

## ***Proposal for temperature screening those entering prisons and Garda detention centres***

### ***For NPHEt consideration***

***23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020***

#### **Proposal**

The Department of Justice and Equality is supporting a proposal by the Irish Prison Service that, taking into account the new guidance issued by the WHO recognising the unique environment of a prison setting, approval be given to proceed to implement additional screening measures, including temperature testing, for all those entering prisons, with effect from Wednesday 25 March, 2020.

The Department of Justice and Equality has also written to the Department of Health outlining the request of Deputy Commissioner Anne McMahon and An Garda Síochána to introduce temperature testing as part of their control measures in custody areas in Garda Stations where detainees are held (same rationale as for prisons).

Note: although the measure would apply to all persons entering prisons, including staff, the Garda proposal would only apply to detainees in Garda stations.

#### **WHO position to date on temperature screening**

The WHO recommendations for international traffic in relation to COVID-19 outbreak (29 February 2020) noted that “temperature screening alone, at exit or entry, is not an effective way to stop international spread, since infected individuals may be in incubation period, may not express apparent symptoms early on in the course of the disease, or may dissimulate fever through the use of antipyretics; in addition, such measures require substantial investments for what may bear little benefits. It is more effective to provide prevention recommendation messages to travellers and to collect health declarations at arrival, with travellers’ contact details, to allow for a proper risk assessment and a possible contact tracing of incoming travellers”.

Earlier that month the WHO had advised countries considering repatriation and quarantine of their citizens on return home from Wuhan that entry temperature screening “alone may not be very effective as it may miss travellers incubating the disease or travellers concealing fever during travel, or it may yield false positive (fever of a different cause)”. The WHO advised that if temperature screening is implemented, it be accompanied by a series of other measures. (‘Key considerations for repatriation and quarantine of travellers in relation to the outbreak of novel coronavirus 2019-nCoV’, 11 February 2020).

## **New WHO Guidance specifically for prisons and other places of detention**

On 23<sup>rd</sup> March WHO/Europe published interim guidance on how to deal with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in prisons and other places of detention, entitled “Preparedness, prevention and control of COVID-19 in prisons and other places of detention”, available at <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-determinants/prisons-and-health/news/news/2020/3/preventing-covid-19-outbreak-in-prisons-a-challenging-but-essential-task-for-authorities>. (The document is itself dated 15<sup>th</sup> March.) This work is part of the WHO Health in Prisons Programme (HIPP).

The World Health Organisation considers that prisoners are likely to be more vulnerable to the Covid-19 outbreak than the general population because of the confined conditions they live in for prolonged periods of time. The WHO also states that the risk of rapidly increasing transmission of Covid-19 within prisons would have an amplifying effect on the epidemic and swiftly multiply the number of people affected.

Included in their guidance, the WHO makes several relevant statements:

Upon admission to prisons and other places of detention, all individuals should be screened for fever and lower respiratory tract symptoms (pg 4)

Screening at point of entry to prison should be available: health-care and public health teams should undertake a risk assessment of all people entering the prison, irrespective of whether or not there are suspected cases in the community; information should be collected on any history of cough and/or shortness of breath, patients’ recent travel history and possible contact with confirmed cases in the last 14 days (pg 8)

disease surveillance and detection (for example, who will be screened for COVID-19 symptoms? Will there be an initial screening for symptoms for all on entry (staff/visitors)? (pg 12)

In particular: • screening may be considered at entrance with self-reporting questionnaire to exclude those with symptoms; (pg 22)

## **Irish Prison Service position**

The Irish Prison Service has stated that it is in compliance with all of the WHO recommendations in their new guidance on dealing with COVID-19 in a prison setting, with the exception of the recommended measures regarding screening at point of entry.

The Irish Prison Service emphasises the fact that the WHO recommends:

- A general principle is that all prisoners should be screened for fever and respiratory symptoms upon admission to the prison
- Screening at point of entry to a prison should be available as part of the risk assessment of all people entering the prison

The Irish Prison Service argues that, given the unique environment and risks, a further measure of screening all persons entering the prisons which includes temperature checking is necessary, proportionate and critical. Temperature testing would involve mandatory screening of all staff entering prisons comprising a questionnaire and temperature check; the screening of visitors; while the measures will also apply to all delivery personnel and contractors entering the prison.

From bilateral contact with other jurisdictions, the Irish Prison Service is also aware that such screening measures are already being implemented in other prison services including in Italy and the UK and that the risk assessed screening models being used include temperature checking.

The Irish Prison Service also notes that now that the WHO guidance has been published it is anticipated there will be significant pressure both internally from the staff representative associations and externally from NGOs for the implementation of the full range of measures recommended by the WHO for prisons.

#### **Garda position**

The Garda position is that the introduction of temperature testing would be an emergency measure for the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic only. The benefit of taking the temperature of a detained person on arrival at the Garda Station is that it would identify detained persons suspected of having the Covid-19 virus at the earliest possible stage, thus containing the potential spread of the virus if the prisoner subsequently tests positive. This would reduce the number of Gardaí having contact with the detained person and would lead to a significant reduction in members having to self-isolate. The overall objective is to minimise the opportunity for the spread of Covid-19 and reduce the potential loss of large numbers of Gardaí from the frontline during this crisis.

Ends.