



Jeff Zmuda, Secretary

Laura Kelly, Governor

To: Juvenile and Adult Facility Residents and Family Members

From: Jeff Zmuda, Secretary

Date: March 25, 2020

Re: Coronavirus Updates

The number of COVID-19 cases is growing in Kansas but thankfully we do not have any suspected or confirmed cases within our prison system. Over the coming weeks, we will send out frequent communications to ensure that you are staying up to date on any new developments related to coronavirus and the Kansas Department of Corrections.

The Governor issued an order for state workers to stay home for two weeks on administrative leave beginning Monday, March 23. We do have a handful of staff home on administrative leave and even more that are working from home. This is primarily staff from our parole offices and central office, but most of our staff are continuing their normal work to ensure the daily functions of our agency and the facilities we oversee. A rumor that appears to be circulating is that we are locking down facilities as a response to COVID-19. That is not accurate. Our intent is to maintain normal operations until such time as circumstances warrant a change.

Beginning Wednesday, March 25, we will transition from a passive to an active screening process of any person that enters our facility. This screening was developed with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) and medical staff of the University of Kansas and includes a brief questionnaire and temperature screening. All facilities should have this in place by the end of the week. This will include all staff, vendors, program providers and incarcerated individuals who are part of an off-site work crew and those who work in our private industry jobs. This next step in our response is necessary to ensure the continued health and safety of our staff and incarcerated population.

We are continuing to work with our contractors and staff to maintain programming at each facility. There are some challenges in keeping some of the programming going. We are working with our staff and providers to be as creative in finding alternative ways to continue programming as often as possible. We are also communicating closely with our partner providers about changes occurring in their organizations that may impact their ability to deliver programs in our facilities. We recognize these programs are important to your release planning, receiving program credit, and successful transition to the community.

For those on off-site work crews or working in one of our private industry jobs, we are continually evaluating these assignments. We would like to see workers remain in their jobs as long as possible, but only if this can be done safely. To that end, we are implementing the active screenings referenced above and ensuring that employers are following current public health recommendations. We did recently lose a number of jobs due to a private industry lay off because

of decreased demand for their products. Over the coming weeks we will stay in frequent contact with our employers to ensure that we keep those within our facilities safe and healthy and are current on the demand for the products each produces, should that have a further impact on our residents.

Since announcing the free phone calls and video visits on March 18<sup>th</sup>, we have had some questions related to the topic. First, I ask for your patience as we go through this process. Please do not be concerned if you are unable to make or receive phone calls each day. There are only a limited number of phones and video kiosks available and many residents wanting to use them. Our video kiosks were not frequently used prior to the implementation of the free visits. Because of the influx of users, some of these kiosks have been down for maintenance but our vendor is working hard to get them all up and running. For those housed in restrictive housing, these phone and video visits are also available but is subject to the availability of staff members to escort residents to the kiosks. We will make every effort to accommodate the calls in this area, but sometimes it is simply not possible. For those who are being managed as sex offenders, video visits are unavailable due to the increased chances for unapproved visitors to be involved in a video visit. For family members having trouble setting up a video visit, please call our vendor at 888-646-9437.

In closing, as you have seen in your community, place of employment, and among family and friends, the nature of this virus is changing rapidly. We are in a process of continual review and evaluation of our policies and procedures to make adjustments based upon new facts. We will continue to operate in this manner for as long as is necessary and we will be in touch again with any pertinent updates. We appreciate your patience and understanding during this challenging time. Until our next communication we ask that you follow social distancing guidelines whenever possible and keep washing your hands. Stay safe.