

Changes to coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions

Fact sheet for stakeholders

A cautious approach

A range of measures are in place to reduce the risks of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission in Victorian correctional facilities. The measures are informed by advice from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and have been put in place to protect you, and those entering prisons, including staff, contractors, professional and personal visitors.

With the gradual easing of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions in the community, there will also be changes to some restrictions in correctional facilities. As in the community, we will take a step-by-step approach to easing restrictions.

From a timing point of view, changes to restrictions in correctional facilities will be three weeks later than changes being taken in the broader community to assess the impact on COVID case numbers.

The potential for coronavirus (COVID-19) to spread in correctional and post-sentence facilities remains a live challenge.

This makes it especially important that the corrections system takes a cautious approach to changing the service delivery model, in order to minimise the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) entering the prison system or post-sentence facilities.

What measures are being taken to reduce the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Each location has developed Outbreak Prevention and Management Plans in consultation with local Health and Safety and Community and Public Sector Union representatives.

Additionally, COVIDSafe plans will be in place with service providers and for key activities, which outline shared expectations about:

- on-site screening measures for prisoners, staff and visitors
- physical distancing signage and placement of furniture
- maximum occupancy of rooms
- time limits for program and services sessions
- additional professional high-touch point cleaning across every location, including program and service spaces at all correctional and post sentence facilities
- communication protocols if a prisoner or staff member displays symptoms

- infection prevention and control information and training requirements.

Prisoner services and programs

From **Monday 23 November 2020**, some face-to-face, group-based programs and services will recommence. This will include some small face-to-face group programs, education and training (modified to allow classes with fewer participants).

From **Monday 14 December 2020**, more face-to-face, group-based programs and services will recommence. This will include reintegration and chaplaincy services.

Face-to-face program availability may vary by location.

All other programs and services will return to face-to-face delivery when Victoria reaches COVID Normal. Many programs and services will continue to be delivered remotely using tablets until this time.

Programs and services will be carried out in line with health advice to ensure physical distancing, hand hygiene and personal protective equipment requirements are met.

Program participants will be prioritised based on eligibility and sentence dates.

Professional visits

From **Monday 14 December 2020**, prisoners can request essential, professional visits face-to-face in the visits centre. This will include Independent Prison Visitor Scheme visits and visits from legal representatives.

Prisoners can also continue to access professional visits via phone or video, even after face-to-face visits have resumed.

Personal visits

Personal visits will recommence from **Friday 11 December 2020**.

All personal visits will be pre-booked. Prisoners can start requesting bookings now by speaking to prison staff.

Prisoners will also continue to have increased access to phone and video calls for personal visits, even after face-to-face visits have resumed.

What if a prisoner needs to have an in-person visit before 11 December?

There is a process to consider personal visits in exceptional circumstances before Friday 11 December 2020. If a prisoner feels there are exceptional circumstances for a personal visit, please discuss this with the Operations Manager.

Education, training and industries

TAFE staff have already started to deliver on-site education and training services. Class sizes will be smaller than usual to allow for physical distancing, so the timetable will look different.

Prison industry programs will continue to run and will follow health advice to meet physical distancing, personal protective equipment and hygiene requirements.

Religious services

From **Monday 14 December 2020** chaplaincy services can be delivered in small groups, and with physical distancing requirements in place.

Prisoners can continue to access religious services via phone or video.

Community permits

From **Monday 23 November 2020**, community permits and community work restrictions will also change.

Prisoners at the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre can participate in essential transition and reintegration activities in the community.

This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis for each prisoner.

Community work restrictions will also change to allow community work teams in some regional locations to undertake activities that don't involve community interaction (e.g. land care activities).

Prisoners can still apply to attend funerals.

From **14 December 2020**, more community permits and community work activities will recommence.

Where community permits involve work activities, these will follow any coronavirus industry restrictions relevant to the type of work being done.

COVIDSafe plans have been approved for allowed community permit activities.

Group sports and other recreational activities

From **Monday 23 November 2020**, outdoor non-contact sport can occur where organised by prison staff. Prisoner pools will also reopen.

From **Monday 14 December 2020**, outdoor contact and non-contact sport can occur where organised by prison staff or external service provider staff.

Quarantine and isolation arrangements

Protective quarantine of new receptions, quarantine of people with symptoms, and isolation of confirmed cases will continue and be reviewed in COVID Normal.

These have been very successful in preventing the spread of COVID-19 in prisons.



From **Monday 23 November 2020** transfer quarantine will be removed for certain transfers, including when a prisoner transfers from a prison or returns from a court appearance in a CV-managed holding cell or any hospital.

Transfer quarantine applies if a prisoner returns from being held in a police cell or at the Custody Centre or are transferring from Judy Lazarus Transition Centre to another prison, or from a Youth Justice centre. This will be reviewed once the Youth Justice quarantine arrangements have been confirmed.

Preventing the spread of COVID-19

Even with restrictions easing, if you are visiting a correctional facility, it is important to keep doing key things to keep you and others safe:

- Practise good hygiene and regularly and thoroughly wash your hands.
- Maintain physical distancing by keeping at least 1.5 metres away from others, where possible.
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment, including a surgical mask at all times.
- If you feel unwell **do not attend a correctional facility**.
- Symptoms can include fever, cough, chills or sweats, sore throat, shortness of breath, runny nose or change in taste or smell.