

Pregnant prisoners to be temporarily released from custody

Pregnant women in custody who do not pose a high risk of harm to the public will be temporarily released from prison within days to protect them and their unborn children from coronavirus. Prisoners in Mother and Baby Units meeting the same risk assessment will also be released with their children.

Prison governors will be able to grant their release on temporary licence once they pass a risk assessment and suitable accommodation for the women has been identified.

This decision follows intense work across the prison estate to protect prison staff, the public and prisoners during the coronavirus pandemic, and as part of the national effort to protect the NHS and save lives.

The Prison Service last week took steps to ensure prisons are complying with social distancing rules and provided alternative means for prisoners to keep in touch with their families after cancelling family visits.

The Prison Service has already helped isolate pregnant women and new mothers and their babies from the wider population. From today (31 March), transfers within the prison estate will be limited in all but exceptional cases.

All actions have been informed by the advice of experts from Public Health England.

Lord Chancellor and Justice Secretary Robert Buckland QC MP said:

We have already taken extraordinary measures to protect prisoners and the public over the last few weeks, but it's clear now that we must temporarily release pregnant woman and those with small babies with them inside prison.

Governors can now temporarily release pregnant prisoners so that they can stay at home and reduce social contact like all other expectant mothers have been advised to do.

Those who will be released will be assessed before they leave prison to ensure they are a low risk to the public. They will also be subject to licence conditions, including a requirement to stay at home, and wear an electronic tag, where appropriate. They can be immediately recalled to prison for breaching these conditions or committing further offences.