




STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
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July 15, 2021

TO: All Interested Parties
FROM: Cheryl Strange, Secretary 
SUBJECT: Updated Safe Start Corrections Plan

With COVID-19 case numbers generally decreasing and vaccine numbers increasing in communities across the state, I am eager to share with you the good news that our [Safe Start Corrections Plan](#) will go into effect on August 15, 2021.

While there is a strong desire to return to “normal”, COVID-19 still poses a significant threat to congregate living settings, which our facilities are. As a result, it remains important to maintain vigilant by continuing to follow conservative mitigation strategies. The department will be using a phased approach to reopening, as evidenced in the linked Safe Start Corrections Plan.

What Will Change?

DOC will start reopening more programs and activities as volunteers who can show proof of vaccination or test negative via on-site rapid antigen test are allowed back into facilities.

On August 15, 2021, contact visitation will resume and the age limit for visitation will be lifted. The department is working towards increasing the duration for each prison visit session from one (1) hour to three (3) hours and expanding the visiting cohorts at most facilities. For those who have scheduled one (1) hour visits on or after August 15 you will be contacted directly to transition to the three (3) hour visit by the facility scheduler.

Visitors must provide proof of vaccination or submit to a rapid antigen test on the date of the contact visit. An additional announcement with further details on this visitation expansion will be made as soon as possible to provide the information needed in order for visitors to prepare for contact visits moving forward.

What Stays the Same?

As required by Washington Department of Health and guidance for Centers of Disease Control regarding congregate settings, which includes correctional facilities, the safety protocols for masking, physically distancing, cohorting, barriers and hand hygiene will remain in place for DOC facilities until further notice.

These protocols ensure the health and safety of our staff, visitors, volunteers and incarcerated individuals in our care and custody. When possible, large gatherings such as statewide and regional conferences will continue to occur virtually. Masking guidance varies depending on the workplace due to differences in risk across our agency.

The threat of COVID-19 remains real, even as more people get vaccinated. New variants are more transmissible and have been responsible for recent spikes of COVID-19 cases around the world. It

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is not yet time to stop all of the strategies put in place that have gotten us to where we are now.

The Way Forward:

Corrections continues to evaluate all processes regularly and will continue to provide regular updates.

Vaccination remains the most effective way of bringing an end to the pandemic. The need to continue vaccinating all eligible people is as important as ever as we approach summer travel and loosening of community restrictions.

Given that so many of the key metrics we have been tracking during the pandemic are trending in a positive direction, it can be easy to overlook the risk of resuming normal activities outside of work. There is no single pathway for all of us to return to our pre-pandemic routines outside of work and each of us will approach it slightly differently. It is okay for those of you who want to take it slowly.

I understand how hard this has been for incarcerated individuals, their families and our volunteers who are so committed to our agency. Thank you for your continued patience as we work to provide the maximum access for you and your loved ones while continuing to prioritize your health and safety. And if you haven't already, I encourage you to talk with your health care provider about receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.