Letter to Families

Last week Phil Copple wrote to tell you about the Government’s new plans to help manage the new COVID variant, Omicron, and what this means for people in our prisons.

Since we heard the new ‘Plan B’ plans we have been working hard to decide what other steps we need to take to manage the risk from this new variant and keep everyone in our prison safe.

You already know that there are no plans to stop social visits right now. We know how important they are, especially at this time of year. However some changes will have to be made to help to reduce the risk of Omicron for you, the person you are visiting and my staff.

From [X DATE] you, and anyone attending the visit with you, will need to take a Lateral Flow test before your visit and **bring the evidence of a negative result** with you to the prison. This could be:

* A time stamped photo of the negative test taken on the day of the visit, or
* the text or email you received from the NHS when you registered the result online

Children aged 11 and under do not need to take a test.

You will still be able to have physical contact with the person you are visiting during your visit, but you will all need to wear a mask or face covering.

Staff in the prison will also encourage the person you are visiting to also take a test before the visit to help to reduce the risks to everyone, especially if anyone in your party is vulnerable.

If you or someone visiting with you cannot take a test for medical reasons we will need you to bring some written evidence explaining why this is.

This is a vital part of keeping the prison and everyone in it safe from the virus, so if you cannot show evidence of a negative test result then the prison staff will not be able to let you come in for your visit. We really want to avoid having to turn people away on the door – it's not nice for my staff, you or the person you are visiting.

The testing rules in the community have also changed. Anyone who has had contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 now has to take a Lateral Flow test every day for 7 days and limit close contact with other people outside their household, especially in crowded or enclosed spaces and with anyone who is vulnerable.

As prisons are high risk places and our visits area is often busy we are asking any visitors who have had contact with someone with COVID-19 to postpone their visit until they have completed their 7 days of testing.

I want to reassure you that if a visit does have to be postponed because of contact with a positive case or because of a positive test, it will be re-booked and it won’t have an impact on the visits allocation.

I recognise that these extra precautions may be difficult for some, especially during the festive period when seeing your family and significant others is so important. This is why we want to make visits as safe as possible, so that we can reduce the chances of people becoming unwell.

Thank you for your continued patience and co-operation.