Press Release

VADOC Begins Weekly COVID-19 Testing of Infirmary Staff and Acquires the Technology for Faster Test Results

NOVEMBER 16, 2020

RICHMOND — The Virginia Department of Corrections continues to aggressively test inmates and staff for COVID-19 and has taken steps toward soon being able to acquire test results in minutes as opposed to days.

The department recently began weekly testing of infirmary staff to better ensure the safety of inmates and staff in this vulnerable setting. The entire staff at facilities with infirmaries can be tested weekly if necessary.

“We have been at the testing forefront throughout the pandemic, thanks to the tireless work of our medical directors and staff and our partners around the state,” said VADOC Director Harold Clarke. “With the new weekly testing at four facilities that have infirmaries and the upcoming antigen testing, we continue to do everything we can to fight the spread of this relentless pandemic.”

Clinical testing at all state prison facilities continues to occur as symptoms appear. In addition, the department conducts routine mass testing at all facilities across the Commonwealth, testing every four months in dormitory styled housing, every six months for celled housing and every three months in infirmary sites.

The department is also rolling out antigen point of care testing. Antigen testing has a rapid turnaround time, which is critical to identifying COVID-19 infection and implementing control strategies more immediately.

The department has recently purchased the antigen point of care tests and PCR (polymerase chain reaction) machines and will bring them into service once staff are properly trained. This equipment will continue to be used to conduct point of care testing for infectious diseases after the COVID-19 pandemic passes.

“Rapid antigen testing and PCR point of care machines will be invaluable, both as the pandemic continues and afterwards, when we will use them to test for other infectious diseases, like the flu and strep,” said VADOC Director of Health Services Steve Herrick.

To date, the VADOC has administered more than 50,000 inmate tests for COVID-19 on-site in facilities across the state. Since the pandemic began, the VADOC has worked closely with the Virginia Department of Health, the Virginia National Guard, Armor Correctional Health Services, Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Virginia.

Inmates testing positive are placed in medical isolation so they don't infect others. Treatment follows the department's COVID medical guidelines. Medical staff treat symptoms as they arise, just as in any primary care setting. VADOC facilities can provide many things, including oxygen, on-site. If an inmate requires an inpatient level of care, the inmate goes to a hospital.

The DOC has been able to test for the novel coronavirus on a scale that most congregate settings, from prisons to nursing homes, have been unable to do. Statewide, the majority of COVID-positive inmates have been asymptomatic, identified only because of the department’s point prevalence testing.

All DOC facilities are following a pandemic sanitation plan, and inmates and staff are required to wear appropriate PPE at all times, including medical-grade PPE, such as N-95 masks, when appropriate. Virginia Correctional Enterprises manufactures both utility face masks and cleaning supplies approved by the EPA for use in combating the coronavirus, so there is no shortage of either in the facilities.

Contact

Lisa Kinney

Main Phone
(804) 674-3275

For Immediate Rele
11-16-2020

Connect

Contact

Virginia Department of Corrections
P.O. Box 26963
Richmond, VA 23261

(804) 674-3000

Policies

Web Policy

Freedom of Information Act

Additional Information

eVA Public Records

VADOC Expenses