

COVID-19 Update - July 02, 2021

Hi All-

As we get ready for our Independence Day weekend, I wanted to give a COVID-19 status update. There are so many great accomplishments and milestones to celebrate, and there's also work left to do. I'll get right to it.

COVID Testing/Trends:

In Idaho at large, and in IDOC specifically, we are seeing encouraging trends in COVID-19 test results. We continue to regularly test staff and residents, and we're seeing a positivity rate below 2%.

In May, IDOC revised its testing/quarantine protocols to incorporate new CDC guidance as follows:

- Following a known or suspected exposure, fully vaccinated residents living in a non-healthcare congregate setting should be tested but are not required to be quarantined as long as they are asymptomatic.
- Pre-release testing is no longer required for fully vaccinated residents.
- Fully vaccinated residents who have had no known or suspected exposure to a COVID positive individual may be excused from mass testing.
- Fully vaccinated staff who have had no known or suspected exposure to a COVID positive individual may be excused from testing by providing a copy of their vaccination card to Mike Evans in the IDOC HR Department.

Safety remains a top priority for us, so we continue to consult weekly with our State epidemiologists to ensure that we are doing all we can to protect our staff and our residents.

COVID-19 VACCINATIONS:

We know that the only way we are going to get back to a more normal status is to get as many folks vaccinated as we can. Our District Health Departments, Corizon, and the National Guard have been working hard to provide vaccines to our IDOC residents. Last week, we reached an exciting milestone - the vaccine has now been offered to every resident in our custody! Even more impressive is that we had over 73% choose to be vaccinated!

Now it's our turn. Recently, Governor Little offered an incentive to state employees who choose to be vaccinated by offering 4 hours of paid leave to anyone who has been vaccinated or chooses to be vaccinated by August 31, 2021. HR will be sharing additional guidance on how to make use of this incentive, and staff who have been vaccinated are encouraged to send their completed vaccination cards to Mike Evans in HR. As a reminder, staff can find a walk-in location or get signed up for a vaccination by going to <https://coronavirus.idaho.gov/>.

Demobilization Underway:

Based on declining COVID positivity rates in our facilities, we have begun to gradually move from our COVID status and return to more normal operations. In June, we initiated our formal demobilization plan that involves making regular assessments of the current COVID risk in each of our facilities and adjusting activities based on that risk. This process is happening cautiously and deliberately, but includes things like a return to centralized dining, increased programming, and the reopening of in-person visitation. This is important in helping provide residents a return to a more normal living experience,

opportunities to engage in prosocial activities, and to reduce idleness. It's equally important for our staff as these types of opportunities can ease tensions and improve overall safety.

Mask Mandates:

Given the continued decline in positive COVID cases within the state, the State epidemiologists have given us the green light to lift the mask requirement for our offices without a congregate living setting. Effective **Tuesday, July 6**, staff **who are fully vaccinated** and working in Central Office, P&P Districts, or other worksites that don't have congregate housing will no longer be required to wear a mask when at work. Public health officials continue to encourage mask wearing by people who are not fully vaccinated.

The CDC guidance for congregate settings remains unchanged and **masks are still required for our prisons and CRCs**. It is important to note that if COVID cases begin to climb, plans around demobilization, mask requirements, and testing are subject to change.

On a personal note, I want to share a little more insight on what factors into our decision making regarding mask requirements because, candidly, it's been one of the more difficult issues to tackle. It's clearly an emotionally charged issue, but first and foremost, we try to follow the science and the advice of public health officials. I respect that some people don't want to wear masks in the same way I respect that some businesses choose to require them. The same is true for the very personal decision of whether or not to get vaccinated. But what I can't ignore is that the math is different for us at IDOC. Our decisions can and do directly impact people who don't have the same choice – be it someone in our custody or a peer with whom we work shoulder to shoulder. The authority we have over others has to be accompanied with the responsibility to provide the safest environment possible. Despite our best efforts, we live with the knowledge that bad outcomes are a possibility. That doesn't mean it's okay to give anything short of our best efforts. Until such time as it's safe to do so, we have to use every tool available – testing, masking, and vaccines – to minimize risk and provide the safest environment possible for everyone working and living in our correctional facilities.

I also want to share something that speaks so highly of your hard work over this last year. We have been asked by the CDC to be part of a large multi-state project looking at COVID-19 in correctional settings. Your hard work, and IDOC's collaboration with Corizon, our State epidemiologists, Health Districts, the Idaho State Health Laboratory, and the VA Laboratory have caught the attention of many. We are thankful to be part of what has been called the "gold standard for intersectoral partnership" during this pandemic.

That partnership helped provide an important framework for understanding the science and the risk. But your hard work – and willingness to do the hard things – helped us avoid the widespread catastrophic consequences some systems suffered. We're not done yet, but we're a lot closer. And I can't thank you enough for getting us to this point.

I hope you have a great Independence Day!

Thanks-
Josh