## Operational Guidance - Covid 19 Pause to Asymptomatic Testing Guidance in Prisons and YCS in England & Wales.

Following the announcement from the Health Minister on 24th August 2022, outlining amendments to asymptomatic testing across various sectors, we will now pause routine asymptomatic testing.

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

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, including asymptomatic testing, may be reintroduced, and this will be communicated nearer the time.

We must be clear that pausing the regular asymptomatic testing regime does not mean testing will be removed from prisons completely.

We will continue to use testing for people with symptoms and to respond to outbreaks and this will be available year-round. This means that all other areas of testing outlined in the table provided will broadly stay the same. 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.

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

There may be local discretion where health protection teams (HPTs) advise temporary asymptomatic testing in certain circumstances, for example during outbreaks or for individuals at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19. In these instances, health protection teams will provide advice direct to settings.

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.

The pause in asymptomatic testing has been considered in the wider context of the additional mitigations in place including but not limited to, wastewater-based surveillance, handwashing, ventilation, and a continued focus on facilitating access and uptake of vaccinations and anti-viral treatments. Staff, prisoners and visitors should continue to follow guidance for infection prevention and control.

This document outlines the revised testing approach that will continue to be implemented as part of the HMPPS Testing programme for prisons in England from 31st August 2022 and for prisons in Wales from 8th September 2022. Please see [Summary of Covid-19 Testing](#_Summary_of_Covid-19) for full details.

**Additional Testing in Prisons**

Prisons with an ongoing outbreak should continue to seek OCT advice on the level of testing required to respond to outbreak.

Where Governors are concerned that there may be an outbreak imminent or notes a particular rise in local risk, they should consult the local HPT lead for advice to determine what is an appropriate response to the assessed risk.

**Stay at Home Advice**

Staff with [symptoms](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-prisons-and-other-prescribed-places-of-detention-guidance/covid-19-prisons-and-other-prescribed-places-of-detention-guidance#Symptoms) should take an LFD test as soon as they develop symptoms and take another LFD test 24 hours after the first test. Where possible symptomatic staff should stay away from work and conduct the LFD tests at home. Staff should only come into work if both LFD test results are negative

In the event that a member of **prison staff tests positive for Covid-19**, the current advice continues, and they must not attend the workplace and follow the Return-to-Work Testing advice at Annex A and detailed in the Staff Testing Manual. Return to Work / Regime testing guidance should also be followed even if the member of staff is asymptomatic.

**Absence Management**

Information on absence management can be found in the current Core 3 Guidance. There will be updates to absence management processes, so sites must stay up to date with any changes.

**Test kit provision and storage**

Prisons are responsible for storing an appropriate level of kits locally in the event of an outbreak.

Test kits will be available to order from Branston, using the regular iproc process. A separate process is available for Private Managed Prisons and Probation Hubs. Any kits that are currently held locally should be retained and stored for outbreak testing and symptomatic testing. It is important to regularly check dates to ensure no out of date kits are used.

**Reporting**

Prisons should continue to work closely with healthcare to monitor infected cases and all prisons are required to complete a COVID data return (formerly the weekly testing return) and answer all questions. This data return has been simplified to reduce the time and burden of completing it. The requirement to continue to report all cases, both staff and prisoners, to Health Partnership Teams (HPTs) remains.

Where Wastewater monitoring is installed, prisons will continue to be notified and alerted to COVID-19 in the prison. Wastewater monitoring provides a signal that can be confidently used to identify whether COVID-19 is in the prison or not, and whether it is increasing or not.

These notifications and alerts should be considered in partnership with Health Protection teams and, where appropriate, responded to.

Any questions on reporting or wastewater can be directed to the Environmental surveillance team <Environsurveillance@justice.gov.uk>

**Communications and Support**

A Notices to Staff is provided at Annex B to support in communicating this change. Testing Manuals for Staff and Prisoners including supporting annexes, will be updated and made available on the operational guidance platform.

Please get in contact with any queries through either [HMPPSTesting@justice.gov.uk](mailto:HMPPSTesting@justice.gov.uk) or [COVID19.RegimesOpsGuidance1@justice.gov.uk](mailto:COVID19.RegimesOpsGuidance1@justice.gov.uk)

**Testing programmes: availability and required frequency**

The following tables provide an overview of the testing approaches that will be available going forwards for prisons. It is worth noting that all testing approaches are subject to change upon the recommendation of an Outbreak Control Team who may, in response to outbreaks or increased risk, recommend the reintroduction of testing for targeted or mass testing for a limited period.

**Please see the Summary of Covid Testing on the following page**

## Summary of the Reduced Approach to COVID-19 Testing 2022

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| **Each testing process will fall in to one of three categories (see updated April 2022 position)** |
| Testing will cease |
| Testing will cease; however, it may be reintroduced temporarily as a result of OCT recommendations during an outbreak |
| Testing will continue (however, the process may be amended) |

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| **Testing for Staff working in Prisons** | |
| **Testing Regime** | **Current Approach from August 2022** |
| Routine Asymptomatic Testing | Routine Asymptomatic testing will PAUSE across all areas. |
| Symptomatic Testing | Those who are unwell should stay at home. Where a member of staff is well enough to work, they may take a test upon arrival at the workplace. If they test negative, they can remain at work. They should take a second test 48 hours later.  Staff who are experiencing new symptoms and do not feel well enough to work should stay at home. Staff who have a fever should not attend work.  Any staff member who tests positive should collect a set of test kits and go home and follow Return to Work (RTW) testing from the onset of symptoms.  Symptomatic Testing is no longer available for free in the community. |
| Return to Work (RTW) Testing  Staff | ‘Return to Work’ Testing will continue for staff who are required to stay at home due to being positive for Covid 19. Staff must not attend the workplace if any test taken is positive.  They will be expected to continue to follow the Government advice provided to those who test positive and then follow the Return to Work testing process for HMPPS staff as outlined in [Annex A](#_Annex_B-_Return) (Return to work on day 6 following two consecutive negative LFD tests (24 hours apart).  Upon return to work, continued testing to day 10 is no longer required. If they decline to test, they should return to work on day 6. |
| Asymptomatic Testing | There may be local discretion where health protection teams (HPTs) advise temporary asymptomatic testing in certain circumstances, for example during outbreaks or for individuals at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19. In these instances, health protection teams will provide advice direct to settings. |
| Outbreak Testing | IMT / OCTs, in response to outbreaks or increased risk, may recommend the reintroduction of routine testing for targeted/mass testing for limited period.  OCT chairs may recommend reintroduction of staff testing in a range of areas to manage an outbreak. Governor to assess viability in delivery. Additional test kit capacity will be considered and will be allocated via the central testing team who will consider across the testing programmes and will advise on available capacity. For additional capacity, prisons should get in touch with [HMPPSTesting@justice.gov.uk](mailto:HMPPSTesting@justice.gov.uk) |
| Testing of HMPPS HQ or (other staff) visiting the prison | HMPPS staff (HQ or visiting probation staff for example) who are not normally located in prisons but that will visit on an ad-hoc basis and are asymptomatic will not be expected to test.  Staff visiting the prison will be expected to follow the guidance for people experiencing symptoms as in the community: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/living-safely-with-respiratory-infections-including-covid-19>  If a test is taken for any other reason and is positive, the member of staff should not attend the prison. |
| Daily Testing of Contacts of Covid (DTCC)  Now England and Wales | Asymptomatic contacts of positive cases of Covid-19 are not required to self-isolate and are no longer required to undertake testing and so DTCC will cease.  **However,** staff will be asked to inform the workplace if they are aware that they have been in close contact with a positive case. The Governor may wish to undertake a risk assessment in some circumstances, for example, if the reported case has come from the contact’s own household and/or if they usually work with individuals on a PMP. The Governor may ask them to undertake (voluntary) testing prior to attending work or could consider amended duties for a 7-day period.  **Contacts who are symptomatic should follow guidance on symptomatic testing.** |
| Testing of Staff on Personal Management Plans | Staff on Personal Management Plans will not be tested in prisons, but this may be undertaken through the community provision as determined by the NHS |

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| **Prisoner Testing** | |
| **Testing Regime** | **Current Approach from August 2022** |
| Reception Testing | Routine Asymptomatic Reception testing will PAUSE across all areas. |
| Prisoner Self-Collect (Adults) | Can continue to be used as a testing method where required (e.g. ~~i.e. reception testing, pre-visits, ROTL or~~ outbreak testing if recommended) but should no longer be used for routine testing |
| Symptomatic Testing | PCR symptomatic testing in general, will cease. For prisoners who are presenting with symptoms of a respiratory infection and/or have a high temperature, Healthcare departments will continue to carry out symptomatic testing of prisoners using LFD tests.  In a small number of cases, i.e. for symptomatic prisoners located in prison healthcare settings, PCR testing may be undertaken by healthcare staff |
| Return to Work Testing (Following a positive test)  Prisoners | Testing following a positive test to enable prisoners to participate in the regime sooner will continue. See [Annex A](#_Annex_C-_Following) for further details. |
| Outbreak Testing | Asymptomatic testing of staff and prisoners to respond locally to incidents, outbreaks or peaks in prevalence as advised by IMT/OCTs will continue.  Asymptomatic Reception testing will pause unless recommended by IMT/OCTs  For prisoners transferred from other sites, reception testing will cease unless recommended by IMT/OCTs.  The use of outbreak testing workforces to support the testing is no longer available.  Outbreak Mass testing using PCR is no longer available  Incident/Outbreak Mass Testing using LFD testing will continue where required  OCT chairs may recommend reintroduction of prisoner testing in a range of areas to manage an outbreak. Governor to assess viability in delivery. Additional test kit capacity will be considered and will be allocated via the central testing team who will consider across the testing programmes and will advise on available capacity. For additional capacity, prisons should get in touch with [HMPPSTesting@justice.gov.uk](mailto:HMPPSTesting@justice.gov.uk) |
| Pre-transfer testing | Pre-transfer testing will cease. However, when in outbreak sites may be required to test all prisoners prior to transfer, subject to advice from the IMT OCT. |
| Pre-court testing | Pre-Court testing will cease- however, in outbreak sites IMT/ OCT may recommend temporary reintroduction |
| Pre-IRC-transfer testing | Routine Testing prior to transfer to an IRC will cease. Outbreak sites will be required to test all prisoners prior to transfer.  IRCs will have their own reception testing requirements upon arrival. |
| ROTL testing | All pre and post ROTL testing, which has been mandatory since December 2021, will now cease and ROR licences no longer need a “consent to test on return” condition.  However, in outbreak sites IMT/OCTs may recommend temporary reintroduction  Any routine testing required to be taken at work placements can continue. |
| Pre-release testing | Pre-release testing will cease (including those going to approved premises). However, in the event that a prisoner has tested positive (for example, if they have tested for another reason) the guidance for ‘Release of a positive prisoner’ should continue to be followed. |
| Pre-Visits Testing | Testing prisoners prior to visits will cease unless recommended by an IMT/OCT through an incident or outbreak |

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| **Visitor Testing** | |
| **Testing Regime** | **Current Approach from August 2022** |
| Social Visitor Testing (Prisons) | Testing of visitors prior to visits will cease  The mandatory testing of visitors prior to visits will now cease however this may be reintroduced as recommended by an IMT/OCT |

## Annex A- Return to Work (RTW) Testing- Prisons in England and Wales

**Staff testing following a positive test**

For individuals who test positive for COVID-19 the advice is to stay at home. If an individual tests positive for Covid 19 they are asked to stay away from work (day 0) and follow Government advice for five full days and can then return to normal routines on day 6 with some testing in place as outlined below. To return to work, the individual should be well enough to work and not experiencing a fever. This process can be applied irrespective of an individual’s vaccination status.

**LFD Tests for staff days 5 and 6:** Staff take an LFD test on day 5 of their ‘stay at home’ period, and another LFD test the following day (day 6). The second LFD test should be taken at least 24 hours after the first. If both LFD tests results are negative, the individual may end their self-isolation and return to work on day 6 after the second negative LFD test result and 5 FULL days of staying at home. They should not take an LFD test before the fifth day of this period and should only return to work following 2 consecutive negative LFD tests which should be taken at least 24 hours apart. These tests should be taken as early as possible in the day so that the member of staff can return to work on day 6 if both tests are negative.

If both LFD tests results are negative, they may return to work immediately after the second negative LFD test result, provided they meet the following criteria:

* The staff member feels well enough to work and does not have a fever
* the staff member must continue to comply with all relevant infection control precautions and PPE must be worn properly throughout the day
* if the staff member works with prisoners or detained individuals who are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 (as determined by the organisation), a risk assessment should be undertaken by the organisation, and consideration given to redeployment for the remainder of the 10-day period

If any of the above cannot be met and the staff member does not return two negative LFD tests on days 5 and 6, they should continue to undertake daily LFD tests on day 7, 8, 9 and 10 days after their symptoms started (or the day their test was taken if they did not have symptoms). If any of these LFD test results are positive the staff member should stay at home and should wait 24 hours before taking the next LFD test

Managers can undertake a risk assessment of staff who still test positive after 10 days and who do not have a high temperature, with a view to them returning to work depending on the work environment.

**If staff decline to test but does not have a fever and feels well enough, they should return to work on day 6. However, they should be strongly encouraged to participate in testing.**

**Prisoner Testing following a positive test**

In the event of a positive test, prisoners will self-isolate for five full days and can then return to participate in normal regimes on day 6 with some testing in place as outlined below

This guidance will apply to prisoners who have tested positive. **Once they have completed 5 FULL days of isolation, are asymptomatic and have returned two negative tests, on Day 5 and Day 6 (tests must be 24 hours apart), they will be able to leave isolation on day 6.** Isolating individuals must isolate in cell from Day 1 to Day 5 inclusive.

It is essential that 2 negative rapid lateral flow tests are taken on consecutive days and reported before individuals leave isolation For instance, if an individual is positive on day 5, then a negative test is required on both day 6 and day 7 to release from self-isolation, or positive on day 6, then a negative test is required on days 7 and 8, and so on until the end of day 10.

**If the prisoner declines to test at day 5 and 6 to release themselves from isolation then they must complete 10 full days of isolation.**

## Annex B – Draft Notice to Staff

On Wednesday 24 August 2022 the Health Secretary outlined amendments to asymptomatic testing across various sectors, including prisons.

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 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 will be pausing all routine asymptomatic testing within English prisons with effect from 31st August 2022 and 8th September 2022 for all prisons in Wales. This will be kept under regular review and as we move towards winter, some areas of testing may be reintroduced.

We must be clear that pausing the regular asymptomatic testing regime does not mean testing will be removed 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

**For local prisons & those receiving directly from court only**

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)

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

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.

If you have any questions regarding this notice, please contact: health@justice.gov.uk