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NDCS offers COVID testing opportunity to inmates

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NDCS offers COVID testing opportunity to inmates

June 9, 2020 (Lincoln, Neb.) – Director Scott R. Frakes announced that men and women housed in the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) will have the opportunity to be tested for the coronavirus (COVID-19), even if they are not symptomatic. Participation is voluntary. Testing will be conducted in each of the 10 facilities over the coming weeks.

“This is the same test that is currently available in the community,” stated Dir. Frakes. “In keeping with the standard of care available to all Nebraskans through TestNebraska, testing is also available to our inmate population.”

NDCS health care workers will collect the swabs, which will be processed by the same lab handling results for TestNebraska. Those who are tested will be notified by the agency, as to their results.

“We want inmates to take advantage of the specific days that we have set aside for testing in their facility,” explained Dir. Frakes. “This will allow for a more efficient process. If someone requests testing after that period, they will be medically assessed to determine if testing is necessary, and managed on a case-by-case basis.”

Dir. Frakes said the current testing process is expected to continue through the end of the month. To date, seven inmates have tested positive for COVID-19 – all tied to the Community Corrections Center – Omaha (CCC-O). When TestNebraska expanded to those ages 65 and older, 110 inmates who fell into that category opted for testing as well.

“That’s out of 192 men and women in NDCS who would be in that age group,” noted Dir. Frakes. “So far, none of those results have come back positive,” said Dir. Frakes. “That is very good news because obviously, that is a population more likely to be susceptible to an illness such as this.”

The agency follows guidelines by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for isolating inmates who are COVID-positive and quarantining any close contacts.

“CCC-O was a perfect model for how to best manage an outbreak of illness. We were able to make adjustments to dining and other daily activities that, while more restrictive in terms of movement, ensured the well-being of other inmates and staff members,” said Dir. Frakes.

Dir. Frakes emphasized that increased testing would not diminish utilization of the steps NDCS has employed during the past several months to prevent the introduction and transmission of COVID-19.

“Those things are just as important, if not more important now. We will continue to screen staff and others entering our facilities, taking temperatures, wearing masks, disinfecting, encouraging universal health precautions, and all of the other proactive processes we implemented early on.”

NDCS staff members who want to be tested for COVID-19 have that opportunity through TestNebraska, or by scheduling an appointment through their own health care provider.

“We have had 19 teammates who have tested positive. Fortunately for most, their symptoms have been mild and they continue to return to work following a period of self-isolation,” said Dir. Frakes. “The level of dedication that staff members have demonstrated during this pandemic has been nothing short of amazing. They know they are critical to the NDCS mission of keeping people safe, as well as healthy.”

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FACILITIES:
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