



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
P.O. Box 41101 • Olympia, Washington 98504-1101

January 21, 2022

Dear Families of Incarcerated Individuals,

As you are aware, the Omicron variant continues to spread across the nation and Washington State. The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) is seeing cases starting to surge on the east side of the state and beginning to plateau in the western areas of the state. WA DOH indicates one in five Washingtonians have COVID.

What occurs in the community is mirrored in our facilities. Currently, 20 of our prison and work release facilities are on outbreak status, and thus quarantine. My priority is the health and safety of your loved ones and our staff.

DOC complies with all actions in accordance with the WA State Department of Health. These steps include grouping people by their unit grouping (cohorting), using isolation when someone has tested positive for COVID 19, and quarantine, when someone may have been exposed to someone with known or suspected COVID-19. Quarantines, while necessary to separate a person exposed to COVID-19 from other individuals, impact an individual's ability to attend regularly scheduled programs, recreation, and services. It may also impact the amount of time for video visits and calls. While the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and DOH protocols are subject to change, currently both isolation and quarantine each last anywhere from 10-14 days but can be extended if a person within the group tests positive. Testing occurs at various intervals under various circumstances and is also based on CDC and DOH guidance.

We have also worked with DOH to inform our return-to-work protocols for staff. I want to reiterate that the department gets approval from the DOH for all COVID-related protocols. Some of you have had questions about the CDC guidelines for congregate care facilities and why wasn't DOC adhering to them. The short answer is that there is a subset within the congregate care setting at the CDC for correctional facilities due to the unique circumstances in correctional facilities. I again want to assure that all DOC protocols and procedures fall within the requirements approved by the DOH.

I know some of you have concerns about food and water getting to your loved ones at regularly scheduled times. In some cases, and some locations, meals are taking much longer to serve. Everyone in the facility is being given the opportunity to eat every meal. Occasionally, due to delays, food service has run into recreation times and some are choosing instead to go to recreation. Additionally, there is unlimited access to water in cells and common areas used for quarantine and isolation.

I visited Washington Correctional Center on Wednesday of this week and spoke with many incarcerated individuals across the campus and in various living units. I found them to be in good spirits, although tired of the situation. Many were out and about, doing work, and in good compliance with masking and social distancing. I toured the medical department, the behavioral

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health department, and the gym which is being renovated for additional isolation space. I plan to visit more facilities next week and will continue to do so.

As we move forward, you will hear about cohorting in dayrooms, shower and bathroom areas, serial testing of our incarcerated population, and an increased emphasis on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) protocols, cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting, and social distancing. The DOC COVID-19 Safe Start plan outlines our policies and protocols [here](#).

We are increasing efforts to communicate the rapidly changing environment at each facility and will be adding even more information weekly to FAQs, updates to our website, kiosk messages, messages delivered in cells, Facebook and Twitter, and our COVID-19 Bulletin. To receive the latest updates in the DOC COVID-19 Bulletin, [click here](#).

I have regularly approved spending out of the IIBF to provide additional things to individuals. Today I authorized a JPay credit and Commissary credit to every incarcerated individual as well as a Superbowl goodie bag. We are also putting final touches on a plan to further utilize the Incarcerated Individual Betterment Fund (IIBF) for items to help your loved one cope with these challenging circumstances. I will share more about that as it unfolds. I expect to receive the plan Monday, January 24, and will review it as soon as I have it. I am eager to get this moving. We have used the IIBF to do a variety of things to help those in our care and custody and I am eager to do more.

In closing, I would just add that we are constantly reviewing our operations, many of which change daily. It is our hope that by taking these measures we can reduce the amount of time it will take to get back to a new normal with our operations. In the meantime, please know we understand this is very hard on you and those you love and support in our facilities.

Fondly,



Cheryl Strange, Secretary
Department of Corrections