Q: Do I still have to keep 2 metres apart from other people?
A: Yes! Studies have shown you only have to spend 1 minute 1 metre away from someone to get infected. The closer you are to someone who is infected with coronavirus and the longer you spend with them, the more likely you are to catch it. You may see other people ignoring public health guidance, but you can keep yourself safe by following it: wash your hands regularly, don’t touch your face, and keep 2 metres apart from other people. If you have been closer than 2 metres to someone who tests positive for COVID-19, you may be asked to isolate for 14 days (see later question about contacts).

Q: Can I catch coronavirus if an officer or another resident comes into my cell?
A: Without protective equipment (PPE), you can catch coronavirus if you are less than 2 metres away from someone who is infected with the virus. Sometimes officers will need to come into your cell as part of their duties. If they cannot stay 2 metres away from you, they are advised to wear PPE for your protection and theirs. Occasionally, in an emergency or an urgent situation, they may not be able to do this.

Q: Can I catch the virus when I am queueing for my food or medicines?
A: When you are queuing (or anywhere where there are other people) you should keep 2 metres apart from everyone to stay safe from COVID-19. In some places, there will be marks on the floor to tell you where you should stand. If not, 2 metres is about 3 large steps – it’s further than you think! Food and medicines are prepared following strict health and safety guidelines, so you shouldn’t worry about catching the virus from them.

Q: How can I keep safe from coronavirus as shielding advice changes?
A: If you have been shielded over the past few months, you may feel anxious about mixing with other people again. In the community, shielding will pause from 1st August but you will still be able to shield in prison, if you would like to. Healthcare staff can help you decide what is best for you and if at any time you want to change your mind about your choice, you will be supported to do this. Whether or not you choose to continue to shield, the government advice for people who are at risk of severe illness with COVID-19 is to continue being cautious: wash your hands regularly, don’t touch your face, stay in your cell where possible and stay at least 2 metres apart from everyone when you leave your cell.

Q: Will I need to wear a mask or another kind of face covering to stay safe?
A: You will need to wear a mask if you have COVID-19 symptoms or test positive for COVID-19 and might come into contact with someone (e.g. if you leave your room). You will need a face covering for all hospital visits and for social visits where you cannot stay 2 metres apart from other people, due to seating or movements in the visits area. If you have been told you must wear a mask or a face covering, you will be given one to wear and should keep it covering your nose and mouth at all times. Some people (with breathing difficulties, some types of disabilities or children under 11 years old) will NOT have to wear a face covering.
Q: Am I still likely to catch coronavirus if I haven’t had it by now?
A: You are still at risk of catching coronavirus. There will be times when the risk of catching the virus will be higher than others. The best way to keep safe is by following public health guidance: wash your hands regularly, don’t touch your face, and keep 2 metres apart from other people. The prison has a responsibility to keep you safe, so they will follow guidance from public health experts about when it is safe to make changes to the regime and what to do if there is an ‘outbreak’ in the prison or in the local area outside it.

Q: Can I still catch coronavirus if I think I have already had it?
A: There’s a lot we don’t yet know about coronavirus, including if you can catch it again. If you have had symptoms of coronavirus, unless you had a test, it will be hard to know for sure if you actually had it - and even if you tested positive, you can’t be sure you won’t catch it again. It’s best to keep safe, wash your hands regularly, don’t touch your face, and keep 2 metres apart from other people.

Q: Can I get tested for coronavirus (COVID-19)?
A: Tests are now being done on anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, continuing cough or a change in your sense of smell or taste). In some prisons, people without symptoms are being tested. This is to see if there are people without symptoms who have coronavirus infection. By doing ‘surveillance’ testing (monitoring) programmes, we hope to learn more about the virus and to keep people as safe as possible.

Q: I have been told that I am a ‘contact’. What does that mean?
A: The NHS is now beginning a national programme of tracing people who have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for coronavirus. This is to help to stop the virus spreading. If you have been told that you are a contact of someone who has coronavirus, you will be asked to self-isolate for 14 days. You will not be allowed to mix with other people while you are self-isolating. If the person you were in contact with turns out to test negative, you will be able to stop self-isolating. They will need to carry on isolating until they are better.

Q: If I am a ‘contact’, will I get tested for coronavirus?
A: You won’t get tested if you don’t have any symptoms. If you get symptoms while you are isolating, you will get tested and anyone you have been in close contact with, in the 48 hours before you became unwell, will be asked to self-isolate. This will include people you live with in the community, if you have only just come in to prison.

Q: Will I get my usual health checks for my medical conditions?
A: As the lockdown restrictions are lifted, more face-to-face appointments can start to happen. It is really important to get any long-term medical conditions checked and you should let a member of the healthcare team know if you think your health is getting worse.

Q: When will I get to see the dentist and the optician?
A: Dentists and opticians are beginning to see patients again. They have to follow very strict rules because of the extra risk with the types of checks and treatment that they do.

Q: I should have been seen at the hospital for a regular check. When will I be able to go?
A: While hospitals were busy caring for patients with COVID-19, they had to stop ‘routine’ clinics. They carried on seeing emergencies and people with cancer. ‘Routine’ appointments have started again but there is a big backlog of work due to the pandemic. You must make sure that you tell the healthcare team if you think your health is getting worse while you wait for your hospital appointment.
Q: Should I still be taking Vitamin D – and can I get it prescribed for me?
A: People in the community are still being advised to take Vitamin D. The advice for people who spend a lot of time indoors, who have dark skin (for example with an African, African-Caribbean or south Asian background) or who wear clothes that cover up most of their skin is to take vitamin D all year round, to keep their teeth and bones healthy. This advice has not changed. So yes, keep taking vitamin D while you are in prison and check out current advice for the community when you leave. Multivitamins containing vitamin D can be bought from a chemist in the community and they are available on the canteen for people in prison. They will not be prescribed by the healthcare team, except for people who have a medical condition that means they need to take more than this amount of vitamin D. Please contact your healthcare team if you are not sure.

Q: I have put on weight in the lockdown and I haven’t got as much energy as usual. What can I do?
A: A number of people have put on weight over the past few months. It hasn’t been possible to go to the gym and some people haven’t felt like exercising in-cell or outdoors. Many people have felt more anxious or irritable than normal and they have found it difficult to sleep. Some people have been eating when they have felt bored or anxious and they haven’t felt like choosing the healthy menu options.

As restrictions on the regime start to lift, there will be more times when you can leave your cell and gym staff will be running outdoor exercise sessions. Make sure you stay as active as possible when you can. Try and start exercising again if you have stopped. You may find it hard to begin with, but it will help you to feel less anxious or irritable and it will help you sleep. Try choosing the healthy options on the menu (these should be marked) and try to limit the amount of unhealthy snacks you have.

Q: I don’t feel like doing anything, even though I am allowed out of my room more. What can I do?
If you find that you are very anxious, tearful or angry and you don’t want to do the things you enjoyed before lockdown, you may have become unwell with anxiety or depression. Put in an application and speak to a member of the healthcare team who will arrange for you to get checked out and get further support. You can also ask to speak to a listener or to one of the chaplaincy team.

Get out into the fresh air when you can, even if you don’t feel like it. Try doing craft activities for a few minutes at a time – or read a few pages of a book, if you are able to concentrate. THINGS WILL GET BETTER. Remember to keep in contact with your family and friends by writing to them, speaking on the phone or by arranging a video call, if virtual visits have been introduced where you are. Social visits are beginning to start up again, where these can be arranged safely, and with strict guidelines in place.

If you find any of this information confusing or different from the latest guidance you have seen on the news or read about, or if you have concerns or questions about your health, you should speak to a member of the healthcare team where you are currently staying. Before you leave prison, make sure you are given the latest guidance about COVID-19 and what is expected of you in the area where you will be living after you are released.

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