

COVID-19 Update - June 11, 2020

Hi all-

I'm going to be doing these updates one to two times per week, or as needed if there's breaking news. Today, we had some breaking news. Governor Little announced that Idaho met the criteria to move to Stage 4 this weekend. . .but barely. The Governor urged caution in his announcement today and noted community spread has occurred in more than half the counties our state, and the virus is moving from cities into rural areas where healthcare access is more limited. Stage 4 means all businesses may reopen with certain protocols in place.

**Visiting and Volunteer Services Remain Closed:** Stage 4 also opens up the possibility to resume visiting in our facilities. It's now permissible, but it's not yet advisable. Since the Governor announced his staged plan to reopen Idaho's economy, we've been working with his office and the infectious disease control experts at the Department of Health and Welfare in preparation for Stage 4. From the outset, the Governor has been clear that having the ability to reopen visiting does not mean that we should. We agree, and frankly, the conditions don't allow for visiting and volunteer services to safely resume right now.

That doesn't mean we aren't working hard to make it happen. While we've been working with DHW to identify appropriate criteria to help us make the determination of when visiting can safely resume, a workgroup has been developing protocols for what a safe return to visiting will look like. We're going to be taking those protocols and piloting them at CRC's in the near future to allow limited in-person visiting to resume.

I know this decision is going to be tough for the people in our custody, their friends and loved ones, and a lot of us. But it's the right decision to keep COVID-19 out of our system. Especially in this case, getting it right is far more important than getting it right now. We'll do everything we can as quickly as we can to restore these opportunities. While that work continues, we're continuing to support the other means of communication through email, phone and video visitation to keep the people in our custody connected to their friends, family and loved ones.

**Increased Testing:** We're getting close to being able to utilize the ID NOW testing instrument that will provide rapid test results. We also are working with the Veterans Administration on a partnership to significantly increase our testing capacity. Both of these are going to be really important steps to help us further prevent an outbreak or respond to a positive case. We'll have more to report next week as we work out the details with the VA because the increase in testing also will positively impact movement in and through our system. Short of having a vaccine or effective treatment for COVID-19, testing is a key component to loosening some of the restrictions that are in place.

**Coronavirus Funding:** Last Friday, IDOC secured an additional allocation of the federal coronavirus funding. This allocation is geared towards technological infrastructure and system improvements to help us better respond to the public health crisis. It also includes some funding for additional community resources. As I've mentioned before, the federal funding is a little tricky in that there are a lot of strings attached and we have a very limited window to make use of the funds. You're going to see a lot of movement in the coming weeks as we prioritize projects and get to work. Division leadership will be sharing more specific details as we get projects appropriately scoped and implementation plans in place.

I'm incredibly proud that Idaho remains one of three states who have yet to have a positive COVID-19 in their correctional system, and so many people are deserving of the credit for that accomplishment. But we have to keep in mind that can change at any time. Now is not the time to let that pride turn to hubris. I don't know if this will help anybody, but it helps me: *If you don't want to take appropriate precautions for you, don't. Do it for the people you care about.* I haven't been particularly bashful about how much I dislike wearing a mask, and I'm also pretty cavalier about my own health. But I care about the people I work with. I care about the people under our jurisdiction. I care about my family. And it's that concern for them that gets me to suck it up and put on a mask when I can't avoid close proximity to people outside my household.

Keep it up, and recommit to doing everything you can to protect yourself and others. Stay safe!

Thanks-  
Josh