Nevada Department of Corrections

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Press Release

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New NDOC Initiatives, Improved Protocols Keep Public Safe during Pandemic

The Nevada Department of Corrections (NDOC) continues to launch new initiatives and fine-tune existing protocols to keep the COVID-19 virus out of its facilities. This includes mandating staff testing for COVID-19 every two weeks and offering additional options for communications between offenders and their families.

“Our goal is to mitigate and prevent the spread of COVID-19 through rigorous testing and the implementation of deliberate and pro-active protocols,” said Charles Daniels, NDOC Director. “I am proud of our staff who work tirelessly and selflessly to ensure the safety and welfare of fellow staff members and our offenders.”

NDOC tested all staff earlier in the year, and then starting August 3 modified this procedure to test staff every two weeks at the facility where they work.

“The most likely way that COVID-19 enters our facility is from staff, and that is why we check everyone’s temperature and conduct a risk assessment before allowing them into a facility,” said Michael Minev, NDOC’s Medical Director. “It was determined in the interest of public, staff, and offender safety to add another layer of protection, and that is why we are now testing staff every two weeks. Identifying staff who have COVID-19 and removing them from our facilities strengthens the firewall we have established during the pandemic.”

Another layer of protection against the virus has been the suspension of in-person visitation, which began March 7 and has been strictly enforced ever since. To mitigate the impact of this change on offenders and their families, NDOC recently expanded two

programs. The first allows eligible offenders up to two free phone calls per week, and the second is a 50% discount of secure messaging which allows the community to send emails (without attachments) to offenders.

"We recognize the importance for inmates to stay connected with their families and friends," said John Borrowman, NDOC's Deputy Director of Support Services. "These connections are essential to the support needed for an offender to successfully reenter the community upon their release."

These new initiatives and the fine-tuning of existing protocols are working as Nevada continues to have one of the lowest offender positivity rates in the nation.

NDOC tested its entire offender population of 12,282 for COVID-19 during May and June, with only 23 – or .19% of all offenders – testing positive. NDOC is currently conducting a second round of testing and has received results from 4,083 offenders, with three testing positive for a rate of .07%. The majority of the 26 offenders who tested positive during rounds one and two were recent transfers from Nevada detention centers who were diagnosed while in NDOC's intake units. As of today, 23 have tested negative for the virus and transitioned into NDOC's general population.

NDOC also tested its entire workforce of 2,644 for COVID-19, with 84 – or .9% – of staff testing positive. So far during its second round, NDOC has tested 1,236 staff and had 15 test positive for a rate of .12%. Of the 99 staff who tested positive, 58 have recovered from the virus and returned to work. One staff member, Digital Telecom Specialist Hector Gutierrez, passed away on August 2 after courageously battling COVID-19 for many weeks.

NDOC's No. #1 priority is the health and safety of the public, staff, and offenders, and continues to implement other procedures to stop the spread of COVID-19. These include:

- Running modified operations at all facilities.
- Restricting travel between facilities.
- Isolating offenders who test positive in negative airflow rooms in the infirmary.
- Releasing staff from duty who test positive so they can quarantine. They return to work only after receiving approval from NDOC's medical director.
- Mandating staff wear full personal protective equipment (PPE), to include booties, gloves, and N-95 masks, whenever they enter an area where offenders who tested positive are housed.
- Conducting regular townhall meetings to provide updates on NDOC procedures. These meetings are hosted by wardens and NDOC's executive leadership.

NDOC is not resting on the laurels of its low positivity rates. The department works closely with local and state public health officials to fine-tune its policies and procedures. COVID-19 represents an ever-changing custody and medical challenge, and NDOC will remain vigilant in order to keep the virus out of its facilities.

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The Nevada Department of Corrections is committed to building a safer community by striving to incorporate progressive best practices in all aspects of corrections. NDOC houses more than 12,000 persons with felony convictions in 18 facilities statewide. For more information visit www.doc.nv.gov.

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