

FAQ for the Public related to Iowa DOC and COVID-19



Quick Stats:

Number of confirmed cases for Inmates: 0

Number of confirmed cases for staff*: 0

*Staff information is self-reported.

Cases and Testing

What is the difference between isolation and quarantine?

Isolation separates people who have a contagious disease from people who do not.

Quarantine separates and restricts the movement of people who were exposed to a contagious disease to see if they become sick.

What is being done to keep sick people out of the prisons?

Anyone entering the facility (staff and contractors) are screened prior to being allowed to enter the secure perimeter every shift.

What about inmates coming from jails?

All new intakes are placed in quarantined units and monitored for COVID-19 symptoms for 14 days prior to their movement into the general population in an effort to reduce the likelihood that they are bringing COVID-19 to the rest of the population.

What is a contact investigation?

When **public health workers investigate whether a disease has spread, it is called a contact investigation**. For COVID-19, this generally starts with an interview of the person who has a positive test (from their quarantine location). Questions are asked such as places they have been and a list of people who may have had close contact with them. [CDC considers a close contact](#) someone who was within about six feet of someone with COVID-19 for a long period or had direct contact with infectious secretions of a person with coronavirus — such as being coughed on.

What will you do if you have a positive test?

The department has a robust pandemic policy that would be followed. Every effort will be made to minimize the spread of the virus to others in the facility. Our top priority is the safety of staff and inmates.

Can you test at all facilities?

Yes, every prison has the capability to test and submit the tests to the State Hygienic Laboratory. There have been several tests administered and all came back negative for COVID-19.

If the virus spreads through IDOC, are there contingency plans in place to maintain the prisons?

Yes. In addition to the public pandemic policy, each facility has emergency staffing plans should they need to exercise them. These plans are kept confidential under Iowa Code 904.602 for obvious reasons.

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Communication

Because visiting has been suspended, the department has been working on providing reduced-cost or free communication solutions for inmates and their loved ones during this challenging time.

As of 3/24/20, all inmates will receive 4 free o-mails that they can send per week (refreshing every Tuesday).

Video solutions continue to be tested and worked on prior to full implementation.

Phone call cost-reduction continues to be worked on with the vendor that provides phone services.

Letters, o-mails, and phone calls all continue to work under the traditional model for inmates and family at some of the lowest-costs in the country. More on how to use them at doc.iowa.gov.

Why has it taken more than a week to get free phone calls and video calls set up?

The department's first priority is to ensure an aggressive implementation of policies and procedures to minimize the impact COVID-19 will have on inmate health. At the same time, we have been continuing to work on providing these solutions to keep inmates connected with their loved ones.

General COVID-19 Operations

Are the prisons under lockdown or will they be?

There may be times where the facilities have to go to a restricted movement. The department tries to minimize these occurrences as much as possible. We are not locking down facilities due to the pandemic at this time.

It is our goal to keep operations as close to normal as possible. This includes continuing work assignments, classes, communication with family, etc.

When possible contamination occurs, facilities may be temporarily locked-down to allow for thorough cleaning in affected areas.

Are inmates receiving medical care?

Yes- health services staff continue to provide excellent medical care to those in need. Elective procedures have been postponed at this time which is consistent with community standards. Non-elective procedures are still taking place with the University of Iowa Hospitals.

What is the plan/procedure for COVID-19?

The department has made our pandemic plan a public policy. It can be viewed at:
https://doc.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/io-se-26_epidemic_and_pandemic_action_plan.pdf