**Visits Testing During Outbreaks in Prisons - April 2022**

From 1 April 2022, asymptomatic testing in the wider community ended in England & Wales. This impacted social visitors to prisons, who had previously accessed free tests in the community. As a result, the requirement for visitors to test prior to social visits in prisons in England and Wales has ceased. It is also no longer necessary for prisoners to be offered a pre-visit test. In the event of an outbreak, Outbreak Control Teams may, however, recommend the reintroduction of visits testing for prisoners and visitors as an additional safeguard.

Once a decision has been made to re-implement visitor testing, Governors should immediately advise the HMPPS Testing Team, who will support establishments through the process and the issuing of communications.

Self-collect test kits will be provided by HMPPS at the visits centre (or suitable alternative) to enable visitors to test prior to admission to the prison. Visitors aged 12 and over will be strongly encouraged to take a test on arrival, although testing will remain **voluntary** and entry should not be declined on the grounds of refusing to take a test. . However, where a positive test is given, the visitor will not be permitted entry into the prison.

If a visitor declines to take a test, additional mitigations can be put in place as recommended by the OCT/assessed locally, including non-contact visits, social distancing and face coverings. These mitigations should be decided at the point that visits is being re-introduced, in discussion with health leads and local trade union representatives.

**Planning**

Prisons should be aware that OCTs may recommend standing up visits testing and can commence planning for this eventuality, considering the below.

A SPOC should be appointed to ensure the set up and management of the process is in line with requirements. This will include the setting up of record keeping processes and maintaining stock levels.

**Resourcing Testing**

As part of the overall decision-making process, the Governor should consider available resources to implement testing, as visitor testing going forwards should be supported by prison staff. Family services providers are not being asked to play a role in testing visitors.

With the re-introduction of visitor testing, it is possible that testing of prisoners may also be recommended. This can be done using the previous approach to LFD testing already in place. Where there has not previously been a testing regime to support pre-visits testing, the visits testing guidance will support sites through set-up.

**Test Kits**

If the prison requires additional kits to support visits testing, the HMPPS Testing Team will work with the prison to ensure a supply of self-collect LFD tests is provided to the prison via courier from NDC Branston as soon as possible. This should be requested through the HMPPS Testing Team using the test kit request proforma provided by the team.

The test kits will be provided in boxes of seven, but the prison can issue one test at a time to each visitor and so will not be required to issue a whole box to an individual.

**Set up and Guidance**

The re-establishment of visitor testing will require governors to support a testing lead to set up a suitable self-test area either in the visitors' centre or a suitable location outside of the prison. This will also mean they will be responsible for ensuring that processes are in place as described in the published [HMPPS Social Visits Testing Guidance](https://pogp.hmppsintranet.org.uk/2020/07/15/visits-supporting-material/) which has been updated. This outlines the required considerations for infection prevention control and waste management. Test results should be registered and reported by the visitor who will then show visits staff evidence of the test (date stamped photo or text message or email from registration).

Governors will need to consider the number of visitors who will need to take a test prior to their visit and put in place measures to test and process visitors in such a way as not to impact upon the length of the visit.

**Communications**

It is important that visitors are given prior notice that testing will be taking place as early as possible. Once the decision has been made to stand up visitor testing, the HMPPS testing team will liaise with the HMPPS Communications team. The updated [visits guidance](https://pogp.hmppsintranet.org.uk/2020/07/15/visits-supporting-material/) pack (v1.4) provides Governors with template communications products including notices to prisoners, children, families, staff and social media templates and assets to support them to advise of any re-introduction of visitor testing. Once informed, the HMPPS communications teams will update individual prison pages on the gov.uk website to advise families of the need to test prior to a visit at these sites.

Governors should arrange for booking services to advise visitors of the change, and prisoners must be made aware. Best efforts should be made to ensure those prisoners who are expecting visits imminently are informed of the planned change. The Prison’s social media page can also be used to highlight the change to visitors.

**Reporting**

The testing of visitors must be noted using the Smart survey, recording the number of tests offered, taken, and any positive tests, using the existing link. This supports the testing team to monitor uptake and usage and inform future stock requirements.

**Ending Visits Testing**

Once the Governor has agreed with the OCT that visits testing is no longer proportionate, the process may cease. SPOCs will be asked to advise HMPPS Testing team to ensure the supply of tests can be stopped. The HMPPS Testing team will also inform the Communications team of the change, so the Gov.uk pages can be updated.

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| **The Visits Testing Model** |
| **Testing** | **Visitor Testing:** Visitors will be offered a self-collect LFD test at the visitors' centre. This model involves Self-collect testing (LFD) of visitors at a designated external testing area. The visitor is issued with a test kit to complete and register themselves and show the results to Prison staff.***If a visitor declines to take a test, additional mitigation can be put in place such as non-contact visits, social distancing and face coverings, as decided locally. However, entry must not be declined.***  ***These mitigations should be decided at the point that visits is being re-introduced, in discussion with health leads and local trade union representatives.*** |
| **Prisoner Testing:** The Prisoner consents to undertake an LFD test either the day before or on the day of the visit. If the result is positive, the prisoner should isolate in line with current guidance. |
| **Results** | If visitor(s) receive a **negative** test result, the visit can go ahead. If the prisoner testing is also taking place, both the prisoner’s test and the visitor’s test should be **negative** for the visit to proceed. If visitor(s) receive a **positive** test the visit will not be allowed to take place.  |