

Prisoners continue to die in segregation

31 March 2026: In a bulletin published today, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) shared learning from their investigations where prisoners have died while segregated.

The PPO investigates deaths in custody and complaints from prisoners. Their latest bulletin highlights the potential risks associated with placing prisoners in segregation which is an isolating form of custody.

The HM Prison and Probation Service Segregation Policy makes clear that “segregation should only be used as a last resort whilst maintaining a balance”. However, the Ombudsman’s office said they continue to see several of the same issues 11 years after the publication of their first bulletin on segregation.

The bulletin reports that out of 14 individuals that were located in the segregation unit and died between 1 April 2024 and 31 December 2025, 8 were being managed by suicide and self-harm monitoring procedures (ACCT) at the time of their death.

“Prison policy clearly states that placing prisoners that are being managed under ACCT in segregation should only be done in exceptional circumstances”, said Ombudsman Adrian Usher.

“It is concerning how many prisoners are on an open ACCT whilst segregated and we continue to investigate a number of deaths where this occurs. Being placed in segregation is likely to heighten a prisoner’s vulnerability and it reduces the protective factors against suicide and self-harm”.

“More must be done by HMPPS to take these risks into consideration”.

The PPO also shared examples of staff focusing on a prisoner’s behaviour rather than their risk of suicide, with further reports highlighting a lack of individual and quality one-to-one contact with those in segregation.

The impact of continued segregation on mental health was also highlighted in the bulletin, with one prisoner committing suicide after being segregated for 110 days. In a different case, healthcare staff attended less than 50% of the prisoner’s daily segregation reviews.

The Ombudsman’s office urged prison leaders to be aware of the importance of checking a prisoner’s physical health before deeming them fit for segregation. Prison policy requires that an initial health screen for segregation is completed by a doctor or a nurse within two hours of a decision to segregate. The PPO found this did not always happen.

A prisoner who died of COVID-19 pneumonia while segregated was incorrectly assessed by staff as conducting dirty protests, when in fact a health issue was making him incontinent. In another case, a prisoner was deemed as non-compliant and placed in segregation.

Despite suffering from epilepsy and sickle cell anaemia, the nurse did not complete his initial segregation health assessment within two hours and he died later that night.

“The initial segregation health screening predominantly relates to mental health. I have found the omission of physical health in policy illogical, so I have recommended that HMPPS amend their guidance to include this”, said Adrian.

Lastly, the PPO also found in many cases a failure to follow the segregation policy procedures, with some staff unaware of the requirements. The investigative office explained it is essential that staff are properly trained given the risks associated with prisoners on the segregation unit.

“Segregation should only be used as a last resort”, said Adrian.

“I urge Governors and Directors to assure themselves that they have sufficient quality assurance arrangements in place within their establishment and are meeting the segregation requirements”.

-ENDS-

Notes to editors:

1. This release is available at: <https://ppo.gov.uk/media-releases/>
2. The bulletin is available at:
https://cdn.websitebuilder.service.justice.gov.uk/uploads/sites/14/2026/03/35.200_PPO_Learning_lessons_bulletin_Segregation_v2b_Final_Web1.pdf
3. Adrian Usher was appointed as Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) in April 2023.
4. The PPO is appointed by and reports directly to the Secretary of State for Justice. The Ombudsman's office is wholly independent of the services in remit, which include those provided by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), Prisoner Escort and Custody Service, the Home Office (Immigration Enforcement), the Youth Custody Service, and those local authorities with secure children's homes. It is also operationally independent of, but sponsored by, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ).
5. The roles and responsibilities of the PPO are set out in the Terms of Reference (ToR), the latest version of which can be found at: <https://ppo.gov.uk/document/prison-and-probationombudsman-terms-of-reference/>
6. The PPO has three main investigative duties:
 - complaints made by prisoners, young people in detention, offenders under probation supervision and individuals detained under immigration powers (detained individuals)
 - deaths of prisoners, young people in detention, approved premises' residents and detained individuals due to any cause
 - deaths of recently released prisoners that occur within 14 days of release from prison (except homicide)
7. Please contact ppocomms@ppo.gov.uk if you require more information