Rioting prisoners carrying metal bars smash up jail in Scotland

Two police officers have been injured in a suspected riot at a prison as tensions over coronavirus soar inside jails across the UK. Police were called to Addiewell Prison in West Lothian, Scotland, on Monday after rioting prisoners carrying metal bars were said to have 'smashed up' part of the jail and stabbed a prison officer who had been taken hostage. The riots come after it was announced that prisons across England and Wales would be shutting down jail visits in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19 which has now claimed the lives of 422 people in the UK. A number of prisons have already confirmed cases of COVID-19 as cases soar across the UK and Boris Johnson orders Britons to stay inside. However anxiety inside jails over coronavirus continues to grow due to the close proximity of prisoners and fears staff will go off sick with the disease. Today video footage from Addiewell Prison showed a prisoner laughing as he filmed the vandalism done to the private jail’s Forth D hall. The prisoner said: ‘Mate, you’s have lost the plot. Have you trashed the whole place?’ He also asked a bare-chested prisoner in the video: ‘Where’s your coosh,’ before the thug brings a length of metal into shot. A source told the Daily Record: ‘A hardcore of prisoners at HMP Addiewell went on the rampage and smashed things up, leading to a lockdown. ‘They situation there has been growing more tense every day, as there is no effective way to apply social distancing inside a jail. ‘Prisoners are angry that others with symptoms are not been taken of the premises until they are confirmed as suffering from the virus.’ A Scottish Prison Service spokeswoman said the incident had now been dealt with. She said: ‘An incident took place yesterday in HMP Addiewell where a small number of individuals were involved in a disturbance in one section of the establishment. ‘The incident was brought to a safe conclusion and the prison was secured on Monday night. The individuals involved have been reported to Police Scotland.’ Today the Ministry of Justice confirmed that visitors would no longer be allowed to enter the establishments in an effort to keep staff, inmates and families safe and protect the NHS’s ability to cope with the surge in coronavirus cases. A message of their Twitter page read: ‘We have suspended all prison visits in England & Wales for today. This is while we ensure safe & secure functioning of our prisons while enforcing social distancing. ‘If you have a visit booked today, please do not attend. Stay home, protect the NHS, save lives.’ The Prisoner Officer’s Association (POA) also confirmed that inmates would be locked up for most hours of the day and would be let out only to access necessities such as showers or to use the phones and exercise. National chair of the POA, Mark Fairhurst, confirmed that the new plans were approved on Monday night after talks with the government brought to light that more prisoners were showing symptoms of the coronavirus. He told The Independent: ‘More and more staff are self-isolating, more and more prisoners are showing symptoms of Covid-19, and in order to protect staff, prisoners and the general public, it is now necessary to self-isolate our prisoners to stop the spread.’ He added: ‘We’ve continued to work normally for as long as we possibly can and I think families of prisoners will be relieved that they’re not at risks and prisoners will be relieved that their loved ones will be safe at home instead of travelling all over the country into packed visit halls and putting themselves at risk. ‘In my local prison, HMP Liverpool, prisoners have been asking why they haven’t been locked down yet, so we’re hoping there will be a sensible reaction from prisoners. They must realise that this is for their safety and their loved ones.’ Addressing the Prime Minister’s new coronavirus lockdown rules on Monday, the POA General Secretary Steve Gillan said: ‘The POA recognise that Prison staff are key workers, but the Prime Minister statement is a game changer. ‘It was always envisaged that regimes would be kept as normal as possible, but that position has now altered and the POA will continue to work with Government and Employer to keep our members and prisoners as safe as possible. ‘These restrictions will bring their own challenges operationally, but the Director General Phil Copple has made the correct decision.’ According to the new prison restrictions, essential workers such as kitchen, laundry and cleaning staff, will be unlocked to carry out their work and prison staff will be briefed on arrival for duty. The latest announcement comes as it was revealed today that a prisoner has contracted the virus at the all-male Oakwood Prison near Wolverhampton and is in self-isolation. G4S, the private company which runs the jail, said it was continuing to monitor national guidance. John Whitwam, managing director, G4S custodial and detention services, said: ‘We have confirmed one case of coronavirus at HMP Oakwood. ‘The health and safety of our staff and the people in our care is our top priority and we have existing, well-developed policies and procedures in place to
manage outbreaks of infectious diseases. ‘We are in regular discussion with Public Health England and following their guidance. ‘The person concerned had already been self-isolating since Tuesday, in accordance with national guidance, and will remain in isolation and in regular consultation with our on-site health professionals. His family have been contacted and will be kept up-to-date.’ Oakwood joins HMP Manchester and HMP High Down in having confirmed cases of coronavirus. It is believed visits to Oakwood have reduced amid the crisis. The POA said it ‘praised the decision of the Secretary of State for Justice and the Director of Public Sector Prisons for their decision to place Prisons in England and Wales on immediate lockdown’. Last week it was revealed that almost 1,000 prison officers have gone into self-isolation and some security procedures may have to be halted if there are staff shortages amid the coronavirus outbreak, it is understood. Prison cell searches and drug tests for inmates might be scrapped in a bid to cope with absences during the crisis. Some 900 prison officers were off work and self-isolating on Thursday. ‘Core security processes’ will ‘cease’ and prisoners will need to be confined to their cells if jails in England and Wales do not have enough staff, according to official guidance seen by BBC News. Meals, medication, prisoner safety and family visits will be prioritised. The number of prison officers off work rose on Friday, sources told the BBC. The guidance is also said to advise against starting new offender behaviour programmes like those put in place for sex offenders. The news came after a former chief inspector of prisons called for low-risk inmates to be released from prison to avoid them becoming ‘incubators’ for coronavirus. Speaking on the BBC’s Newsnight programme, Nick Hardwick suggested prisoners with only a short amount of their sentence left to serve could be freed to help ease the pressure on the prison system.