

COVID-19 Update - March 27, 2020

From Josh Tewalt, Director, Idaho Department of Correction

Hi all-

It's FRIDAY! Well, for some of us. If it's not your "Friday" yet, hang in there!

Statewide Update: As of this evening, 230 cases of COVID-19 are being reported for Idaho. Sadly, a total of 4 fatalities from COVID-19 related complications have been reported.

COVID-19 Testing Tracker: On Monday, we're going to be going live with a daily tracker so staff and the public can better stay up to date on COVID-19 test results within our system and any units/areas with restricted movements due to potential exposure to someone exhibiting influenza-like symptoms. The tracker will be updated daily by noon with the most current status information as of 0800. We're hopeful this tracker can help provide peace of mind to those concerned about their loved ones in our system by providing accurate, up-to-date information. It also will be a useful tool for staff to keep tabs on what is happening in other facilities. Along those lines, another sample was submitted today, and the test came back NEGATIVE. That's now 10 negative tests systemwide.

RDU Changes: We're in the process of making some changes to how people move into our system. To provide additional safeguards, ISCI and PWCC will be ensuring everyone coming into our system will be isolated for 72 hours. By then end of next week, we're looking to implement additional changes to transport and RDU to allow for a 14-day isolation. That's not an easy lift, but it's one that will be really important to building an additional layer of protection for our system. We'll have more details next week on the changes.

You have questions? Ask away! I had an officer reach out today with a question about why we were still accepting people from out of state for parole violations. It was a great question and one I'm sure a lot of people have. I explained that we send more people on interstate compact than we receive, and that shutting the front door to our system also closes the back door. At a time when we need create room to increase our ability to isolate and contain, anything that limits our ability to release people is especially problematic.

I appreciated the question, not just because it was a great question, but because it was a great reminder to make sure we communicate the "why" behind some of these decisions that are being made. I also appreciated that he felt comfortable asking about something that had been on his mind. I encourage you to do the same thing. If something doesn't feel right, say something! If you have questions, ask! We might not have considered something or it could highlight the need for us to better explain why a particular decision was made. Either way, that's how we get better.

I hope you have a great weekend!

Thanks-
Josh