

COVID-19 RESPONSE

A MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY KEVIN A. CARR



Thursday, April 2, 2020

I recognize that this is a difficult time for friends and family of loved ones in the Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC), and that members of the public have many questions about what our agency is doing to prepare for the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. I want to assure you the DOC is taking precautions to minimize risks and protect staff and those in our care as we continue to see more positive cases of COVID-19 (coronavirus) in the state.

As of April 1, 2020, there are 1,550 cases of COVID-19 in Wisconsin, and information around this outbreak is changing rapidly. Our agency is taking this situation very seriously, and we continue to seek appropriate and timely actions to mitigate the potential exposure to others and in order to keep those in our care safe. I understand the serious implications of the COVID-19, and DOC is following the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines for management of COVID-19 in correctional facilities. As a result, we have put in place several preventative measures to mitigate the risk:

- Implementing medical screening protocols for employees entering adult or juvenile correctional facilities
- Directing staff that do not feel well to stay home
- Enhancing sanitation and cleaning protocols in facilities, field offices and transportation vehicles
- Increasing quantities of cleaning supplies and hand soap for use by staff and persons in our care
- Frequent communication with staff and persons in our care to provide accurate and up-to-date public health information including basic health guidance and precautions to prevent the spread of the virus, such as encouraging frequent and thorough handwashing
- Following Department of Health Services (DHS) guidelines and encouraging persons in our care to alert Health Services staff immediately if they experience any symptoms related to COVID-19.
- Enhancing purchasing efforts for pandemic emergency supplies and personal protective equipment
- Implementing social distancing practices during dining, recreation and wherever else possible
- Utilizing technology in place of face to face interactions through the use of video applications whenever possible
- Several operational changes to include: the suspension of non-professional and non-essential visits, volunteers, contracted activities, most programming, work release for persons in our care in the private sector, inter-facility and non-essential internal transfer, admissions to state prisons and juvenile facilities, non-essential staff travel and training, and most face-to-face contact visits in Community Corrections
- Releasing supervision holds on 1,148 non-violent misdemeanants throughout the state
- Releasing others persons in custody that qualified for Certain Earned Release. These non-violent persons had less than one year to serve in prison and will be on community supervision
- 65 individuals participating in an Alternative for Revocation (ATR) at the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility (MSDF) were identified and will be released on April 2, 2020

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While our top priority continues to be the prevention of COVID-19, we have contingency plans in the event the virus does enter our secure facilities. Each site has pandemic plans to address COVID-19, including the protocols and isolation procedures if someone is exposed and/or becomes infected. In the event of a confirmed positive case in one of our secure facilities, contact investigations are being conducted to determine which individuals may have been exposed to the virus, and subsequent isolation or quarantine may occur to manage these situations. Additionally, any site with a confirmed positive case of COVID-19 will suspend administrative rules to limit movement and reduce the risk of spreading the virus further.

We recognize that the precautionary steps we have put in place may also create a hardship to those in our care, and their friends and family. DOC is reviewing these decisions on a daily basis, and continues to look for ways we can improve conditions for staff and those we care for during this time. Some of the efforts we have implemented so far to help during this difficult period are:

- Providing youth in our care with unlimited free phone calls
- Providing adults in our care with two (2) free fifteen-minute phone calls each week
- Waived \$7.50 medical co-pay to allow anyone exhibiting symptoms of illness to seek medical attention (this fee was already waived for youth)
- Increasing weekly and bi-weekly spending limits for canteen items
- Increasing communication to staff, and those in our care on all decisions being made

I want to publicly thank the employees within our Department who remain committed to our efforts to keep our staff and the individuals in our care safe during this temporary crisis. I am extremely proud of their ability to meet these new challenges, while maintaining essential operations. We will work to keep the public informed of changes in our operations as they develop. The best source of information will continue to be our public website at doc.wi.gov/COVID19. I encourage individuals to check the page frequently for up to date information on our response to COVID-19. Additionally, DOC has been following guidance provided by DHS and CDC and more information can be found on dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19 and CDC.gov/Coronavirus.

Thank you for everyone's patience during this difficult time. Please stay safe and healthy, and know that we are devoted to keeping our staff and your loved ones safe during this time.

Sincerely,

Kevin A. Carr
Wisconsin Department of Corrections Secretary