

COVID-19 Update - March 31, 2020  
From Josh Tewalt, Director, Idaho Department of Correction

Hi all-

Seriously, an earthquake??? Someone seriously needs to unplug 2020 and plug it back in again. But here we are, so back to the news. . .

**Earthquake:** Yep, it was an earthquake. And a big one with the epicenter being about 70 miles north of Meridian. While no injuries have been reported at our facilities and CRC's, there appears to be some minor structural damage to at least one unit at ISCI and some minor plumbing damage there as well.

**COVID-19 Testing for IDOC Facility Staff:** The Idaho Bureau of Laboratories (Idaho's State Health Lab) provides priority COVID-19 testing for IDOC inmates and our staff working in correctional facilities. If you are a correctional facility staff member who becomes symptomatic, you need to notify your supervisor and seek testing from your medical provider. Once your medical provider has established that your rapid flu and rapid strep tests are both negative, you should request that a sample be sent to the Idaho State Health Lab for COVID-19 testing. Please be sure to let your health care provider know that you are a correctional facility employee. This should trigger them to contact the Health District to enter you into the system for priority testing. Your health is a priority to us!

**Releases from prison:** As we've been preparing for the COVID-19 public health crisis, it is clear our ability to respond appropriately is impacted by the room we have available to mitigate the spread of the illness in our facilities. On the community side, we have been using maximum discretion to ensure only those posing an immediate threat to public safety are taken into or remain in custody. We've also been looking at ways to safely create sufficient space in our facilities to be able to isolate and contain any infectious disease outbreak.

To that end, we're focusing first on what we control. We have some people still in our custody who are past their tentative parole date and we're trying to get them released as quickly as possible. We also are working with the parole commission on the release of people nearing the release dates granted by the commission. Last week, the commission voted to move up parole dates for people who had already been granted parole, and are parole eligible. This doesn't change the release process or requirements, and they still have to complete programming and have an approved parole plan before they can be released. Additionally, the commission will be re-reviewing people who are parole eligible without a date and people within six months of their full term release date to see if they can be safely returned to the community. There will be a lot more on this in the next couple weeks, but I wanted to let you know what we're working on right now.

That's it for today, and for the month of March. I'll be keeping an eye out for the swarm of locusts. You all keep taking care of business and each other!

Thanks-  
Josh