To:     HMPPS Leadership Team

          HMPPS Executive Directors

Prison Group Directors

Governors

Directors of Private Prisons

Cc:     Probation SLT

          Regional Probation Directors

**Pausing of Covid-19 Asymptomatic Testing in Prisons and YOIs in England** **– For Action**

In light of the recent Ministerial announcement regarding Covid-19 testing across various government settings, it is important to provide clarity on what this means for testing in the adult prison and youth secure estates.

On Wednesday 24 August 2022 the Health Secretary outlined amendments to asymptomatic testing across various sectors, including prisons. As a consequence, we will move to an updated approach to pause routine asymptomatic testing in prisons from 31 August 2022.  At present this will only affect those establishments within England, information regarding Wales will be issued in due course.

As set out in the Living with COVID strategy, the Government’s objective is now to manage COVID-19 in line with other respiratory illnesses, whilst protecting and treating those who are most vulnerable from more serious outcomes.

The recent wave has now peaked and prevalence in the community is expected to remain low over the next few months. Therefore, the likelihood that individuals entering prisons are infectious is reducing, and the relative risk of onward transmission is lower. As a result, regular asymptomatic testing will have a lower impact in improving health outcomes. Given these conditions, we are now pausing all routine asymptomatic testing.

This change supersedes the testing approach we communicated to governors in May regarding asymptomatic testing for identified high-risk areas and individuals.

Given the lower levels of prevalence the focus will shift to a reactive approach, with only symptomatic and outbreak testing, although this will be kept under regular review. As we move towards winter, some areas of testing may be reintroduced, and this will be communicated nearer the time.

It is important to acknowledge that COVID-19 vaccinations, and ongoing availability of symptomatic testing, will continue to provide vital protection against outbreaks in these settings.

We must be clear that pausing the regular asymptomatic testing regime does not mean testing will be removed from prisons completely. All other staff testing as previously communicated also remains unchanged. These are:

* Return to Work testing (following a positive test)
* Symptomatic Testing
* Outbreak testing

Additionally, Outbreak Control Teams may, at any time, recommend the temporary reintroduction of certain areas of testing where the risk indicates a need to do so.

Please also note that asymptomatic reception testing of prisoners will also cease and so those prisons who receive directly from court no longer need to continue to carry out testing of new receptions. This means that upon reception, new prisoners are no longer required to take a test or isolate or reverse cohort.

Prisoner testing will continue in the following areas:

* Symptomatic testing
* Return to Regime testing (following a positive test)

**Application in the Youth Secure Settings**

The information and mandatory actions detailed applies to YCS Youth Offending Institutions (YOIs) and Secure Training Centres (STCs).

Local practices in these establishments may vary from the adult estate, or application may require interpretation where the legislative framework or operating model is substantially different from a prison.

The language in these notices refer to ‘prisons’ and ‘prisoners’: The YCS will ensure that all language is child-focused when the principles are applied at a local level.

Youth Secure Settings have a legal duty to safeguard children and young people held in their care. In the Children and Young People Secure Estate healthcare is integrated within each secure setting.

It is suggested that Governors/Directors may need some time to digest and communicate this information and so prisons and youth custody establishments should plan to implement this revised testing approach by 31 Aug 2022.

Further operational guidance will be provided and in the interim the team can be contacted for further advice by emailing HMPPSTesting@justice.gov.uk.

**Ian Maris, Deputy Director – Change Delivery & Central Services / COVID-19 Response**