



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



VIRUSES AND PLACES OF DETENTION

BACKGROUND

Objective

To guarantee the protection of people in custody and the staff against the spread of viruses.

Special context of places of detention and viruses

The nature of places of detention is that they are constructed to maximize public safety.¹ This is highly likely to lead to people living in very close proximity of each other in often overcrowded conditions, which increases the probability of the transmission of viruses. Overcrowding is an increasingly widespread problem in a number of countries and places of detention.² These conditions can generate substandard and at times inhumane conditions of detention. It is therefore advised to work with the judiciary to explore alternatives to custodial measures to reduce the inflow and accelerate the outflow of the population of places of detention.

When the number of people in custody exceeds a place of detention's capacity, the need to adapt essential services accordingly is rarely taken into account. As a result, the water supply system and the capacity of the kitchens and sanitary facilities may no longer be sufficient to meet the needs of the entire detention population which may affect the immune system of the people in custody. Important to note is that when a virus spreads inside a place of custody, it is not only a threat for the people in custody but also for the staff, including their families and friends.

STANDARD AND TRANSMISSION-BASED PRECAUTIONS IN PLACES OF DETENTION

1. How can viruses be transmitted?

There are two main routes by which people can spread different viruses:

- Viruses can be spread through people who are less than 1 metre away from you by breathing or coughing out droplets.
- You can also contract a virus by touching contaminated surfaces or objects, spreading the bacteria by touching your eyes, nose, or mouth and ingesting the bacteria.

2. What prevention and control measures are available?

Develop protocols for entry screening for staff, visitors and people in custody, especially newly arrived.

- Screening the body temperature, enforcing social distancing, and promoting hand washing practices among the population of the place of detention and its staff can prevent the transmission of a virus. In most cases, a person is contagious after they have developed symptoms.³ However, their level of infectiousness depends on the virus and its severity.
- For newly arrived people in custody who exhibit symptoms, placing them in protective isolation for 14 days may be recommended.
- For visitors, non-contact visit protocols can be implemented to ensure there is at least a 1-meter distance between the person in custody and their visitor. Among the general population of the place of detention, health screening serves as an opportunity to provide information on prevention measures and healthy habits to maintain.

Adhere to regular cleaning standards and routines.

A virus may stay active on inanimate objects, including hair, pens, and phones, for hours and days, sometimes remaining viable even in high temperatures. Therefore, disinfecting an environment is a key step to prevention, partly because it is interrupting the transmission process and requires droplet, airborne, and contact precautions to combat it.

¹ Bick, J. A. (2007). Infection control in jails and prisons. *Healthcare Epidemiology*, 45, pp. 1047-1055.

² UNODC, Criminal Justice Handbook Series. (2013) *Handbook on strategies to reduce overcrowding in prisons*, 208, iii.

³ Department of Health and Social Care, Public Health Wales, Public Health Agency Northern Ireland, Health Protection Scotland, and Public Health England. (2020). *COVID-19: Guidance for Infection Prevention and Control in Healthcare Settings*.

Allow people in custody the opportunity to be in the sun, where possible.

The bacteria of a virus can be deactivated when exposed to the sun for several minutes. If cleaning supplies or equipment are unavailable, the sun may be another option to try and disinfect person in custody's clothing, hair, or other potentially contaminated items.

Avoid or reduce the concentration of people in custody, even in open spaces.

Consideration should be given to dividing "out-of-cell" time, while ensuring people in custody' free time does not fall below the absolute minimum of 1 hour per day, according to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

Create the capacity for medical or protective isolation for symptomatic people in custody.

Placing affected people in custody in protective isolation while the virus subsides may prevent its further spread. If it is not possible to house a person in custody in protective isolation, ill people in custody with similar symptoms and risk factors should be placed together in quarantine. Ideally, the room should be well ventilated with regular medical observation by a healthcare professional, including taking body temperature at least twice a day to monitor any signs of deterioration or signs of recovery.

Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

When conducting activities in close contact with a symptomatic person, such as interviewing or restraining people in custody and staff should ideally wear: disposable gloves, fluid repellent surgical facemasks and eye-protection if available.

Isolate symptomatic people in custody

- In some cases, protective isolation may be used for symptomatic people in custody to prevent the spread of the virus among the rest of the population.⁴ Where possible, segregation from affected and non-affected people in custody should occur in a prompt manner.
- Evaluate all suspected cases in a well-ventilated room, until the patient is transferred to an appropriate health facility.

Communicate with people in custody about the the situation and the changes in their routine

- In order to avoid disturbances, suspicions or misunderstandings, it is very important that people in custody are informed about the situation and the reason for changes in the prison's daily routine.
- Use signs, boards or consider writing letters where resources allow, setting out the measures the prison is putting in place to ensure their safety and to encourage good health habits.
- Where possible, consider allowing people in custody to follow local and national broadcasts. This will help to remove the perception of "biased" information and may reduce the risk of disorder. While transparent communication with people in custody is always important, health-related concerns can induce fear and anxiety, making strong and consistent communication between staff and the person in custody necessary.

Optimize ventilation inside the wings

Ensure that ventilation is as good as possible in the cells and blocks. The windows should be cleared of clothing, fabric coverings and other personal belongings that may reduce airflow.

Stop public visits

- While temporarily suspending visitors to the place of detention may cause dissatisfaction or anger among the people in custody, this measure is important to avoid spreading the virus. Its purpose in protecting the people in custody should be explained before putting the measures in place.
- The place of detention should consider the length of time that it can be closed to visitors, but must also take its lead from World Health Organization (WHO) and instructions from its Head Quarters.

Create a reporting process for staff to be able to report suspected infected people in custody

Most suitable would be a daily handover to their closest supervisor who will pass the information up the chain of command. Places of detention may additionally develop paper systems for this task dependant on location and or resourcing implications.

Ensure daily access for healthcare staff

- Initial and ongoing assessments of the prisoners by healthcare professionals are very important in order to limit the spread of the virus, but also to prevent unnecessary restrictions being put in place that may limit the movement of individuals within the custodial environment and its regime, who are not infected.⁵
- Their welfare and safety must be monitored at all times and the least restrictive measures applied in controlling the spread of viruses, while still giving access to albeit a restricted regime for those prisoners affected.

Respect legal representation

- Respect due process of the law and inform lawyers and other official visitors about the restrictions
- Where restrictions are imposed, consider alternative options to facilitate access to legal assistance, such as the use of mobile telephone or video conferencing to obtain legal advice.

Maintain consistent information sharing with partner agencies

Close collaboration between health and justice ministries should be established to ensure continuity of appropriately shared information, which is a crucial component of an effective, coordinated, and whole-of-government response.

Implement environmental cleaning following a possible case of a virus

- If a symptomatic person in custody is transferred from their cell to another location, their cell should remain vacant with the door shut and windows open until it has been properly cleaned with detergent and disinfectant.
- Once this process has been completed, the room can be used again.
- The same process applies for communal areas and vehicles used by a symptomatic person in custody.

⁴ Department of Health and Social Care, Public Health Wales, Public Health Agency Northern Ireland, Health Protection Scotland, and Public Health England. (2020). COVID-19: *Guidance for Infection Prevention and Control in Healthcare Settings*.

⁴ Bick, J. A. (2007). Infection control in jails and prisons. *Healthcare Epidemiology*, 45, pp. 1047-1055.

3. How will I know what to do?

DO'S	DON'TS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequently wash your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds, especially when you start or leave work. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer gel • Consume warm drinks and food, especially before and right after you develop symptoms • Practice social distancing by maintaining a 1-meter distance and refraining from visiting others • Stand and lay in the sun for more than 30 minutes. This helps to deactivate any bacteria • Clean and disinfect the area around you with diluted bleach solution regularly • When you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands). Put used tissues in a trash bin and wash your hands immediately • Refrain from touching your eyes, nose, and mouth, particularly if your hands are not clean. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take global outbreaks and pandemics lightly. They are serious. • Travel or otherwise expose yourself to places with many people unless deemed essential • Disregard or disobey government advice to refrain from socializing. This includes hosting family and friends at your house • Seek medical attention if symptoms are only mild, although judgement should always be exercised whether healthcare is needed • Stop your medication because you start to feel better • Panic. Many symptoms of viruses are only mild • Wear a facemask unless you have a virus • Hoard food, toilet paper, or other welfare items unless essential