

Update - Aug. 9, 2021

Hi All-

The days are long but the years are short. Someone shared that nugget with me when I became a dad, but more and more, it just seems to apply to life. This weekend we went shopping for school supplies for the kiddos and I was left wondering where summer went! August is here, and I wanted to give you a quick update on a couple things I know are on everyone's minds.

Staffing: You can't drive by many businesses without seeing "Now Hiring" signs everywhere. We're no exception. Several weeks ago, we alerted the board to the alarming trend we're experiencing in trying to hire corrections officers. In March of 2020, we had 97% of our CO positions filled. Today, we're at around 75%. What's most interesting is that until recently, our turnover was consistent with, and in many cases lower, than in recent years. What changed was our ability to be competitive with starting pay in a rapidly evolving economy. We've been working with the Governor's office, Division of Human Resources and key legislators to tackle the issue on two important fronts. The first is targeting our security pay structure to be more competitive in the marketplace. The second addresses how changes in compensation are appropriated to keep our salaries competitive over time. Aside from keeping our staff and residents safe, there isn't a higher priority for our agency right now than meaningfully addressing the staff shortage. We're close, and we expect to have exciting news to share very soon. I'll share more information on tomorrow's Lunch with Leadership. Tune in if you can or watch the recording when you're able.

COVID-19: The emergence of the Delta variant has caused a great deal of alarm, and rightfully so. In early May, the Delta variant accounted for less than 1% of COVID infections. As of last week, it accounted for roughly 94% of all infections nationally. While experts are still working to understand everything that makes this variant so potent, some things are pretty clear at this point. It is considerably more contagious than other variants. Early indications suggest it also could have more severe health impacts as hospital systems across the country report surges in COVID admissions that are straining health care systems.

Unfortunately, the Delta variant is here and replicates 1,000 times faster than the original COVID-19 strain. For the first time in a month COVID-19 deaths in the United States are once again over 2,000 per week, with new cases averaging more than 60,000 per day. Here at home, cases have been steadily increasing since the beginning of July. A little over a month ago, IDOC went for several weeks without any positive cases among our residents and staff, but in the last month we have had 45 positive residents and 17 positive staff members. In June, we began demobilizing our COVID-19 response using objective criteria developed in conjunction with state epidemiologists. Given what other corrections systems are experiencing with the Delta variant, we're pausing our demobilization activities so we can be ready for whatever is coming our way. Like we have throughout the pandemic, we'll use the best information we have to make decisions and that could include a return to requiring masks in non-congregate settings or reinstating other mitigation measures that have been walked back since June.

We are very fortunate that almost 75% of our residents chose to get vaccinated because it is helping to decrease spread within our facilities. We need to continue to be vigilant about mask wearing, social distancing, and hand washing to protect our staff and residents. Just like fire won't burn without fuel, the virus won't spread without a host. Please be mindful and take precautions to keep yourself and

those around you safe. When those measures fail, it's clear that vaccines offer the best protection against adverse health impacts. If you've been hesitant about getting the vaccine, I sincerely hope you'll give it another look. At this point, over 350 million doses have been administered in the US and around 1.5 million in Idaho. I've attached a [couple infographics](#) about the Delta variant and Idaho COVID outcomes.

I know folks are tired. We are all tired of COVID, and people are being stretched thin to keep our facilities running. I also know we have more work in front of us and we're up to the task. As things continue to evolve with the Delta variant, we'll provide more regular updates.

Thanks-
Josh