

Jails and Correctional Settings: Interim Guidance for Administrators

PLAN, PREPARE, AND RESPOND TO CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)

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Background

This interim guidance is based on what is currently known about the transmission and severity of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

This guidance will be updated as needed and as additional information is available. Please regularly check [MDH: Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html) for updated interim guidance.

COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person, between people who are in close contact with each other (within about 6 feet). Spread is from respiratory droplets produced when an infected person cough or sneezes. It may also spread from contact with contaminated surfaces or objects. This is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads, but the virus could spread that way if a person touches a surface or object with the virus on it and then touches their own mouth, nose, or eyes.

COVID-19 appears to cause more serious illness in older persons and those with underlying health conditions. Therefore, administrators of jails and correctional facilities play an important role in preparing to respond to COVID-19, and in responding if COVID-19 spread becomes prevalent in their communities.

Steps to Take Right Now

The general strategies MDH recommends to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in jails or correctional facilities are similar to strategies these facilities use every day to detect and prevent the spread of other respiratory viruses like common colds and influenza. Build on your everyday practices to implement these strategies:

- Hand hygiene
- Respiratory etiquette (covering coughs and sneezes)
- Routine environmental surface cleaning
- Staying home when ill (for staff and volunteers)

Organizational Preparedness

These preparedness steps may help protect your facility while minimizing disruption to your important services.

- Develop or review business continuity plans for how to keep critical services going if staffing levels drop due to illness or taking care of ill family members or friends or children that may be temporarily out of child care or school settings. Critical services may include providing nutritional services to inmates, ensuring access to legal consultation, or providing medical care.

- Be prepared to change your practices as needed to maintain critical operations (e.g., suspend some services or activities if needed).
- During times of COVID-19 circulation in the community, ensure sick leave and other absence policies for employees and volunteers are flexible and non-punitive in order to allow employees or volunteers to stay home if they have symptoms of acute respiratory illness or if they need to care for a sick family member. Make sure your employees or volunteers are aware of these policies. Do not require a health care providers' note to validate illness or return to work, as health care provider offices and medical facilities may be extremely busy and not able to provide this documentation.
- Develop plans to monitor absenteeism in the facility.
- Develop a plan that identifies spaces in your facility that could be used to separate ill patients or exposed inmates from the general inmate population.
- Cross-train personnel to perform essential functions so the facility is able to operate even if key staff are absent.
- Assure you have adequate supplies of soap, paper towels, tissues, hand sanitizers, cleaning supplies, and garbage bags. If possible, a supply of disposable gloves and paper facemasks may be useful if persons become ill while at your facility.
- Consider the feasibility of supporting telecommunications or videoconferencing as an alternative to in-person visits (e.g., court appearances, attorney-client meetings, or meetings with clergy in the setting of respiratory illness).

Preparing and Educating Staff and Volunteers

- Ensure that staff providing medical services have been trained in appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) use and that PPE is available (e.g., gloves, eye protection, surgical masks, N95 respirators).
- Ensure that employees and volunteers are aware of sick leave, absence, and telework policies and that employees and volunteers stay home if they are ill.
- Encourage staff and volunteers to receive influenza vaccination.

Preparing the Facility

Specific action steps that can be taken now in jails or correctional facilities include:

- Post signs throughout the facility encouraging hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette (cover your cough and sneeze), and avoiding touching your face with unwashed hands. Print materials are available on [MDH: Hand Hygiene Print Materials \(www.health.state.mn.us/people/handhygiene/materials.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/handhygiene/materials.html). Handwashing posters are also available on [CDC: Posters | Handwashing \(www.cdc.gov/handwashing/posters.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/posters.html).
- Post signs at entrances instructing employees, volunteers, visitors, and others not to enter if they have symptoms of respiratory infection (such as fever or cough). Post materials in the languages used by the populations you serve. Print materials are available on [MDH: Hand Hygiene Print Materials \(www.health.state.mn.us/people/handhygiene/materials.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/handhygiene/materials.html).
- Place alcohol-based hand sanitizer at all entry points and key points in facility as possible. If not possible, use signs directing to the nearest sink to wash hands with soap and water.

- Ensure that soap and disposable paper towels and running water are available in bathrooms and that toilets are in good working order.
- Regularly dispose of waste products and empty waste baskets. Use disposable liners in wastebaskets if possible. Use no-touch disposal receptacles if possible.
- Routinely clean all frequently touched surfaces such as doorknobs, handrails, bathroom fixtures (sink handles, toilets), countertops, work stations, tables, chairs, and elevator buttons. Use the cleaning agents that are usually used in these areas and follow the directions on the labels. Provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks) can be wiped down as needed.

Responding to Respiratory Illness

Community transmission of COVID-19 has not yet been detected in Minnesota.

- If an inmate becomes ill with respiratory symptoms while at the facility, separate the patient from others, assess the patient, and act according to your usual protocols.
 - Ensure that the patient is masked when transported within the facility or during transport to another facility.
 - Jail or correctional health care providers should stay abreast of local COVID-19 conditions to inform clinical decision-making.
 - If an inmate is suspected of or confirmed to have COVID-19 but does not require a higher level of care (e.g., hospitalization), ensure that the patient is separated from the general population and that correctional health care personnel are using appropriate PPE when providing care. Contact MDH (651-201-5414) for additional guidance on case and contact investigation.
- If an employee or volunteer becomes ill while at the facility:
 - They should be sent home as soon as possible.
 - They should not return until they are free of fever (oral thermometer temperature of 100.4 degrees F/37.8 degrees C or greater), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g., cough suppressants). When COVID-19 becomes widespread, or if they are diagnosed with COVID-19, additional recommendations may be issued.

Additional Steps to Take if COVID-19 becomes Widespread in your Community

- Check [MDH: Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html) and news sources for new developments concerning potential spread of COVID-19 in Minnesota. Local conditions will influence the recommendations that MDH and local public health may make regarding community-level strategies to lessen the impact of COVID-19.
- If a person confirmed to have COVID-19 infection spent time in your facility, MDH will work with you on response steps.
- Social distancing and restrictions on gatherings will be recommended when disease is widespread in the community. In those circumstances, the recommendations will include limiting the presence of non-essential persons in your facility. Recommendations may also include, in some circumstances,

limiting or delaying inmate transfers to other correctional settings and assuring persons keep a distance of 6 feet between themselves and others.

- Follow MDH guidance for seeking medical attention or reporting potential outbreaks. Such guidance will be posted on [MDH: Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/index.html) if COVID-19 becomes widespread in the community. If you have additional questions, you can contact MDH at 651-201-5414 or toll-free 1-877-676-5414.

Other Guidance to Review

- You may also wish to review [CDC: Coronavirus 2019 \(COVID-19\) \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html) for additional updates and guidance.
- In particular, if your facility provides health care, please refer to [CDC: Information for Healthcare Professionals \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/hcp/index.html).
- Also note [CDC: Resources for First Responders and Law Enforcement \(www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/first-responders.html\)](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/first-responders.html).

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To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5414.