

Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry

A case study:

What prisoners told Let's Be Heard about their experiences in the COVID-19 pandemic



Easy Read



What is Let's Be Heard?



The **Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry** is a review into what went well and what could have been done better during the COVID-19 **pandemic** in Scotland.

A **pandemic** is an infectious disease that has spread across the world.



The Inquiry is **independent**.

This means it does not work for the Government or any other organisation.



The Inquiry is investigating how Scotland dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2022.



The Inquiry will:

- find the **facts** – what is true
- find out what we need to learn
- make **recommendations** to Scottish Ministers so we are better prepared in the future



A **recommendation** is what we think should happen.

What is Let's Be Heard?



Let's Be Heard is the listening project of the Scottish COVID-19 Inquiry.



Let's Be Heard was set up for people living in Scotland or affected by decisions made in Scotland during the pandemic.



It gives them a way to:

- share their experiences
- say what information should be learned from their experiences



It is the main way that people can give information to the Inquiry to help it with its work.



The Inquiry thanks everyone who has shared their experiences of the pandemic with Let's Be Heard.

Why have we done this case study?



A **case study** is when we look closely at information from one group of people.

This case study looks at what 74 prisoners in Scotland told Let's Be Heard.



In this document we call these 74 people **respondents** as they have given information to the case study.

Prisoners are not giving spoken evidence to the Inquiry.



This case study made sure that the experiences of prisoners are represented in the Inquiry.

The information includes:

- their experiences of the pandemic in Scotland
- how the Scottish Government's rules and **restrictions** affected them



Restrictions are things you are not allowed to do.

- the lessons prisoners think should be learned from their experiences

What are the main things we found out?



- **Mental health**

We heard that the mental health of prisoners in Scotland was affected in the pandemic.

Respondents felt **isolated** – cut off from people.



Prisoners felt they were badly affected by having more time locked in cells.



Many respondents felt that restrictions added to their punishment and made them feel depressed and anxious.

Some respondents reported that in lockdown there was more:

- **self-harm** - when some people hurt themselves when they are very upset or worried





- feeling suicidal – that they want to take their own life



- use of illegal drugs



Changes in **routines** and **responsibilities** were also reported to have badly affected the mental health of prisoners.

A **routine** is a pattern of what happens in a regular day.



Responsibilities are things that someone must do.

- **Limited opportunities** – this means fewer chances to do things

Prisoners stated that stricter measures meant that:

- food quality and hygiene was worse





- daily routines were disrupted
- there was less access to education
- there were less chances to exercise



When activities were cancelled, prisoners told us they could not take part in classes that would support them to move to a lower security prison.



A small number of respondents said that there were delays in their case being heard in court.



This meant they spent more time **on remand** and this caused extra stress.

On remand is the time someone spends in prison before their trial in court starts.



- **Prisoner and prison staff relationships**

Respondents said that in the pandemic the relationships between prisoners and prison staff broke down.



They said that poor communication between the people that run prisons and prisoners made them feel frustrated and anxious.



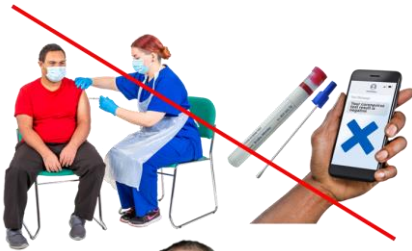
Respondents believed that prison officers were the source of infections in the prisons.

Many respondents said that staff did not follow Scottish Government guidelines.



But some prisoners praised staff who had worked to support them.

They knew that prison officers were under pressure at home and at work.



- **Access to healthcare**

Respondents felt that they had more difficulties and delays in getting healthcare, compared to people outside prisons.



This included getting tests, mental health support and vaccinations.

- **Visits**



Prisoners and their families said they were sad and upset because they could not have face-to-face visits.



They were pleased that the Scottish Prison Service gave mobile phones to prisoners and they could have online visits.



- **Being prepared and communication**

Respondents felt that Scottish prisons were not properly prepared for the COVID-19 outbreak.



Prisoners said there was poor communication and they were not given enough information about COVID-19 and the restrictions.

Prisoner views on lessons to be learned



- **Pandemic planning**

Prisoners felt there should be clear plans for each prison including:

- staff training
- having enough **PPE** – the personal protective equipment like masks and aprons that keep people safe from viruses





- having a plan in place for getting back to a routine when the pandemic is over



They felt this should include ways to stop any delays in:

- getting a trial in court
- getting released from prison

- **Infection control**



Respondents wanted:

- more tests if there is a future pandemic
- more **hygiene measures** for prisoners and the buildings they are in



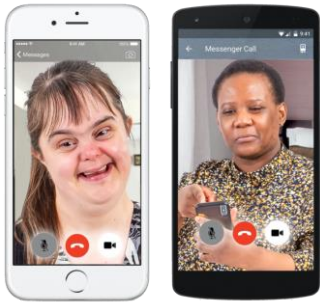
This means ways to keep clean and to stop infection from spreading.



- **Mental health**

Respondents said there should be things that would prevent loneliness, isolation and poor mental health like:

- more social time with other prisoners



- more calls with friends and family



- more **welfare checks** – when prison staff check on prisoners in their cells to make sure they are safe and well

- **Communication**

Prisoners also wanted clear information just for prisons about restrictions, guidance and vaccinations.

Prisoners would like this to be available to Scottish Prison Service staff and to prisoners.





Additional images by Canva