



EOPSS



DOC

DOC LAUNCHES VACCINATION, ELECTRONIC MONITORING PROGRAMS AS HEALTH AND SAFETY STRATEGIES

FEBRUARY 2021

Guided by its core mission to provide custody, appropriate care, and meaningful programming for those under its supervision, the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC) began dispensing the first round of doses of the COVID-19 vaccine for DOC inmates and staff on January 18th, supplemented by a public awareness campaign helping them to make healthy and informed decisions on vaccination. The DOC started administering second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to inmates and staff on February 15th. After months of public health and safety initiatives, the DOC has also introduced an electronic monitoring program, also known as home confinement, enabling some inmates to successfully reenter the community under strict conditions of accountability; expanded video visitation at all facilities; and continued various modes of testing for COVID-19.

From the first days of the pandemic, the DOC recognized the unique challenges COVID-19 posed to the people living and working in correctional environments. The DOC's strategies minimized opportunities for the virus to enter facilities, identified and treated inmates and staff who contracted the virus, and helped suppress the virus' spread through enhanced cleaning and sanitizing practices. These decisions were made by balancing the latest COVID information and the need to provide beneficial programming opportunities for those entrusted to DOC's care.



**Photo-Entrance of Boston Pre-Release Center*

VACCINATIONS

Vaccines are being offered to all inmates and staff at all DOC facilities. DOC's medical vendor, Wellpath, prioritized the most vulnerable populations based on CDC and DPH recommendations and guidelines. The first round resulted in 4,330 inmates being administered their first doses of the Moderna vaccine. This level of engagement was due in part to the internal public awareness campaign the DOC undertook by circulating posters and videos to promote healthy choices regarding receipt of the vaccine. There were three major components to the awareness campaign:

- In December, as DOC was preparing to receive and roll out the vaccine, it made available to inmates a 36-minute recorded videoconference with Rev. Liz Walker, Rev. Gloria White-Hammond, M.D., Dr. Anthony Fauci, and others that was hosted by Roxbury Presbyterian Church. The discussion specifically addresses potential sources of skepticism that individuals may have about the vaccine and the medical industry.
- The Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS) partnered with Commonwealth Medicine to develop a culturally competent COVID-19 vaccine awareness campaign geared toward helping the incarcerated population make a healthy choice on vaccination. A series of three videos was created featuring a diverse group of speakers from various disciplines and social and professional backgrounds who deliver messages regarding the vaccine. This series of videos was developed in collaboration with formerly incarcerated persons, advocates, health care providers, and others. They were provided in English with open captioned versions in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, and one of the three videos was geared toward incarcerated women.
- DOC's medical vendor, Wellpath, created its own informational video clip discussing the efficacy of the vaccines and answering some frequently-asked questions.
- All of these videos are played on DOC facilities' closed-circuit television and were made available for inmates to download to their tablets.

The DOC also vaccinated 2,244 staff members on site, with some staff opting to receive the vaccine through non-DOC vaccination sites in the community.

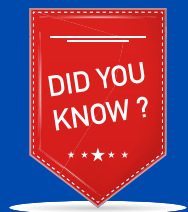
Vaccinations will continue to be administered to those wishing to receive a vaccine as the DOC administers second doses for both inmates and staff in accordance with vaccination guidelines.

MODES OF TESTING

The DOC continues to conduct COVID-19 testing and has administered over 28,000 tests thus far for a current inmate population of about 6,500 people. The DOC has completed multiple rounds of Department-wide universal testing for inmates, patients, and direct custody staff at all facilities. Additionally, day-to-day testing of any symptomatic inmates and patients and their close contacts is ongoing. The DOC also tests all inmates prior to transport to an outside hospital for appointments and prior to release to a medical or congregate setting.

These tests have supported the DOC's ability to make informed, data-driven decisions; ensure that appropriate steps are taken to separate individuals who are symptomatic as well as close contacts of those who may have tested positive; and continue important medical care for inmates who require closer monitoring. Additionally, DOC's medical provider, Wellpath, continues to provide COVID-19 testing for symptomatic inmates, their close contacts, those who are newly admitted, and those who go on an outside hospital trip or transfer to another facility. As of February 17th, there were 47 active cases of COVID-19 among about 6,500 inmates. Strategic mobile testing continues for staff as well, with a self-swab test recently being implemented for staff to continually monitor for the virus.

Waste water epidemiology is another safety measure put in place to further track the virus and care for the DOC's inmate population during the pandemic. In December of 2020, the DOC began the process of waste water testing by conducting samplings twice a week, every week, at the Massachusetts Alcohol and Substance Abuse Center, MCI-Norfolk, MCI-Cedar Junction, Pondville Correctional Center, MCI-Shirley, and Souza Baranowski Correctional Center. SARS-CoV-2 is shed in the stool of individuals infected with COVID-19. Sewage is analyzed to determine the presence of infected individuals, and estimate the number of cases. The data from sewage can help DOC facilities detect the re-emergence of COVID-19 at a facility which assists in the targeted testing for staff and inmates. The DOC plans to expand the waste water testing to other facilities in the future.



The DOC has made COVID-19 Testing Reports, an FAQ, and additional information available online at:
<https://www.mass.gov/guides/doc-coronavirus-information-guide>

ELECTRONIC MONITORING/HOME CONFINEMENT

The Department of Correction's electronic monitoring program (also known as home confinement) is underway, the provisions of which are set forth in 103 DOC 468 – Electronic Monitoring Program. The program allows for monitoring an inmate's location via global positioning system (GPS) while the inmate is on an authorized release from a Department facility. The Electronic Monitoring Program promotes reentry by maximizing an inmate's time in the community prior to release, which allows the inmate to demonstrate their ability to function in a realistic living environment while monitored under strict conditions of accountability. The implementation of this program involved successful collaboration with the Probation Department concerning the placement and monitoring of inmates on GPS devices, identification and provision of training and equipment, and other steps necessary to ensure the safety of the public and the health of the inmate while outside a correctional setting. Inmates incarcerated and in the custody of the DOC who are within one year of parole eligibility or a confirmed discharge date (adjusted maximum date) may be eligible for participation in the Electronic Monitoring Program.

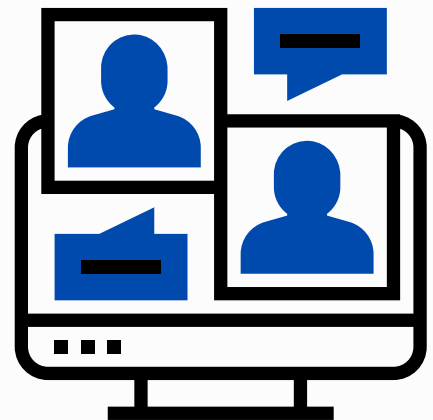
During the period of eligibility determination, the DOC utilizes existing reentry resources to enroll the inmate in MassHealth or the equivalent for the provision of medical, dental, and mental health services. If the inmate is not eligible for MassHealth or the equivalent, or if a determination on eligibility is pending, the supervising agency's designees, along with reentry staff, will coordinate arrangements for medical, dental, and mental health care through a community health center located near the inmate's home. If an inmate is released while on Medication Assisted Treatment, there are support navigators through Spectrum Services who provide a bridge to services within the community. Inmates are provided with contact information for regional reentry resource centers prior to release that they can access while participating in the Electronic Monitoring Program.



VIDEO VISITATION

Video visitation is operational department-wide. In-person visitation was suspended temporarily in November in response to the second surge of the virus in Massachusetts. In response, to keep inmates connected with families and loved ones, the DOC offered four free video visits to each inmate. DOC staff continues to assess general in-person visitation on an ongoing basis. Once a complete re-opening can resume safely, DOC hopes to resume general in-person visitation in a way that is responsible, appropriate, and safe for inmates, staff, and the public.

Additionally, video conferencing for attorneys is ongoing with the DOC facilitating on average around 175 video-conferences a week. In-person visits for attorneys are also available.



The pandemic has challenged every person, organization, and community in the Commonwealth to rise to our highest ideals of care and mutual concern. The collaborative teamwork among the DOC staff, our inmate population, and the community at large has achieved results consistent with those across the Commonwealth. The DOC's commitment to its core mission has guided every decision to heed public health guidance, minimize the virus' impact, and continually strengthen public safety in the 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts.