



DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

ADMINISTRATION

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COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions

Where does the South Dakota Department of Corrections (SDDOC) receive information from regarding the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?

We are following the guidance of the South Dakota Department of Health, our medical provider, and the recommended guidelines for correctional facilities from the Centers for Disease Control in regard to precautions, practices and prevention methods for COVID-19. Because the situation with the COVID-19 remains fluid, the SDDOC is continuing to review and identify strategies to ensure the safety and well-being of our staff and offenders in our custody and under our supervision.

What types of precautions are you taking to stop the spread of COVID?

At the beginning of the pandemic, the DOC activated our Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), which establishes direct response and management ensuring that critical functions continue within our department. Our agency divisions and facilities have identified essential function staff and operations, with the primary focus on safety, sanitation, security and supervision. Essential services such as food, laundry, medical, behavioral health, and maintenance continue in our facilities.

Isolation and quarantine plans have been established for all of our facilities.

Educational materials on precautions and prevention measures have been distributed and shared with staff and inmates.

We have increased cleaning and disinfecting efforts throughout the facilities and hired additional inmate workers for this purpose. We have added extra portable handwashing stations in our facilities. We have increased laundry services.

Wherever possible, we have adjusted schedules to reduce contacts with others, including limiting the size of inmate groups for meals and other activities.

We have suspended visitation and volunteer activities.

We have restricted inmates from work (work release, community service work) outside of our facilities.

We have instituted staff screening for all staff as they enter a facility, including answering questions and taking their temperature. SDDOC and DOH staff have access to the required Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and DOC staff are also wearing masks in order to keep them from spreading germs to others in the facility. Inmates have also been provided with masks. The inmates have been instructed to wear the masks anytime they are out of their cells at the higher security facilities or out of their bunks at the minimum-security units, except for when they are eating or showering or have more than 6 feet of separation during recreation time.

Hand sanitizer is provided to inmates under staff supervision in the facility dining halls and recreation areas.

In addition to the Centers for Disease Control guidelines for correctional facilities, DOC is regularly taking every inmate's temperature. If an inmate has a temperature of 100.4 or above, DOC staff will refer them to Correctional Health for an assessment. If an inmate is experiencing symptoms (fever, new onset of shortness of breath or a new onset cough), they are expected to report this to staff.

We are adjusting admission and intake processes to ensure individual assessment, separation and cohorting of new admissions for their first 14 days in the facility.

Safety measures also include screening all inmates upon admission, prior to transfer to another facility, and prior to release from the facility.

What are you doing for the inmates who cannot have visitation and programs or can't work outside the prison walls?

By working with our tablet, phone service and video visit provider, we've been able to offer free phone calls and video visits on a limited basis.

Medical co-pay charges are being waived for any inmate attending sick call for respiratory complaints.

What happens when an inmate begins to show symptoms of COVID-19?

Inmates with new onset of fever, cough, or shortness of breath are tested for COVID-19 if clinically indicated. DOH staff in our facilities have the testing materials to conduct the tests where indicated.

What happens if an inmate tests positive for COVID-19?

The inmate is placed in isolation as per the CDC and DOH recommended guidelines. If the DOH determines an inmate requires hospitalization, the inmate will be taken to a local hospital for further evaluation and treatment.

Medical and correctional staff that deal with a positive inmate are using CDC recommended personal protection equipment (PPE) and procedures to mitigate the risk.

DOH follows up with the standard investigation procedures. Others that may have come into close contact with an inmate who has tested positive are quarantined so that they can be monitored by medical staff.

What happens if my loved one is positive for COVID? Will I get notified?

The inmate's designated emergency contact is notified if the inmate's condition is serious.

What are you doing for the elderly and vulnerable inmates?

SDDOC and DOH have identified this population within our facilities and intensified efforts to reduce potential exposure and transmission.

Are releases (discharges and paroles) being impacted by COVID-19?

Scheduled individual inmate releases are proceeding as usual, pending a medical screening.

The Board of Pardons and Paroles has continued with their scheduled monthly hearings. The Parole Board is utilizing technology and holding fewer in-person meetings to limit exposure.

Why are you continuing to transfer inmates to other SDDOC facilities and accepting new inmates from elsewhere?

We need to maintain the safe and orderly operation of our corrections system as much as possible, including keeping the facility census at an appropriate level. We have limited inter-facility transfers to only those that are necessary. Any transfers that do occur are using the proper screening process before any transport occurs.

We do not have the authority to refuse to take custody of an inmate who is legally sentenced to our care and custody by the courts.

The Pennington County shuttle is using a screening process for all their inmates as well, and they refuse anyone who doesn't pass the screening. They also have increased their cleaning regiment for the bus to ensure safety.

How are Parole Services and Juvenile Community Corrections operating?

While their offices are closed to the public, parole and juvenile field service staff are continuing to provide case management of parolees and juveniles. Staff in our field services offices work remotely when possible and have increased utilization of technology to keep in contact with those on their caseload.

Included in Governor Noem's [Executive Order 2020-14](#) is a temporary suspension of South Dakota Codified Law 16-22-28, which is the statutory provision requiring the Department of Corrections to impose certain sanctions for parole violations regarding a positive urinalysis test for a controlled substance. This will allow the department to institute a policy which may include an alternative sanction or deferment of the sanction.

Parole agents are continuing to assist law enforcement and other agencies with emergent issues as necessary.