NC DPS

Visitation Temporarily Suspended at State Prisons as a COVID-19 Precaution

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RALEIGH

Mar 13, 2020

The North Carolina Division of Prisons will suspend visitation to all the state's prisons effective Monday, March 16 to minimize the health risks from the spread of coronavirus.

We are not aware of any cases of COVID-19 in our Prison system. However, ensuring staff health and safety is a top priority for the Division of Prisons. On March 10, 2020, Governor Roy Cooper declared a State of Emergency based on the public health emergency created by COVID-19.

On March 12, in the face of growing cases of COVID-19 around the nation and here in North Carolina, the Governor's Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Task Force and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services issued specific recommendations to reduce the spread of the infection while we are still in the early stage. Those recommendations included restricting visitors for residential establishments to include correctional facilities.

“We have made this difficult decision in light of the DHHS recommendations and to reduce the risk of this disease getting into prisons and spreading,” said Todd Ishee, Commissioner of Prisons. “This was a difficult decision. I know this will not be good news to offenders and their families, but this is being done with everyone’s health and safety in mind.”

If the threat level from the disease increases over the weekend, visitation may be suspended before Monday. The suspension will be reviewed every 30 days.

The Division of Prisons will make efforts to allow increased offender phone calls to their families and friends and will work on increasing recreational opportunities while visitation is suspended.

Volunteer visits to the prisons will be suspended as well for the next 30 days.

Legal visitation and pastoral care visits will continue to be allowed and they will be subject to medical screening. All vendors and contractors doing business with facilities also will be screened prior to entering a prison facility.

Dozens of other states have taken similar measures in the past few days.

While no one has tested positive for coronavirus in any North Carolina prison, the Division of Prisons is taking additional safety steps in light of the rapid spread of the disease in the country, including:

- The screening of all new offenders to the state prison system for potential coronavirus symptoms. Anyone with symptoms will be isolated while the source of their medical issues is investigated. This is being done to help prevent the introduction of coronavirus to prisons.
- The screening of all offenders prior to transportation. Offenders with symptoms will be isolated while the source of their medical issues are investigated. This is being done to prevent the spread of coronavirus if it emerges in the prison population.
- Increased cleaning regimens at all prison and juvenile justice facilities.
- The delivery of ample supplies of disinfectants to all facilities.
- The production of non-alcohol-based hand lotion by Correction Enterprises for use throughout all the prisons. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are prohibited in prisons. Until the lotion supplies are delivered, offenders will continue to use soap.

“All of these actions are being taken to minimize the health risks to staff, offenders, and the public,” said Ishee. “We ask for everyone’s cooperation and understanding.”

For more information on coronavirus, and the state's response to the disease, please go to https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-response-north-carolina (https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-response-north-carolina) .

The U.S. Center for Disease Control has a COVID-19 information page at https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html (https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html) , including situation reports, frequently asked questions, and targeted information for particular audiences.

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