

COVID-19 Update - April 10, 2020

Hi all-

Look at this! And I even have a few minutes to spare. Happy Friday!

There now is evidence community spread of COVID-19 is occurring statewide. While technically only 13 counties meet the definition for community spread, those counties are represented in every region in the state. It's important to note the risk to our correctional system is not necessarily the same risk that the Governor or public health experts consider when putting restrictions in place. Many of those measures are designed to minimize the impact to the healthcare infrastructure. For us, it's been critically important to stay up to date on the latest developments with CDC guidance and work with the infectious disease control experts to understand how COVID-19 is being transmitted through Idaho. As a result of those conversations, we're making some modifications to our operations.

**Extending the Current Operational Period:** Our current operational period is set to end on 4/15/2020 and I don't think anybody thinks we'll be on the other side of this crisis by next Wednesday. In fact, models are predicting that the crisis will peak in Idaho between next week and the end of the month. So we're extending our operational period through to 5/1/2020, at which time we'll reevaluate if there's a need to further extend. This means our facilities will remain on modified-secure status and volunteers and in-person visitation will continue to be restricted.

**Medical Screening:** The evidence continues to suggest COVID-19 is highly contagious. As a result, the CDC and our Idaho state epidemiologists are recommending that we change our medical screening process. You'll see two big changes: 1) we will begin taking temperatures for staff *as thermometers become available at each work site* (you wouldn't believe how hard it's been to obtain "no contact" thermometers!); and 2) if you answer "yes" to any *one* question (it was two), you'll be sent home and HR will follow-up with you. The new screening tool is attached.

Undoubtedly, the new process is more restrictive and is likely to result in more people being turned away. I'll apologize in advance for any inconvenience this may cause, but I can't stress enough how important these additional safeguards are to better protect the safety of you and the people in our custody. If you are turned away, please follow up with HR as soon as possible.

**Cloth Masks:** We are excited to see folks jump at the opportunity to start making masks. Right now, we're making somewhere in the neighborhood of 600 per day. While our internal operations ramp up, we have an order with a vendor to supplement what's being made, which we expect to arrive late next week. Our goal is to provide every staff member and incarcerated person with 3 masks. If people want to fashion their own DIY mask because you are in a vulnerable category or your work doesn't allow you to maintain social distance, you should feel free to do so.

**Connection Opportunities:** As we extend the operational window and continue restrictions on our population in our custody, we also are looking for ways to further communication with family, friends and loved ones. We hope to have some details finalized next week, but we are actively working with our partners to make calls, emails, and video visits more affordable.

**Federal Coronavirus Funds:** I'm going to provide a more detailed update next week on our budget, the impact of COVID-19 on the state budget, and what that means for us. Idaho received \$1.25 billion in federal funds to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The state is hoping to receive guidance from the feds on appropriate uses for the funds by April 24th, and we've been working with the Governor's Office to prepare a plan for IDOC to make use of some of those funds. I think it's important you know that any discussion about the budget is separate from the current discussion about how we respond to the public health crisis. We're certainly being mindful about the economic uncertainty that exists, but the decisions we're making are singularly focused on how to best position our agency to provide for the health and safety of our staff and the people in our charge while allowing the essential functions of the agency to continue. That won't change.

As we head into Easter weekend, most of us will be celebrating it differently this year. In these uncertain times, I hope each of you are able to find peace and comfort with the ones you love. I'm grateful for each of you, and hope you have a wonderful weekend. Happy Easter!

Thanks-

Josh