

Prison Service of the Czech Republic

Summary of measures and actions on fighting COVID-19

With the first cases appearing in Italy, the Czech Prison Service (PS) started declaring home quarantine (first 14-day, then it was changed to 7-day) for its employees coming from affected countries (now the borders are closed, everyone returning from abroad is ordered 14day home quarantine by the government).

Later on, the PS started taking body temperature entries to all its facilities including HQ (daily, affecting all entering people – staff, prisoners, lawyers...) – currently, the level not to allow entry is set to 38°C and above.

Prisons and personnel:

- All prisons shall prepare isolation cells and rooms for potential cases of infected inmates or for newly admitted inmates;
- Prisons have stocks of food and other material to be able to function for at least a 30-day period without shipments of supplies;
- All prisons are equipped with a certain number of respirators and spare filters (FFP3 category), gloves, goggles and protective suits. The PS has been constantly working on purchasing, getting and supplying more protective material, however, we are limited firstly by the market and secondly by what the government can supply us;
- All personnel working at entries/gates must wear protective respirators;
- General disinfection of common spaces is done more frequently. Disinfection soaps and alcohol based sanitizers
- The Headquarters uses home office for most of its employees.

Face masks production:

- The Czech Prison Service (during the weekend 13-15 March) started to sew its own 100% cotton reusable face-masks. These are to be distributed to all employees in the 1st wave, the prison population in the 2nd wave and employees' family members in the last phase. When the PS reaches its full production potential, it is estimated 40 000 face-masks/month can be manufactured and supplied also to the state.

Prisoners, personnel and health checks (admission, medical treatment):

- Newly admitted prisoners shall be put into quarantine for a 14-day period. If they have symptoms of COVID-19, they shall be transferred to our prison hospital. The PS' prison hospital prepared its infectious wing for such inmates.

The PS has its own infection-ambulance-vehicles. However, if infected prisoners were found among the current prison population, they would be moved (in cooperation with public health authorities) to regular public hospital treating COVID-19 patients.

- All prisoner-newcomers or those from transfers are to be examined by physicians. In these cases, and all other (regular ones) where direct physical contact between prisoner-doctor is not necessary, physicians must perform the examinations from behind partition glass (i.e. consultations). Where the situation allows it, using Skype is also possible and supported (telemedicine). Preventive health-checks were postponed; same as non-urgent medical interventions. Doctors shall perform their duties in a minimal-number-of-staff-manner (doctor+nurse) to avoid the risk of contracting COVID-19 and spreading it to more medical personnel.

Prisoners (visits, prison leaves and “compensation” measures):

- On 14th March, all family-and-relatives visits to prisoners were cancelled for the time corresponding with the State of Emergency declared by the Czech Government. This does not affect prosecuting authorities;
- Prisoners were given one extra parcel they can receive (mainly food items), they can use money from other chapters of their pocket-money budget for making phone calls; and prisons are encouraged to use Skype video-visits as frequently as possible.

Prisoner transfers, visits of/procedures agreed with state organizations etc.:

- Prisoner transfers were limited to a necessary minimum connected to security reasons only;
- Procedures were agreed with Police regarding inmates handed over to the PS by the Police and vice versa. The authority which is handing over the prisoner is always responsible for their health state and for arranging medical care (the respective authority – Police or PS – will not accept individuals with body temperature over 38°C);
- The PS asked prosecuting authorities to thoroughly consider each individual case of their entry into prison and decide carefully if it is really needed to visit the prison. If it is, they must wear face masks;
- Courts and judges were asked to use videoconference options (possible in all 35 Czech prisons) as much as possible to prevent prisoner transfers to courts or judges coming into prisons;
- PS limited entry of all other external workers (Probation and Mediation Service personnel, members of Churches and so on) in order to limit the traffic

between prisons and the outer environment. Prison-leaves (as a benefit to prisoners) are cancelled for now.

Other:

- Ministry of Justice communicates with courts – where it is possible, courts shall postpone commencement of custodial sentences;
- Hand in hand with courts limiting their agenda and operation, a specific branch of PS personnel (Judicial Guards – serving at courts / MoJ / state prosecutor's offices as security officers) is considered to be used in regular prison operation to help prison officers;
- Naturally, there also comes the regulation that all official international outgoing or incoming visits were cancelled, so far until April, but the current situation shows us it may be for the whole half-year (at least). In a similar manner, all excursions for school groups and other interested persons were cancelled. Even without these - schools are shut down and borders closed).

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