

EARLY RELEASE OF PRISONERS

The Government has announced new measures to protect the NHS from coronavirus risks in prisons, deciding to release selected low-risk offenders, who have served over half their sentence and are within two months of their automatic release dates. This action is necessary to avoid thousands of prisoners overwhelming local NHS services and to save lives. All actions have been informed by the advice of experts from Public Health England and will be kept under constant review.

We know that the decision to release an offender early will be distressing for some victims but, in order to protect victims, a number of important exclusions are in place.

Exclusions

- This early release scheme will **only apply** to offenders who are to be released in the next 2 months

The following are excluded and so will not be released early under this scheme:

- any offender who received a sentence of 12 months or more for a violent or sexual offence;
- any offender with a history of domestic violence;
- any offender convicted of stalking or harassment offences (coercive/controlling behaviour, breach of Restraining Order or revenge pornography); and
- any offender who is of concern on the grounds of National Security.

Additionally, no offender convicted of COVID-19 related offences, including coughing at emergency workers or stealing personal protective equipment, will be eligible.

Other safeguards

For any offender not automatically excluded, there will be:

- a thorough risk-assessment beforehand to ensure they do not pose a significant risk to the public, including any child safeguarding issues.
- subject to strict licence conditions;
- electronically monitored, including with GPS tags, to enforce the requirement to stay at home; and immediately recalled to prison for breaching these conditions or committing further offences.

What happens next?

- The releases will be phased over time but can start later in the week commencing 6 April.
- Phasing the release will ensure appropriate checks and risk assessments can take place. This will not lead to thousands of prisoners being released at the same time.

For more information: www.gov.uk/government/news/asures-announced-to-protect-nhs-from-coronavirus-risk-in-prisons

Can the victim find out if the offender in their case has been released?

- Victims who are not part of the Victim Contact Scheme¹, who wish to know if the offender in their case has been given early release, or if they have received unwanted contact from the offender, should contact Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service Victim Helpline on **0300 060 6699** (Monday – Friday 9.00am – 4.00pm) or by emailing **victim.helpline@justice.gov.uk**
- Victims support groups may ring the Helpline on behalf of individual victims.

¹ There may be a very small number of victims who have been given discretionary access to the scheme and they will be contacted directly by their Victim Liaison Officer.

- Helpline staff will make enquiries and then notify the victim as to whether the prisoner is due to be released or has been released.
- As always, if victims are concerned about their immediate safety, they should call the **police** on **999**.

What support is available to victims?

- Victims can continue to access support during the Coronavirus outbreak. Further details are available on Gov.uk (www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-victim-and-witness-services) or by contacting their local Police and Crime Commissioner (www.police.uk).