



# Health and safety guidance for court custody inspections during the COVID-19 pandemic

Updated 18 January 2023

## Introduction and context

1. As the country continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) will continue to conduct its court custody inspection framework to report on the treatment of and conditions for detainees. This guidance is continually updated to reflect the latest health and safety advice and sets out key processes that staff must follow and actions they must take when carrying out court custody inspections, to reduce risks to themselves, their household, court custody and escort staff and detainees.
2. HMI Prisons will continue to adhere to national public health advice, including any local restrictions in place in specific areas where we carry out court custody inspections, and to the 'do no harm' principle at all times. HMI Prisons will continue to follow all national and local announcements relating to COVID-19 alert levels and restrictions and will update this guidance as required.
3. The most recent World Health Organisation (WHO) guidance, published in March 2020, offers a comprehensive guide on the *Preparedness, prevention and control of COVID-19 in prisons and other places of detention*. The guidance is explicit about the importance of oversight and independent scrutiny during the pandemic:

The COVID-19 outbreak must not be used as a justification for objecting to external inspection of prisons and other places of detention by independent international or national bodies whose mandate is to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; such bodies include national preventive mechanisms under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.'

*Preparedness, prevention and control of COVID-19 in prisons and other places of detention, p.5*

4. Staff are advised to familiarise themselves with this document for their own safety and the safety of others. Additional guidance below is based on specific HMI Prisons working practices.

## Who will be involved in inspections?

5. Inspection field work will normally be carried out over one or two weeks, depending on the size of the court custody cluster and the number of courts involved. Four to five HMI Prisons staff members and partner inspectorate staff will be involved in the inspection of each court custody cluster.
6. All open court custody facilities in the cluster will be visited as part of the inspection. This means that HMI Prisons staff will visit different court custody facilities in the cluster on consecutive days.

### Exclusions

7. NHS guidance identifies individuals who are at high risk from COVID-19: see [Who is at risk from coronavirus \(COVID-19\) – NHS](#). While there is now no need for those individuals to formally shield, any HMI Prisons staff who are classified as high risk from COVID-19 will be given the opportunity to complete a risk assessment with their line manager to identify if they are able to visit court custody facilities and whether any specific mitigating measures are required to support them to do so.
8. The risk assessment process will be kept under regular review. All existing individual staff risk assessments will be reviewed in light of any new national announcements and/or restrictions.

### Staff deployment

9. The greatest risk posed by HMI Prisons staff to detainees and staff working in court custody facilities is that a member of the HMI Prisons team unknowingly contracts coronavirus in the community and brings it into the court custody facilities. Staff are expected to comply at all times with national social distancing and hygiene guidance, as well as with any local restrictions in the area in which they live, to reduce the risk of contracting the virus.
10. In line with the Government's 'Living with Covid-19' plan for England, HMI prisons staff are no longer required to complete routine PCR or lateral flow device tests (LFDs) before they leave home for an inspection. However, they should continue to comply with the testing requirements for staff at the court custody facilities being inspected.
11. If a member of staff tests positive while out on inspection, they must return home immediately and avoid contact with other people where possible. The remaining members of the inspection team may wish to complete an additional LFD test as a precaution, but they can continue with the inspection unless they themselves test positive.
12. HMI Prisons Secretariat should also be alerted immediately and will assist with any travel or accommodation arrangements. If staff are staying in a hotel or using a hire car, they should make sure they inform hotel management on site and the Enterprise branch which supplied and, if different, will be collecting the hire car.

### Staff with symptoms

13. While staff are no longer legally required to self-isolate if they have COVID-19, the latest NHS guidance (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/when-to-self-isolate-and-what-to-do/>) advises that you should try to stay at home and away from others to avoid passing on the virus. All staff must report any clinical signs of infection to their line manager and the Secretariat immediately and try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people for five days, which is when they are most infectious. This five-day period starts from the day after the test was completed.
14. You should also, if possible, avoid meeting people at higher risk from COVID-19 for 10 days, especially if their immune system means they're at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19, even if they've had a COVID-19 vaccine. Staff can return to work from day six if they feel well enough to do so.

15. Symptoms may include a **high temperature** - this means feeling hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature); a **new, continuous cough** - this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual); and a **loss or change to your sense of smell or taste** - this means you have noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell and taste different to normal.

## Travelling to and from inspections

16. A current Driving on Duty Risk Assessment should be in place. Newly completed forms should be sent to Lesley Young, Head of Finance, HR and Inspection Support, and Umar Farooq, HR Manager.
17. Staff should use Enterprise hire cars in keeping with HMI Prisons' usual policy. Requests for cars should be made as normal by contacting Caroline Fitzgerald, Inspection Support Officer. Enterprise car hire are cleaning their hire vehicles between customers, but when first using the car, members of staff should check that it is safe to use, including by cleaning the seat, steering wheel and controls.
18. If a member of staff uses their own vehicle, mileage claims should be made via SOP as usual. This will be at the higher rate for all journeys e.g. the longer journey from home to the inspection and back, and shorter journeys between the hotel and court custody facilities daily during the inspection.
19. All staff using their own vehicle must have car insurance which includes business use. Members of staff who need to arrange an increase of the level of insurance will not be able to recover any charges levied by their insurers. A copy of the insurance policy showing the required level of cover should be lodged with Lesley Young, Head of Finance, HR and Inspection Support and Umar Farooq, HR Manager.
20. The coordinating inspector should liaise with other team members ahead of the inspection to identify the transport requirements of each member of staff and agree a transport plan with all members of the team ahead of the inspection.

## Reducing transmission of the COVID-19 virus during an inspection

21. The WHO guidance, Preparedness, prevention and control of COVID-19 in prisons and other places of detention, identifies two main ways to transmit the infection (see section 7.3):
- infection can be spread to people who are nearby (within one metre) by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled by a person with the COVID-19 virus; or
  - people may become infected by touching contaminated surfaces or objects (fomites) and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth (e.g. a person may touch a doorknob or shake hands and then touch their own face).

### Washing hands

22. Staff should wash their hands frequently and for at least 20 seconds. They should do this on arrival at a court custody facility, immediately when arriving back at the hotel or at home, and frequently during the visit. Staff should be aware that gates, railings and door handles are a high-risk contamination point. Staff should avoid touching their face after making contact with these surfaces. See below for a practical guide on hand washing.

### Hand sanitiser

23. All staff should carry hand sanitiser if possible. Hand sanitiser should be used frequently in between hand washing opportunities. It is more efficient for staff to purchase this themselves

and claim back the costs from HMI Prisons. Staff should check that the sanitiser is effective against viruses.

### **Bringing items into court custody facilities**

24. Staff must limit the quantity of items they bring into a court custody facility as far as possible. Bags should not be carried unless attached to the person. Notepads should not be placed on surfaces, and pens should remain in staff possession and not placed in the mouth. Laptops and cameras may be brought into court custody facilities but should be wiped down on arrival and at regular intervals.

### **Eating**

25. Staff are encouraged to bring their own food and appropriate utensils, and to wash their hands thoroughly before eating all food, including fruit and sweets. All items taken back to the hotel or home should be thoroughly washed and packed away after use.

### **Social distancing**

26. It is recommended that HMI Prisons staff continue to maintain a two-metre distance from others during the inspection where possible. Staff should be aware that some areas within court custody facilities are less than two metres wide and should consider this when moving around, making every effort to plan a route which enables them to maintain distance from others.

### **Face masks and coverings**

27. There is no longer the requirement for individuals to wear face masks/coverings as standard while in court buildings. Where there is no requirement to wear a face mask, if HMI Prisons staff wish, they may wear a face mask for the duration of a visit to a court custody facility. They may wish to do so for their own protection.

### **Speaking to detainees**

28. Some detainees may be isolated because they are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19. HMI Prisons staff should pay attention to any verbal guidance provided by court custody managers and any signage or briefing notes that identify areas where prisoners may be isolated due to COVID-19. If staff need to interview these detainees, they should follow the guidance below on using PPE.

### **Personal protective equipment (PPE)**

29. There may be circumstances in which we need to interview a detainee who is isolated. HMI Prisons has secured a supply of PPE for this purpose. Should PPE not be available on a specific occasion, it will **not** be possible to interview the detainee in person.
30. The minimum level of PPE that staff should wear when interviewing detainees who are being isolated because they are symptomatic is: disposable gloves, disposable medical mask, disposable full gown or apron, disposable eye protection (e.g. face shield or goggles).
31. When engaging with these detainees, HMI Prisons staff should maintain social distancing as well as using PPE. Staff should keep contact to a minimum to reduce exposure. At the end of the exposure to the detainee, it is imperative that staff immediately and safely remove PPE as outlined in the guidance below.
32. Putting on and taking off PPE correctly is important (see guidance below). The court custody facility will help with disposal of any PPE, but you should ask staff about any specific procedures for disposal and the location of the clinical waste bins. You must wash your hands immediately after removing PPE.
33. For all staff, PPE must be changed after each interaction with a suspected or confirmed case. In

the unlikely event of PPE being required for a prolonged period, it must be renewed every four hours.

### **Emergency resuscitation**

34. Staff must not attend any emergency resuscitation incidents as this will require an additional level of PPE due to the aerosol effect of the procedure.

### **Feeling unwell**

35. If HMI Prisons staff begin to feel unwell while on site or feel that they have developed symptoms of COVID-19, they should be vigilant in maintaining social distance and arrange to leave the court custody facility as soon as possible. They must inform the team leader prior to leaving, and the team leader must inform the court delivery manager as soon as possible.

### **After a visit**

36. Should a member of HMI Prisons staff develop symptoms shortly after visiting a court custody facility, they must let their team leader and Lesley Young, Head of HR, Finance and Inspection Support know immediately. Lesley will inform HMCTS, Head of Contracted Services. Similarly, should an outbreak be identified in a court cluster shortly after inspectors have visited, HMCTS will alert HMI Prisons via the designated point of contact (Lesley Young).

# Hand-washing technique with soap and water



Wet hands with water



Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces



Rub hands palm to palm



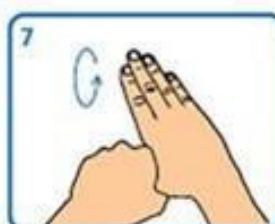
Rub back of each hand with palm of other hand with fingers interlaced



Rub palm to palm with fingers interlaced



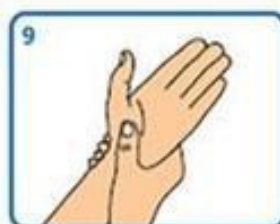
Rub with back of fingers to opposing palms with fingers interlocked



Rub each thumb clasped in opposite hand using a rotational movement



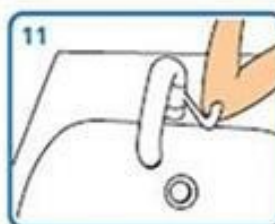
Rub tips of fingers in opposite palm in a circular motion



Rub each wrist with opposite hand



Rinse hands with water



Use elbow to turn off tap



Dry thoroughly with a single-use towel



Hand washing should take 15-30 seconds

## Putting on personal protective equipment (PPE)

The order of putting on PPE is: apron, facemask, visor and gloves.



### Apron

- Pull over head and fasten at back of waist



### Facemask

- Secure ties or elastic bands at middle of head and neck
- Fit flexible band to bridge of the nose
- Fit snug to face and below chin



### Visor

- Place over face and eyes and adjust to fit



### Gloves

- Extend to cover wrist

### Use safe work practices to protect yourself and limit the spread of infection.

- Keep hands away from face
- Change gloves between tasks and when torn or heavily contaminated
- Limit surfaces touched
- Regularly perform hand hygiene

## Removing personal protective equipment (PPE)

PPE should be removed in an order that minimises the potential for cross-contamination.

The order of removing PPE is: gloves, apron, visor and facemask.



### Gloves

- Grasp the outside of the glove with the opposite gloved hand; peel off
- Hold the removed glove in the gloved hand
- Slide the fingers of the ungloved hand under the remaining glove at the wrist
- Peel the second glove off over the first glove



### Apron

- Unfasten or break ties
- Pull apron away from neck and shoulders lifting over head, touching inside only
- Fold or roll into a bundle



### Visor

- Handle only by the headband or the sides



### Facemask

- Unfasten the ties – first the bottom, then the top
- Pull away from the face without touching front of facemask

### Perform hand hygiene immediately after removing all PPE.

All PPE should be removed before leaving the area and disposed of in a sealed plastic bag in a household wheellie bin.

# Useful websites

## **World Health Organisation**

*Preparedness, prevention and control of COVID-19 in prisons and other places of detention*

[http://www.euro.who.int/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/434026/Preparedness-prevention-and-control-of-COVID-19-in-prisons.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/434026/Preparedness-prevention-and-control-of-COVID-19-in-prisons.pdf)

## **GOV.UK**

*Coronavirus (COVID-19): what you need to do*

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

*People with symptoms of a respiratory infection including COVID-19*

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/people-with-symptoms-of-a-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19>