



Office of
Legislative Corrections
Ombudsman

Keith Barber
Ombudsman

P.O. BOX 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

Phone: (517) 373-8573
Fax: (517) 373-5550

ombudsman@legislature.mi.gov

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COVID Positive Status

As of Monday afternoon, March 30, 80 incarcerated individuals have tested positive for COVID-19 within nine of the 29 state prisons. There are 14 staff members who have tested positive including six corrections officers and two probation agents. Thank goodness there have been no MDOC-related deaths to date.

Prisons under Quarantine

Influenza Quarantines:

- Central Michigan Correctional Facility (STF) (B and C Units)
- Saginaw Correctional Facility (SRF) (700 Unit)
- Macomb Correctional Facility (MRF) (Also under COVID Quarantine).

COVID-19 Quarantines:

- Macomb Correctional Facility (MRF) (Also under Influenza Quarantine)
- Parnall Correctional Facility (SMT)
- Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility (WHV)
- Lakeland Correctional Facility (LCF)
- Detroit Reentry Center (DRC)

Potential Release of State Prisoners

There appears to be some confusion regarding Executive Order 2020-29 which Governor Whitmer issued on Sunday, March 29. The EO recommends temporary COVID-19 protocols and enhanced early-release authorization *for county jails, local lockups and juvenile detention centers* to mitigate the spread of the virus. It does *not* affect state prisoners. Executive Order 2020-29 specifically targets individuals who are old, have chronic health conditions, pregnant, are medically frail or are nearing their release date provided they do not pose a public safety risk for those confined in *county jails, local lockups and juvenile detention centers*. The only impact this order has on the MDOC is that it halts the transfer of prisoners from county jails to state prison so they do not unintentionally spread the virus from possibly asymptomatic persons.

The Governor did specifically comment on state prisoners while briefing the media on March 30. The Governor stated that her office was discussing the possibility of speeding up the

parole release of some non-dangerous prisoners with MDOC Director Washington. It is unknown at this time which prisoners might be considered for release, what type of criteria would be considered, or when such a decision might be reached.

Prisoners making Personal Protection Equipment

Three prisons that have no known cases of COVID-19 - Chippewa, Carson City and Ionia - are making face masks for the incarcerated population and correctional facility staff. The MDOC reported to the media it is projected to produce up to 9,000 masks per weekday to meet its internal needs. The goal is for every prisoner and MDOC employee to have three masks to keep for personal use. The masks are cloth surgical masks that can be laundered.

The MDOC has already produced over 42,000 masks, 427 gowns and 112 personal protective equipment suits. Soaps and other cleaning supplies are being made at the Detroit Reentry Center, and protective eye wear is being created at Gus Harrison Correctional Facility.

The MDOC reported that every prisoner working on PPE production is tested prior to their shifts, including having their temperature taken, in an effort to ensure that no sick individuals are working on production. MDOC correctional facility staff are screened for the virus every time they enter a correctional facility.

Prisoner COVID Screening Protocol

MDOC staff working inside correctional facilities continue to screen prisoners for symptoms of COVID-19 infection. Appropriate health care staff are notified if any prisoner self-reports symptoms or is identified by an employee as potentially symptomatic. Prisoners are usually taken to a quarantine area if presenting with symptoms, typically a single cell setting. Testing prisoners for COVID still requires approval from the Department of Health and Human Services, but test kits are available at all prisons.

Quarantine – Positive cases and close contacts

A prisoner who is symptomatic or identified as a close contact of a symptomatic prisoner is quarantined based on the status at their facility. COVID tests are ordered based on DHHS guidelines. Someone who is tested, and their close contacts are quarantined as a cohort, that is, their exposure dates would all be the same and they could be moved out of quarantine as a group if no symptoms are exhibited during the waiting period. Prisons have designated quarantine areas for symptomatic and close contact prisoners. Two prisons must move symptomatic prisoners and close contacts to adjacent facilities because they lack enough space to adequately quarantine people.

Prisoners who test positive for COVID and are already at one of the prisons with identified cases remain at those prisons and are quarantined in the special area designated for that facility. Prisons already with identified COVID positive cases are: Macomb Correctional Facility, Parnall Correctional Facility, Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility, Lakeland Correctional Facility, and Detroit Reentry Center. Prisoners who need acute medical care are moved to Duane Waters Health Center which is adjacent to a Jackson area prison.

At present, prisoners at other facilities without already identified positive cases are being sent to the Cotton Correctional Facility for monitoring and care. If capacity is reached at Cotton, prisoners who test positive will be moved to a different predetermined prison that has already been prepared for such an event.

The MDOC has not yet reached a point where positive prisoners can “step down” out of the quarantine unit. When this occurs, it is the MDOC’s intent to move them to a designated “step down” unit for continued monitoring, rather than returning them to different general population facility. It is the MDOC’s intent to eventually return prisoners to their original facility if that is still operationally feasible at the time.

Quarantine – Movement, Privileges

Out of cell movement is very restricted for positive cases, as it is in society, to try to control the spread of the virus inside the correctional facility. I think everyone understands, particularly most within the MDOC, that this type of isolation has a huge impact on the quarantined prisoner population because they have no control over their situation or environment. But, an important consideration is that this is really a continuation of the public health crisis we are all currently facing.

Because of this forced isolation, there are reports that some prisoners are not reporting symptoms to avoid being isolated, which has presented some additional challenges. All prisoners who are not feeling well should be encouraged by their family members to report their symptoms to staff to try to reduce the spread of the virus as much as possible. Although this may seem like a punitive action by the MDOC, I do not believe there is anything punitive about it, as much of the world is trying to limit movement because movement presents opportunities for the virus to spread.

Prisoners in quarantine units have access to the phone, either a unit phone if they are close contacts and still have some movement or a portable phone if they are confined to a cell.

The prisoner population receives an email every day informing them of new cases that have been discovered at a facility and the fact that prison staff will be screening, contacting, and taking appropriate steps to isolate close contacts.