

## COVID-19 Director's Update 3/36/2020

Hi All-

It is absolutely crazy how fast the days have flown by the past two weeks. . . yet here we are. This time two weeks ago, we were a day away from Idaho's first confirmed case. This evening, the state announced the total is now 189 confirmed cases and earlier today announced the first three fatalities from COVID-19 complications.

**9 for 9:** We received results back on additional COVID-19 tests. So far, so good. We've submitted a total of 9 samples and all 9 have returned NEGATIVE.

**Stay-Home Order:** The Governor acted decisively in issuing a 21-day stay-home order yesterday. We can expect additional clarification as the need arises. For us, aside from mandatory telecommuting taking effect next Monday, it is business as usual. By close of business tomorrow, we will be arming each of you with a letter attesting to your employment with the Idaho Department of Correction and highlighting the essential nature of your work. We will be issuing these letters to all staff as a precautionary measure. We have no indication that officials will be checking paperwork and I can't state that emphatically enough! But we know we also have a number of staff who live and commute from neighboring states under various orders. We want to arm you with a letter just in case the situation changes and it is needed at some point.

**Eagle Pass, TX:** We still have 610 people housed in Eagle Pass, TX. Texas is not immune from COVID-19. The Eagle Pass Correctional Center has ample rapid flu tests and has plenty of the COVID-19 test kits on hand. They have two COVID-19 test results pending but have no symptoms. They continue to medically screen and conduct temperature checks on all staff as they arrive at the facility. They are continuing to build up supplies for food service, cleaning and hygiene. 11 people in the Eagle Pass community have been tested so far for the COVID-19 virus and only 1 has been positive. The Eagle Pass community is enforcing the 10 people or less grouping requirement and have limited dining and other establishments to take out or delivery only.

**Connection and Intervention Stations:** It seems like it was ages ago, but it really wasn't that long ago that the legislature approved funding for Connection and Intervention Stations to wrap services around our highest risk supervised population. Cindy Lee and her crew in contracts have been working hard to prove that we can respond to a public health crisis and chew gum at the same time! Today, the Invitation to Negotiate – which starts the procurement process – hit the streets! We hope to have the contract awarded and services available to our districts and supervised population as close to July as possible. Thanks to Pat, Cindy, and the team for keeping your foot on the gas to make this happen!

**Rumor Control:** It's been a busy week for rumors - some new, some old. The one I keep hearing is that we have people in our custody who have tested positive. Simply not true. A lot of that is due to our response to any influenza-like illness. When someone gets isolated because they exhibited symptoms, it leads to a lot of speculation. That's understandable given the uncertainty everyone is facing. I hope you know that if we have someone test positive for COVID-19, you won't hear it first from the news, social media, or someone else. You'll hear it from me.

Another rumor making it's way around social media – and even was brought up to the Governor on a tele-town hall – is that we brought 40 people from Blaine County Jail into our system without any medical screening. Didn't happen. Everyone coming into our system from a county is medically screened BEFORE they get on state transport. We simply wouldn't let something that dangerous or irresponsible happen.

The last rumor is not new. I've heard some staff remain concerned that should they exhibit symptoms or be exposed to someone exhibiting symptoms that they will be quarantined in our facilities. Not at all. The protocol for staff who exhibit symptoms or suffer a likely exposure is to equip them with PPE and get them offsite and in contact with a medical provider as soon as possible. The only potential holdup would be finding them a ride home if they were unable to drive.

To be honest, so much of the current state of affairs seems surreal. And I think it's important for us to acknowledge just how uncomfortable this can be. None of us have been through anything like this before, and all of us are learning along the way. Yesterday, I decided to telecommute for at least the first part of the day. Problem is, my wife was also telecommuting. What I quickly learned is that the org chart for my house during the week is the same as it is over the weekend, and I'm nowhere near the top. The point is, there's going to be an adjustment period as we create new routines and figure out what a new normal looks like. While we're giving people their space, let's also cut them some slack. Show some patience at a time when all of us could benefit from a little grace.

Take care of yourself, keep looking after each other, and we'll get through this together.

Thanks-  
Josh