

COVID-19 Update - April 07, 2020

Hi all-

We're in a bit of a holding pattern, as we are firmly in phase 2 of our incident action plans. Preparations continue for phase 3, which will be triggered by a positive COVID-19 case within our population, or inmate exposure from a positive staff member. Regional responses will be activated along with additional restrictions system-wide.

Tonight, I wanted to share the process behind the planning and preparation efforts. I've had a number of staff from different levels and disciplines reach out with questions and concerns about decisions that are being made, how those decisions might impact them or their worksite specifically, and/or how they might impact our overall system. It has been incredibly helpful to hear those thoughts and concerns.

From the beginning of this emergency, the entire leadership team has approached planning from the standpoint that much of our agency's work is essential. I've had staff express very real and legitimate concerns about transports, interstate compact, off-compound work, etc., and they're all valid. Here's what we keep wrestling with – when does the work stop being essential? Because by the very definition of the word, it isn't contingent on the level of difficulty or danger associated with it. It is essential, or it isn't. So our approach from the start has been to acknowledge that it's not just the custodial responsibilities in our prisons and CRC's or the supervision aspect in our communities that is essential. So are the opportunities we provide for people to learn, change, and stay connected to their friends and family. Our responsibility to put people in our custody and under our supervision in the best possible position to be successful is every bit as essential to what we do.

That's the balance we're trying to find – how do we provide for the health and safety of our staff and people in our custody while allowing the essential work of this agency to continue. For people in our custody who are employed in industries defined as essential and who may have families who rely on them for support or child support, when do we pull the plug on those opportunities? What are the downstream impacts to the economy, and all of us as consumers, if we deny people the opportunity to work in food supply jobs like CS Beef or the potato sheds in eastern Idaho? We also have people in custody who are on the clock with their sentences. If we stop all movement, what does that look like for our system? Their due process and constitutional rights are not suspended until a time that is more convenient for us.

From a system standpoint, we also have to be mindful of what the end of this crisis looks like. It's more likely months away, not days or weeks. What does that environment look like for the people who live and work in our facilities after months of full restricted status? What conditions have to exist for us to ease restrictions?

While we pray we don't encounter each of those scenarios, our planning necessitates that we answer every single one of those questions – and others – in preparation for this crisis. The incident command team has been working with infectious disease control experts to define the scenarios that will trigger each one of those necessary restrictions. We are using the time we have been afforded in between phases to try to mitigate the potential consequences of each one of those actions.

I hope that this helps shed some light on what is guiding the planning during this unprecedented time. I appreciate the people who have taken the time to reach out. Even if I'm not able to respond, I read

every one. It's when things are toughest that we're at our best. It's also when we show people what we truly value. We're going to learn a lot about ourselves and come to more fully realize how much of what we do is truly essential. I'm so proud of how you have responded.

Thanks-
Josh