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Guidelines

Health and Safety Measures for Pakistani Prisons and Prisoners with Reference to COVID-19

Objective

To provide the guidelines for Pakistani prisons and detained prisoners for prevention from Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19). And, to also provide the health & safety measures for protecting the health and well-being of people detained in prisons, and those who work there (prison staff), and people who visit prisons (legal visitors, family and friends of prisoners, etc.) from COVID-19.

Rationale

Prison health is widely considered as a public health issue. People in prisons and other places of detention such as jails are likely to be more prone to the coronavirus disease than the general population as they are detained in confined conditions for prolonged periods of time. The chances of amplification of infection increases in prison settings, as prisoners are detained in close proximity which is likely to result in a heightened risk of person-to-person transmission of the SARS-COV 2 virus. On the other hand the demographic characteristics of people in prisons typically have a greater underlying burden of disease and worse health conditions such as poor hygiene, weak immune system, and poor nutrition, hence they become more vulnerable of contracting the virus because of their weakened immune systems.

Therefore, prisoners are more likely to spread infection due to their close proximity across the prison population in the absence of adequate preventive health care measures inside the prison. Thus, this collection of health and safety guidelines will help the Pakistani prisons, their staff members, prisoners and their legal visitors to take-up the preventive measures with regards to COVID-19.

Risk of Spread

- Depending on the COVID-19 situation of the specific province/city, the risk of introducing COVID-19 into prisons may vary.
- The risk of virus introduction into closed settings may be associated with prison staff or newly admitted prisoner who has recently stayed in affected area/city/district or who has been in contact with people returning from affected area or community.



Definitions

Prison Staff means prison officer, jailer, warden, duty officer, lockup officer, custody officer.

Symptomatic means developing the symptoms of a disease.

Asymptomatic means absence of any symptoms of disease.

General Preventive Measures for Prisons

- Ensure availability of health care provider in all prisons across the country who is responsible to provide health care services to the detained prisoners and prison staff.
- If person have symptoms well-suited with COVID-19, or if they have a prior COVID-19 diagnosis and are still symptomatic, they should be put into medical isolation until further medical evaluation.
- Ensure provision of appropriate hygiene training and supplies and ensure that all areas susceptible to harboring the virus and accessible to prisoners, prison staff, and visitors are disinfected regularly following the best practices policy.
- Display of posters with preventive measures on wearing face mask and proper hand washing techniques, to address the language barriers, translation in local language may be needed.
- Ensure the availability of information resources for prison staff, prisoners and visitors, such as flyers, posters, should be developed and placed in prison common areas and in areas designated for legal visits and family visits.
- Mandatory compliance of wearing face mask in all prisons. Ensure visitors/relatives visiting prisoners wear proper face mask. (Refer to guidelines issued by Mo/NHSR&C).
- Adherence of social distancing policy for visitors/family members visiting prisoner. (Refer to guidelines issued by Mo/NHSR&C).
- Availability of sanitizing hand rub and ensure that cleaning personnel are available with proper kits and materials in prisons.
- Provision of disinfectant spray to all the prison staff without restriction.
- Special cleaning & disinfecting of areas where prison staff members and prisoners are frequently present. (Refer to disinfection guidelines issued by Mo/NHSR&C).
- Proper cleaning and disinfection of jail rooms, duty rooms, meeting rooms, waiting area, washrooms, jail barracks and corridors. (Refer to disinfection guidelines issued by Mo/NHSR&C).
- Surfaces which present special risks (e.g. toilets, waiting area, prison kitchen, windows, barrack grills, door handles/buttons, tables, chairs and seating benches) should be disinfected regularly.
- Using disposable rubber or nitrile gloves to handle the trash/waste produced in prison and its proper disposal by assigned staff.
- Ensure prisoners released or put on supervised leave from prison are properly screened before exiting the prison.



General Preventive Measures for Prison Staff & Prisoners

- All prison staff should wear appropriate face mask. (Refer to guidelines issued by Mo/NHSR&C).
- Adopt social distancing measures. (Refer to guidelines issued by Mo/NHSR&C)
- Ensure screening of all prison staff members, visitors by measuring body temperature through thermal scanner at entry points by assigned person on duty.
- All staff should be reminded to wash their hands frequently, ideally with hand soap and water or alternatively using a hand sanitizer containing at least 70% alcohol.
- Ensure availability of hand washing soap for prisoners.
- Vulnerable prison staff member and prisoner should be protected and not allowed to come in contact with other prison staff member or a prisoner.
- Any prison staff member suspected of illness shall be sent to isolation room or the hospital as advised by authorized health care provider.
- Clear policy for prison staff members as to when and how quarantine may apply - for example, if a staff member has been in contact with an infected person.
- Developing prison staff members' trainings specific to COVID-19, e.g. how to protect themselves, how to deal with the various situations, how to avoid discrimination.
- Designing a single-use policy of food utensils for prisoners in prisons to avoid kitchen contamination - for example, single-use plates, glasses etc. which later are properly disposed-off in proper waste bags.
- Avoid crowding in the rooms and prison barracks by staggering accommodations and considering parole options in very over crowded situations
- Special precautions to be taken while transporting prisoners to and from court appearances, a well ventilated van should be used while avoiding overcrowding in the transport.

Risk Management

- Availability of screening services at point of entry to prison, 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, fever, patients' recent travel history and possible contact with COVID-19 confirmed case in the last 14 days.
- Compliance of screening policy for all prison staff members, prisoners and visitors.
- Provision of health communication messages for all prison staff with recent travel history or coming from affected areas who are likely to develop COVID-19 symptoms can home-isolate themselves.
- Clear instructions for the visitors who are visiting prison. People who are symptomatic should be excluded from visiting prison. For asymptomatic visitors with recent travel history or coming from affected areas, a non-contact visit policy should be considered.



- Prison authorities should consider implementing measures to limit the mobility of people within the prison and limit the access of non-essential staff and visitors to prison.
- Escalate the level of information on COVID-19 with prisoners. Restrictions, including a limitation of visitors should be explained in advance and alternative measures shall be provided to contact with family/relatives, e.g. phone, should be introduced.

Prison Preparedness Plan for COVID-19

- Prison staff should remain in contact with health-care teams, to enable identification of suspected cases among prison staff or prisoners and their subsequent management in accordance with the national COVID-19 guidelines.
- Designated focal point for covid management may be notified for all covid related activities
- Adequate preparedness plans country wide for prisons to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak situation in such a way as to:
 - Protect the health and well-being of people detained in prisons and prison staff
 - Continued safe operation of prisons
 - Reduce the risk of infection within prison settings
 - Reduce the likelihood that COVID-19 will spread within prisons and from such settings into the community
- To present effective preventive and response mechanisms for:
 - Preventing the introduction of COVID-19 into prisons
 - Preventing the transmission of COVID-19 in prisons
- Preventing the spread of COVID-19 from prisons and from such settings into the community
- Ensure that prison authorities and staff members are well informed and aware of the hospitals to which they can transfer those requiring admission (respiratory support and/or intensive care units).
- How to look after staff e.g. one may assign dedicated workers on site designated and trained to support staff in case the encountered suspected cases require urgent medical care.
- How to detect ill prison staff members or a prisoner e.g. via temperature screenings.
- How to handle a suspected case e.g. WHO guidelines suggest implementing preventative isolation and keeping ill persons at a distance of 2 meters (6 feet) from others and to disinfect the area straight away.
- How prison staff should get in contact with the health authorities. Most of these protocols could already have been decided upon during the preparedness phase.
- Sentinel testing should be carried out where appropriate in consultation of local health authorities.

Provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Appropriate PPE should be available in prisons for use if an infection is suspected (Refer to guidelines issued by Mo/NHSR&C).



- Defining what protection kits should include surgical/medical masks, single-use disposable rubber or nitrile gloves, alcohol-based gel and/or hand soap, biohazard bags, disinfectant spray and touch-free (non-contact infrared) thermometers.
- PPE stocks should be maintained and kept secure to ensure their availability under the specified circumstances.

References

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For more information, please contact:

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