



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

PRISONS DIVISION

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March 19, 2020

TO: All Superintendents

FROM: Robert Herzog, Assistant Secretary
Julie Martin, Deputy Secretary

SUBJECT: Drug/Alcohol Testing Protocols

Many of you have asked questions as to the safety concerns relative to conducting urinalysis (UA) tests or breathalyzer (BA) tests on incarcerated individuals. We have conferred with our local medical staff as well as our agency assigned Assistant Attorney General (AAG).

The advice provided by the AAG around the suspension or limiting of UA monitoring is that DOC has discretion to suspend UA monitoring if DOC determines that UA monitoring poses too great a risk of transmission of COVID-19, due to the public health crisis in place at this time.

We continue to seek guidance for our medical partners to ensure we are providing the most up-to-date information and direction. Medical staff have indicated that, although there is very little research available at this time, they have a level of confidence that the COVID-19 virus is not being transmitted through urine. They believe taking UAs is a low-risk activity as long as staff wear gloves and employ universal precautions. We are aware of the limited size of UA restrooms, so as best as possible, social distancing concepts should apply while administering a UA.

With information in mind, with guidance from our AAG, we are immediately suspending Random UAs for any individual while they are assigned to either Isolation or Quarantine Status for any reason.

In regards to the use of a Breathalyzer test (BA), this is considered a high risk activity due to the potential for droplets to be released into the air during the period of time the test is being administered. Effective immediately, please cease the use of the BA test. Staff are authorized to utilize the UA process for alcohol testing purposes.

We continue to be concerned for the health and safety of our staff, those in our care, and the community. Staff should act reasonably and safely, and utilize universal precautions at all times.

“Working Together for SAFE Communities”

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As always, thank you for your continued dedication to the Department, each other, and your communities. Please take care of yourselves, and each other.

JM/RH:jmc

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