don’t post on social media about this yet, we will send an updated global with social assets and messaging. This is because we need to make sure GOV.UK pages are fully cleared and updated as well as call centres having the right scripts to avoid confusion on the frontline and for family and friends as much as possible.

Please direct any queries on this matter to [COVID19.RegimesOpsGuidance1@justice.gov.uk](mailto:COVID19.RegimesOpsGuidance1@justice.gov.uk).