

London, UK, February 12, 2021

[COVID-19 and Consequences of Prison Lockdown for Personnel, Prisoners and Relatives]

"I don't think I'll even let him come back up during this lockdown. It felt like neglect."

The words of a mother in one of our prisons, recalling the first face-to-face visit she had with her three-year-old son after several months in lockdown, as recounted to the prisons inspectorate.

"Can I touch mummy? Can I give mummy a kiss?", the child asked. "No" was the answer, something she described as "heart-breaking".

[The inspectorate report](#) acknowledges that the severe lockdown in prisons had been successful at containing the spread of COVID-19. But it had "come at a heavy cost to prisoners".

Most prisoners have spent the last year locked in their cells for over 22 hours a day. Contact with family members has been minimal.

Mental and physical health has declined. "Their despondency, resentment and lack of hope for the future were especially notable".

This awful situation is a crisis incubated in Whitehall. The Government can hardly be blamed for COVID-19. The impressive speed of the vaccine roll-out also shows that it has got some things right.

But the Government's obstinate refusal to make the most of options such as early release schemes, to get vulnerable prisoners in particular out of harm's way, has compounded the misery in the prison system. It has likely been the cause of some avoidable deaths and long-term illness.

Every day, over 400,000 people are being vaccinated across the United Kingdom, a number far greater than the entire population of prisoners and staff.

Vaccinating all prison staff and prisoners is eminently deliverable. It should be done. Now.

Not only would this reduce infection, illness and death in prison, and reduce the spread of infection into the community, it would also help prisons get out of their extreme lockdown and restore some hope, at least.

Next month, we will be hosting an expert panel, reviewing what has worked, and what hasn't, in the fight against coronavirus in prisons. You can [find out more about this webinar here](#).