

10/29/2020

Dear family and friends of incarcerated individuals,

If you have a loved one in the Colorado Department of Corrections, I want to assure you that we are taking the COVID-19 pandemic very seriously. The health and safety of our staff and inmates is our highest priority, and we are working diligently with public health and medical professionals to ensure our operational decisions are based in the most current science available.

One of the most important tools in our toolbox has been robust, regular testing over the last several months. CDOC has been conducting large scale targeted testing programs in coordination with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE). CDOC has been conducting regular staff testing over the last several months in an effort to prevent the virus from coming into the facility from an asymptomatic individual. Given that many inmates may not be demonstrating any symptoms, the Department has also been conducting regular inmate surveillance testing in order to identify and quarantine those who are positive to mitigate the spread of the virus within the facilities. It is important to note that the vast majority of inmates that have tested positive have been asymptomatic or have had very mild symptoms.

Symptomatic inmates who test positive are closely monitored by medical staff and will be transported to an external medical facility to receive treatment, if necessary. The CDOC has also brought on additional medical staff to provide monitoring support. Inmates have been quarantined based on whether or not they have tested positive, and/or have potentially been exposed. The inmates remain in that quarantined status while the appropriate testing protocols are conducted. This helps to reduce the potential spread of the virus.

Medical staff work diligently to advise inmates when they test positive and to provide that information as timely as possible. At that time, the inmate has the option to fill out a release of information form so that a staff member can notify their designated loved one. Given medical privacy laws, we cannot release medical information without a signed form, and inmates have the right to decline the sharing of information.

Testing is also critically important in our communities, and we are encouraging staff to have their family members and friends utilize the numerous FREE community testing sites across our state. Those community testing sites can easily be located by going to the CDPHE COVID web page and clicking the "Find a Community Testing Location" button. That website is: <https://covidtest.colorado.gov/map>

Over the last 7 months we have made numerous operational changes in order to best mitigate and prevent the spread of the virus within our facilities and offices. There are currently 9 CDOC facilities on Phase III operations due to COVID positives amongst the inmate population and/or staff members.

In Phase III operations, inmates need to shelter in place in their cells in order to prevent the spread of the virus amongst cells and units. When possible after the source of an outbreak has been located and isolated, inmates will still have access to all their personal property, can send and receive mail, will be provided regular opportunities to shower, and will continue to receive their normal medications. During this time, the ability to use phones and video visitation may be limited given that they are shared equipment, and could potentially be a spread location. Once the medical experts believe it is safe for us to loosen restrictions, we will do so.

All inmates and staff have been required to wear masks and provided education on wearing masks since very early on in the pandemic in situations where mask wearing is possible. The department has provided inmates and staff with free masks and are replacing them as needed. Additional personal protective equipment is provided to both staff and inmates as needed when living or working in an environment with a positive inmate. Staff are also being strongly encouraged to wear masks when they are outside of the facility, practice social distancing in the community, and continue to regularly wash their hands.

As an effort to promote social distancing and reduce exposure risk, inmates have been grouped into their living units. They live, eat and recreate in those smaller groups, and any shared facilities, such as dining halls, are cleaned in between each cohort's use. This is very similar to what public health experts are asking us to do in our communities, by staying at home with only a small group who live in the same household. To the greatest extent possible, staff members are being consistently assigned to specific units and work areas to prevent unnecessary crossover with other areas of the facilities.

In order to prevent the spread of the virus between facilities, the department has primarily been sheltering inmates in place at their facility and limiting any unnecessary transport of inmates between facilities. The department has been working with medical professionals and the county jail facilities to create robust screening and testing processes when bringing in limited intakes to CDOC. Once an inmate is brought into CDOC from the county jails, they are isolated, quarantined and tested for the appropriate amount of time at the intake facility prior to being taken to their permanent facility.

While we know the impact is difficult for community members, friends and family, CDOC has suspended in-person visiting in order to prevent the potential introduction of the virus through such visitation.

We are providing updated information on our COVID website at:  
<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdoc/covid-19-faq-and-updates>

The staff at our facilities are working hard to protect health and safety and will have limited ability to answer public questions, so if you have questions that you are not able to find the answers to on our website above, please reach out to our constituent services team at [cdoc@state.co.us](mailto:cdoc@state.co.us) or by phone at 719-226-4569. They will be able to help get your questions answered.

Please know that every ounce of our energy is focused on keeping our staff and your loved ones safe. We welcome your prayers and we will keep you informed of changes in our operations as they develop.

Dean Williams

Colorado Department of Corrections Executive Director