**21.02.22 “Living with COVID” Announcement - impact in Prisons**

The Prime Minister this afternoon announced that the community in England will be taking the next step towards “living with COVID”. A number of legal restrictions in England will be lifted from 24th February with further changes both later in March and from 1st April. An announcement for Wales is expected in early March. While this is positive news, the implications of this must be considered in the context of our unique environment. Establishments must continue to operate COVID-19 controls in line with their relevant regime stage and as per HMPPS [SOPs](https://pogp.hmppsintranet.org.uk/2020/04/15/safe-operating-procedures-sop-using-ppe/) and operational guidance.

The immediate implications of the PM’s announcement are therefore limited for prisons; however, work is well underway to develop our strategy for living with COVID-19 in custody. Planning is in place to ensure prisons are able to continue to progress safely. The gateway for progression to Stage 2 was opened on 3rd February, with nineteen prisons currently operating at a Stage 2 regime. Moreover, plans for opening the Stage 1 progression gateway are well advanced. The heatmap has moved 53 prisons to amber to date and are reviewing with progression in mind. Prisons will be expected to continue their progression through the National Framework as soon as it is safe to do so. Progression through the stages will also lead to the eventual withdrawal of the national provision of regime mitigations – further updates will be provided on this as/when the Stage 1 gateway is opened.

The PM’s announcement included some changes to specific elements of community guidance. The impact of these changes for HMPPS sites is outlined below.

**Prisoner Isolation**

In line with UKHSA advice, there will be no immediate changes to the current isolation guidance in prisons and the existing approach will remain in place for the safety of prisoners, residents and staff. Full isolation guidance for prisoners can be found [here.](https://pogp.hmppsintranet.org.uk/2020/04/28/staff-testing-in-england/)

Once the legal requirements for self-isolation in the Coronavirus Act 2020 are expired, the use of continued isolation, as recommended by public health, will be covered by Prison Rule 45, as in the current [Flu Pandemic Policy](https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/policies-and-subjects/policy-frameworks/hmpps-flu-pandemic-policy-framework). In summary it rules that a prisoner can be removed from association with others where it appears desirable for the maintenance of good order, discipline or in their own interests. Isolation under these rules must be subject to a review within 72 hours. Further guidance will be issued on prisoner isolation in due course.

**Staff Isolation**

Staff will continue to follow guidance from their HRL and line manager and will be advised to not attend work if they have symptoms or have tested positive for COVID-19. Staff who are contacts of positive cases will continue to be offered the relevant HMPPS return to work testing program, and can refer to the latest UKHSA advised guidance for isolation and testing, found [here](https://pogp.hmppsintranet.org.uk/2020/04/28/staff-testing-in-england/).

**Testing**

Testing will continue to offer a key control to the safety of prisons. Current testing capacity for prisons will continue until at least the end of March, and will apply to both, prisoners and the staff group. The availability of free community tests will continue until 1st April.  However, HMPPS will make the commitment that whilst requiring people to test, be this staff, visitors, prisoners, tests will be provided. It is critical we maintain an allocation of tests to enable this as long as this policy is advised by UKHSA and is in place.

**Wider Communications**

As part of this announcement communications will be going out to prisoners and their families to advise them on testing and isolation requirements, with additional notices for updates.

We will continue to support you throughout this important recovery period. Any queries should be directed to COVID19Ops&Guidance1@justice.gov.uk