



Seirbhís Phríosúin
na hÉireann
Irish Prison Service

Press Release

Announcement on Recommencement of Physical Family Prison Visiting

The Irish Prison Service has today outlined plans for a phased recommencement of physical family visits to prisons commencing on Monday 20th July 2020.

Following Public Health advice, and owing to the restriction on movements announced by the Government in an effort to curtail the spread of Covid-19, physical family visits to prison were suspended on 27th March 2020 and replaced with a new system of virtual or video visits.

The Irish Prison Service fully appreciates how important contact with family is to prisoners and has been committed to the early return of physical family visits as soon as it was considered safe to do so.

In line with the Government Roadmap, and with infection control in mind, the Irish Prison Service has completed a comprehensive risk assessment on the return of physical prison visits. The Service has identified the necessary measures, which are currently being progressed, to ensure that family members and friends can return to physical visits to our prisons in a safe manner.

In order to safely accommodate visitors and ensure compliance with social distancing requirements, in both our waiting areas and in the visiting areas, it has been necessary to limit the capacity and the frequency of visits at this time. Prior to Covid-19 over 4,500 visitors would have entered our prisons on a weekly basis. In order to ensure effective infection control and allow for appropriate social distancing, capacity in both waiting areas and visiting areas must be reduced.

Visits will recommence on a phased basis and movement through the phases will be subject to ongoing risk assessment and will take account latest public health advice, the range of Government restrictions in place and other factors including the prevailing transmission rate in the community.

Summary of Phases

Phase 1 – Return of Physical Family Visits (20 July 2020)

- Physical visits will recommence with effect from Monday 20th July 2020.
- All prisoners will be entitled to receive **one physical family visit per fortnight**, of not more than 15 minutes duration.

- Prisoners may opt for two video visits if preferred.
- Physical visits during this phase will be limited to **one adult person** (over 18 years of age).
- Prisoners will also be able to avail of one video visit of not more than 15 minutes duration per fortnight.
- In order to prevent the potential spread of infection all visits will be behind Perspex screens and visitors will be required to wear a face covering at all times.
- No physical contact between prisoners and family members will be permitted.

Phase 2 - Monday 17th August 2020

- All prisoners will be entitled to receive **one physical family visit per fortnight**, of not more than 15 minutes duration.
- Physical visits during this phase will be **limited to two people** of which one visitor may be a child.
- Prisoners may continue to avail of one video visit per fortnight of not more than 15 minutes
- Prisoners may continue to opt to receive a video visit in lieu of a physical visit
- Visitors will continue to be required to wear a face covering
- In order to prevent the potential spread of infection all visits will be behind Perspex screens and visitors will be required to wear a face covering at all times
- No physical contact between prisoners and family members will be permitted.

The operation and frequency of visits will be kept under ongoing review guided both by Public Health advice and a desire to support as much contact as possible between prisoner and their families. Detailed information for families in relation to the operation of visits will be published on the Irish Prison Service website www.irishprisons.ie in the coming weeks.

Ends

Notes for Editors

There have been no positive cases of Covid-19 amongst the prisoner cohort in Irish Prisons.

The Irish Prison Service has introduced a range of measures aimed at preventing the spread of Covid -19 into our prisons including:

- The introduction of a basic health check, including taking of temperatures for all persons, including staff, entering prisons from 29 March;
- Suspension of physical family visits, replaced by the introduction of video visits;
- Quarantining for 14 days of all newly committed prisoners, in order to reduce the risk that a new committal who might be incubating the virus could spread Covid-19 to the general prison population;
- Isolation of suspected case or prisoner with symptoms to prevent the risk of transmission of infection;
- “cocooning” of vulnerable prisoners including all prisoners aged 70 years or more or those that are deemed medically vulnerable;
- comprehensive training for IPS staff and the provision of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) across the prison estate;
- strong communication with staff and prisoners, including two prison newsletters published weekly and regular Covid-19 information leaflets for prisoners and newsletters for staff regarding actions taken; and
- Establishment of a robust contact tracing model which has been acknowledged by the World Health Organisation as best practice.
- The introduction of new electronic money transfer arrangements and An Post BillPay Service to allow families to lodge money to prisoner accounts.