



COVID-19

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers – Updated 11 June 2020

1. What is the SPS doing to protect people in prison from COVID-19?

Our number one priority is to ensure the safety of everyone who lives or works in our prisons. We continue to work with Scottish Government, Health Protection Scotland and a number of other partners to make sure everything we do is fully informed by the very latest public health advice and guidance.

Physical distancing, alongside effective and regular handwashing are key in reducing the spread of COVID-19. Posters and information re-enforcing the importance of taking these measures are displayed throughout our prisons.

As part of our response to the pandemic, it has been necessary to introduce a number of measures to further reduce the spread of COVID-19, these include suspending:

- all prison visits;
- all education classes;
- all non-essential prison work;
- communal dining; and
- all internal progression and all non-essential prison transfers.

We have also:

- restricted the number of people who can attend exercise, or recreation, at any one time;
- closed prison gyms; and
- increased the frequency of hygiene procedures.

The challenges presented by COVID-19 are ever changing and we are adapting to meet these in a flexible manner. Our approach will *a/ways* be aligned with the latest public health advice.

2. When will restrictions be lifted?

The Scottish Government's National Response Route Map describes how restrictions might be lifted over the coming weeks and months. In line with this approach, we are considering what this means for our prisons and developing plans as to how regime restrictions may be eased.

We are considering things like how we will facilitate; additional prison activity in order to allow greater time out of cell, increased access to services, a return to programme and progression activities and how and when to re-introduce access to prisons.

Our approach will be phased, and will always informed by public health guidance and we will continue to engage with those who live and work in our prisons throughout this process.

3. When will family visits resume?

We do not underestimate the importance of family visits and fully understand that you will be eager to see your loved one as soon as possible.

As part of our plans for the easing of restrictions, we are considering how best to ensure appropriate physical distancing during face to face visits.

The decision on *when* to resume family visits will be fully informed by the latest public health guidance and aligned with Scottish Government's phased approach.

4. When will mobile phones be available?

Introducing mobile phones has been a complex and demanding project. Considerable work was needed in every establishment to ensure that there is a viable mobile phone signal.

Work has also been required to update the Prison Rules to make the use of the specific handset, SIM card and charger legal within a prison setting.

It is anticipated that mobile phones will start to be distributed to individuals from mid-June with all sites being rolled out by mid-July.

The existing phone system will continue to be available after the distribution of the mobile devices.

5. Who will pay for the costs of the calls?

The SPS will pay for the cost of all calls whilst current restrictions remain in place.

Upon the resumption of physical prison visits, or at any time deemed appropriate, there remains the option to apply a charge for the service.

Each individual will have a maximum of 310 minutes of calls per month.

6. When will the SPS introduce Virtual Video Visits?

Regulations to enable virtual visits will be laid before Parliament on 15 June 2020. The SPS intends to introduce virtual visits at HMP & YOI Cornton Vale, HMP & YOI Polmont and HMP Shotts first with virtual visits will be rolled out to all other establishments on a phased basis thereafter. We anticipate all prisons being able to host virtual visits by the end of the month.

You will find a Question and Answer document here -

<https://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Information/covid19/Information-for-families-and-friends.aspx>

We have also created an information Video, which you can find here –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0SFZZoGbmM>

7. What other ways can I keep in touch with my family member in prison?

People in custody can continue to communicate through mail and the prison phone system. We are providing everyone in custody with a free allowance of £2.50 per week on their phone balance, in addition to which we have suspended charges for TV's to allow more monies to be available for making calls.

We have expanded and encouraged access to the Email-a-Prisoner scheme. The Prisoner Voicemail scheme also allows individuals in custody and their loved ones to exchange voicemails through the prison phone system. Families can subscribe to this at: <https://prisonvoicemail.com/>

8. How do I give money to someone in prison?

Prisons are not currently accepting money being handed in. However, money can be sent in the post. If you intend to send cash in the mail, please refer to Royal Mail for guidance.

We can also now accept money transferred via an online banking facility. Money is transferred from your own personal banking app and not via a Government or SPS website. Further details on this can be found on the SPS website at: <http://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Information/covid-19.aspx>

International money cannot be transferred using this service and can only be sent in the mail.

9. Will my family member qualify for release on Home Detention Curfew (HDC)?

Home Detention Curfew (HDC) is available to some people nearing the end of their sentence. A number of presumptions against HDC release have been removed and it is thought that more people will now be released on HDC.

At the appropriate date, SPS automatically generates a list of those who are eligible to be considered for HDC release. Individuals are then asked to complete an application form if they wish to pursue the application.

It should be noted that HDC is not an automatic entitlement and people will only be released after a robust risk assessment.

10. How will COVID-19 affect my family member's progression?

Normally we would offer people in our care the opportunity to progress to less secure conditions. However, in order to adhere to public health advice, the SPS continues to suspend all progression.

There is currently no opportunity available to test individuals in the community and therefore no opportunity for people in custody to demonstrate a reduction in the level of their risk.

We realise that individuals who are seeking to progress may be disappointed. However, this suspension of movement will limit the risk of COVID-19 being transmitted from the community, or from new arrivals, to other prisons or residential areas.

There is a single national waiting list for progression to our National Top Ends and HMP Castle Huntly. This waiting list will ensure a clear and fair decision making process when progression resumes. Those who are approaching critical dates will be prioritised for consideration.

As part of the plans we are developing for easing restrictions, we are considering how and when we can re-start transfers to less secure conditions as well as community access including work placements and home leaves. We continue to engage with the Parole Board, Social Work and other

partner agencies throughout this process. Again, all decisions will be fully informed by the latest public health guidance and aligned with Scottish Government's phased approach.

11. What happens if someone in prison has COVID-19 symptoms?

If someone reports, or appears to have COVID-19 symptoms, they will be assessed by NHS healthcare staff, who are responsible for the delivery of all health services in Scottish prisons. If NHS healthcare staff suspect that an individual has COVID-19, then, as in the community, that individual will be required to self-isolate and confined to their own cell. If the individual is sharing a cell, then they can remain with that same person in a shared cell. All meals and prescribed medication will be provided in their cell.

Many prisons have set aside specific areas to accommodate those who are symptomatic and require to be kept apart from others.

12. Does the SPS test for COVID-19?

All NHS Health Boards will test anyone in custody who is showing symptoms associated with COVID-19. Results of tests are being returned within 6 and 48 hours depending on the Health Board administering the test. A person who displays symptoms but tests negative for COVID-19 will therefore spend no longer than 48 hours in isolation.

Testing is also available for SPS staff, as key workers, if they report COVID-19 symptoms.

13. How will I know if my family member is being isolated?

When anyone is to be isolated, as a result of showing COVID-19 symptoms, then they will be asked if they would like a family member or friend to be informed. A member of our staff will then make sure the family member or friend is kept up to date.

Should anybody become seriously ill, or be admitted to hospital, then, where possible, the person will be asked who they want to be informed. If they are not able to communicate this information, then their next of kin will be contacted.

14. Will my family member still be able to shower?

In line with advice from Health Protection Scotland, individuals who are self-isolating will be located in a single room with ensuite facilities, where possible. If an in cell shower is not available, they will be allowed to leave the room to undertake personal hygiene.

Whilst many prisons have in-cell showers, there are some where people need to use communal showers. Communal showers are being cleaned more often between use and this means there is a reduction in the time available for people to access these.

We continue to provide opportunity to shower on a daily basis, or at least every second day

15. How can you physically distance in a prison?

Notices are displayed across all our prisons explaining how everyone, including staff, should keep a minimum of 2 metres apart.

All prison activity is being delivered with additional controls and with fewer people in communal areas to allow everyone to follow physical distancing guidelines.

16. Are prisons overcrowded and does this mean COVID-19 will spread more quickly?

Scotland's prison population has been high in recent years. However, the suspension in court business, the introduction of Early Release Arrangements and changes to the application of Home Detention Curfew (HDC) means that our prison population has dropped significantly since that start of the pandemic. In March 2020, there were approximately 8,000 individuals in custody, now there are closer to 7,000.

A smaller prison population has reduced the need for people to share accommodation which has allowed us to better adhere to national guidance and help limit the spread of COVID-19.

Together with the Scottish Government, we continually monitor our population levels especially as court business begins to resume.

17. Do people in custody have access to PPE?

People in custody do not routinely require to have PPE as they are able to maintain a safe physical distance at all times. If someone is self-isolating due to having symptoms or has had a positive result for COVID-19, they are provided with a mask to wear when accessing the telephone or attending outdoor exercise.

18. Why are people in prison spending more of their day locked in their cells?

As in the wider community, all non-essential work has been suspended and people are required to stay home in their living areas. In prison only those delivering essential services, such as catering, laundry and cleaning, continue to work. The SPS is ensuring that nobody is financially disadvantaged as a result of being unable to work, through no fault of their own.

Most Scottish prisons have moved to a single shift 'core day' to allow more flexible deployment of our staff. All prison activity is now being delivered with enhanced controls and additional hygiene measures in place.

19. How will the SPS look after my family member's mental health in prison?

We are aware that social isolation in a prison environment can have a detrimental effect on mental wellbeing. Our staff have been provided with information on how to identify those who may be struggling whilst in isolation. Staff are used to dealing with people who have mental health problems and are trained to support them.

Self-help support leaflets and audio files, designed by SPS Psychologists, have been issued to everyone in custody providing information and tools which can be used to maintain a sense of wellbeing.

Prison Chaplains continue to provide pastoral, spiritual and faith-specific care within establishments.

The SPS and NHS Health Boards are providing additional in-cell activities and Fife College have provided additional in-cell education activities delivered by Fife College. Relaxation and mindfulness exercises are also available on in-cell televisions and radio.

Prisons are also encouraging greater outdoor exercise activities in line with public health advice.

20. How is the SPS making sure prison exercise and recreation is safe?

People in custody continue to be offered exercise in the open air and recreation time. However, restrictions have been introduced to maintain physical distancing.

Exercise and recreation are being delivered in significantly smaller groups than previously was the case. The precise number unlocked at any time is judged by each individual prison and this activity is supervised so as to maintain physical distancing.

21. How is the SPS making sure that COVID-19 doesn't spread through communal phone use?

Access to phones is currently being delivered in a controlled manner with appropriate physical distancing. Additional cleaning is also in place.

The introduction of mobile phones will reduce this risk further.

22. How are those with underlying health conditions being managed?

People in prison who have an underlying health conditions have been advised by the NHS to stay in their cell as much as possible and follow physical distancing guidance.

The NHS has also identified those who are clinically vulnerable due to certain underlying health conditions, including cancer, cystic fibrosis and organ transplant patients, and are therefore at greater risk from COVID-19. People in this group have been advised, through NHS letters and discussions with healthcare staff, that they should self-isolate. This process is known as "shielding". Scottish Government's original advice was to shield until 18 June but this has now been extended until at least 31 July.

Anyone shielding is accommodated in a single room and their meals and any prescribed medication are provided to them in their cells. They will continue to be given access to the phone and showers. Both phones and showers are regularly cleaned and these will be thoroughly cleaned before they are used by those who are shielding.

23. Do prison staff have enough Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

We have sufficient Personal Protective Equipment in stock for all staff to use as required. We have issued clear guidance to staff on the appropriate PPE to be worn when carrying out a range of prison duties. This guidance is fully aligned with the most up-to-date Health Protection Scotland guidance.

Public Health guidance advises that our staff only require to wear PPE when they are unable to maintain a 2-metre distance from others or when they are working in direct contact with anyone who has been confirmed as having COVID-19.

24. Where can I find updates about what is happening in prison?

We have established a dedicated family helpline, available on **0131 330 3888**, and website <http://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Information/covid-19.aspx> to provide families with regular updates. Information on the number of people self-isolating across our estate, as well as the current number of confirmed cases, is updated daily and also available on this page.

We recognise that the situation often changes quickly and that is why we regularly update the information.

25. Why can't I be given specific details about my family member when I call SPS' family helpline?

The Data Protection Act 2018 does not allow us to share personal information relating to anybody in custody, without their explicit permission.