



News from the Danish Parliamentary Ombudsman

COVID 19 monitoring in Prison and Probation Service institutions

04 June 2021

During the COVID-19 period, the Ombudsman has monitored the conditions in the institutions of the Prison and Probation Service. The Ombudsman has made recommendations and raised issues with the authorities about testing strategy and isolation of inmates, among other things. The Ombudsman is now concluding his monitoring and expressing satisfaction that the Prison and Probation Service has focused a great deal on the area.

'It is important to prevent infection spreading. At the same time, inmates within the Prison and Probation Service continue to live in quite restrictive conditions due to COVID-19, so it is also important that the restrictions are not extended further than necessary. Therefore, it is positive that the Prison and Probation Service has focused on both preventing infection spreading and making a plan for a gradual easing of restrictions for the inmates,' says Ombudsman Niels Fenger. In this connection, he points out that it is a good thing that the Prison and Probation Service can draw on its own medical expertise and the health authorities while preparing its efforts.

Better prevention and phasing out restrictions

During the COVID-19 period, the Prison and Probation Service has changed its contingency plans, so that it is now expressly stated that new inmates must be screened and that, to the greatest extent possible, it must be avoided to place new inmates in double occupancy cells. In addition, the Department of Prisons and Probation's testing strategy has been developed so that it is now possible to test new inmates, among others.

In March 2021, the Prison and Probation Service presented a plan for phasing out the restrictions that have been implemented. However, during the most recent lockdown from the end of 2020 and in 2021, the inmates have

been able to receive visits from 3-5 closely connected persons, and to a certain extent, they have been allowed to go on leave for Christmas and Easter. Similar offers were not available during the first lockdown in 2020.

As a part of the COVID-19 monitoring, the Ombudsman has visited two state prisons, two local prisons and one halfway house and been in dialogue with the Department of Prisons and Probation and the Danish National Police.

Read the news item of 14 July 2020 [here](#).

Further information:

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FACTS

- The Danish Institute for Human Rights and DIGNITY – Danish Institute Against Torture have participated in the preparation, execution and follow-up on the Ombudsman's monitoring of the conditions in Prison and Probation Service institutions during the COVID-19 period.
- On 3 July 2020, the Ombudsman recommended the following to the Department of Prisons and Probation:
 - That the Prison and Probation Service evaluate the experience gained during the COVID-19 period with a view to assessing whether any future epidemics – or serious outbreaks with a special risk of infection spreading in Prison and Probation Service institutions – **can be handled effectively and at the same time less restrictively**.
 - That the Department of Prisons and Probation during future epidemics – or serious outbreaks with a special risk of infection spreading in Prison and Probation Service institutions – **consider regularly whether there is a basis for working out guidelines** tailored to the conditions at Prison and Probation Service halfway houses.
 - That the Department of Prisons and Probation consider laying down **written guidelines for prevention of adverse mental health effects** as a result of isolation due to COVID-19, potential future epidemics or serious outbreaks with a special risk of infection spreading in Prison and Probation Service institutions, and that these guidelines focus especially on **alternative ways for the inmates to have meaningful human contact**, including with persons other than relatives, and to stay

occupied.

- That the Department of Prisons and Probation and the management at the Prison and Probation Service institutions during the COVID-19 epidemic and any future epidemics – or serious outbreaks with a special risk of infection spreading in Prison and Probation Service institutions – to an increased extent ensure that **the inmates are guided** with respect to prevention of infection spreading and restriction of rights etc. **in a language that the inmates understand, so that all inmates receive sufficient information.**
- That the Department of Prisons and Probation and the management at the Prison and Probation Service analyse the **reasons for the lower number of cases of for instance violence and threats of violence**, use of force, placement in solitary confinement cells and disciplinary punishment during the COVID-19 period with a view to preventing such cases under normal circumstances.
- On 18 November 2020, the Ombudsman recommended the following to the Danish National Police:
 - That the Danish National Police in the event of a need for a new arrangement with phone meetings between relatives and remand prisoners subject to visitation and letter control
 - Consider if a practice where relatives as a general rule cannot show up in person at a police station can be extended to the whole country, and
 - Ensure that all police districts are aware of the possibilities to give exemptions for more than one relative to participate in phone meetings, including when there are children among the relatives.
- On 18 November 2020, the Ombudsman recommended the following to the Department of Prisons and Probation:
 - That the Department ensure that it is expressly stated in the contingency plans for all Prison and Probation Service institutions that inmates and residents must be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 upon reception as well as how this screening is to take place.