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Jeff Zmuda, Secretary

Laura Kelly, Governor

To: Juvenile and Adult Facility Residents and Family Members

From: Jeff Zmuda, Secretary

Date: July 26, 2021

Re: Coronavirus Update

“We are at a tipping point.” That comment was made recently by the University of Kansas Health System’s chief medical officer as he talked about the Kansas City area hospitals and the current COVID-19 surge.

We are also at a tipping point at KDOC. A tipping point means the situation can either improve or get worse and I am concerned it could get worse. Our numbers are small but rising, for both staff and residents. To add to our concern, the positive cases are found almost exclusively in the unvaccinated, and some of the cases are related to the highly contagious delta variant. Currently, 68% of our residents are fully vaccinated, and 51% of our staff are fully vaccinated. While the number of folks vaccinated helps in reducing spread of the virus, vaccinations alone are clearly not enough to help us protect staff and residents from contracting the virus.

There are two key points I want to make. If you are unvaccinated, that is your right and your decision to make. I urge you to make sure, however, you have made that decision based on fact and scientific evidence, not heresy, misinformation or rumor. This new variant is causing people all across our state and nation to rethink their decision about vaccination, and I urge you to do the same. Unfortunately, the delta variant can spread to those who have received the vaccine, but medical professionals observe that these individuals remain either symptom free or do not seem to require hospitalization because their symptoms are mild and will pass. But all are at risk, both from catching the virus and spreading the virus to others. Make an informed choice regarding vaccinations that is right for you.

Vaccinated or not, we must all do our part to control the spread. And that includes the wearing of masks. What you do and believe when you are away from the facility / work unit and on your own time is your business. But when you are at work within one of our facilities, you are expected to follow our established rules, and one of the rules in place today is that you will wear a mask.

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KDOC Message to Residents and Families

Both the CDC (Center for Disease Control and Prevention) and KDHE (Kansas Department of Health and Environment) have specific guidance related to controlling the spread of the coronavirus within correctional facilities, and that includes wearing a mask. The guidance also includes social distancing whenever it is possible, avoiding large gatherings, washing your hands, using hand sanitizer and keeping areas clean and sanitized.

These are not suggestions - these are the rules. If the tone of this message seems more urgent than most, it is because I feel a sense of urgency. I do not want to lose even one more staff member or resident to this terrible pandemic, nor do I want to continue to delay our return to fully normal operations any longer than we have to. But we have an obligation to protect staff and those under our care, and we must do everything we can to control spread of this virus within our facilities. Wear your mask within KDOC facilities. Keep yourself and your loved ones safe and healthy by making smart public health choices, and let's beat this thing once and for all!