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## **PRISONS AND PROBATION OMBUDSMAN PUBLISHES FIRST ANALYSIS OF COVID-19 DEATH INVESTIGATIONS**

Sue McAllister, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO), has published a 'Learning Lessons Bulletin' analysing investigations into 26 deaths related to COVID-19 in the early months of the pandemic.

The PPO fatal incident investigations showed the care and compassion prisoners and family members received from prison and healthcare staff, Sue McAllister said. However, she added: "We have also found some cases where responses could be improved."

The bulletin reports Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) should:

- ensure all staff adhere to infection control measures;
- give appropriate advice about shielding to all prisoners who are clinically vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable
- ensure there is an effective communication system to notify staff of prisoners who are shielding and/or self-isolating due to COVID-19
- ensure that prisoners who are displaying possible COVID-19 symptoms are isolated to protect other prisoners and staff

- ensure that staff use the correct PPE, in line with HMPPS policies and PHE guidelines

The cause of death is normally determined by coroners, but the PPO categorises a death as COVID-19 related if COVID-19 is listed on the death certificate as either the main or a contributory factor to the death.

Between 18 March 2020 and 27 May 2020, the PPO began investigations into the deaths of 25 prisoners and one post-release death which were COVID-19 related<sup>1</sup>. All 26 individuals had at least one underlying health condition or illness and average age at death was 67 years old.

The bulletin also details the changes in working practices at the PPO due to COVID-19, with difficulties in not being able to visit prisons to investigate, other than in a small number of cases.

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#### Notes to editors

1. The report is available at [www.ppo.gov.uk](http://www.ppo.gov.uk)
2. The Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) is appointed by and reports directly to the Secretary of State for Justice. The Ombudsman's office is wholly independent of the services in remit, which include those provided by Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), the National Probation Service for England and Wales, the Community Rehabilitation Companies for England and Wales, Prisoner Escort and Custody Service, the Home Office (Immigration Enforcement), the Youth Custody Service, and those local authorities with secure children's homes. It is also operationally independent of, but sponsored by, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).
3. The roles and responsibilities of the PPO are set out in the Terms of Reference (ToR), the latest version of which can be found here: <https://www.ppo.gov.uk/about/vision-and-values/terms-of-reference/>
4. The PPO has three main investigative duties:
  - complaints made by prisoners, young people in detention, offenders under probation supervision and immigration detainees
  - deaths of prisoners, young people in detention, approved premises' residents and immigration detainees due to any cause

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<sup>1</sup> One case referred to in this report was notified to us in June 2020, but the date of death was April 2020.

- using the PPO's discretionary powers, the investigation of deaths of recently released prisoners or detainees
- 5. The Learning Lessons Bulletin includes fatal incident investigations case studies.
- 6. Please contact John Steele on 07880 787452, or at [john.steele@justice.gov.uk](mailto:john.steele@justice.gov.uk) if you would like more information