



EOPSS



DOC

# HEALTH AND SAFETY REMAIN PRIORITIES AS DOC MOVES TOWARDS RE-OPENING

JULY 2020

The Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC) is committed to reflecting the Commonwealth's careful progress toward reopening in our day-to-day operations, while also remaining mindful of the special challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic poses to correctional environments and the people in the DOC's care. Along with the DOC's core mission to provide secure custody and appropriate care and programming for those under our supervision, the DOC's response to COVID-19 has had three primary objectives: to minimize opportunities for the virus to enter state correctional facilities; to suppress its spread inside of those facilities; and to provide sufficient medical resources to identify and treat inmates and staff who contract the virus. Our response now includes an additional objective: to safely ease restrictions in accordance with public health data and guidance and resume beneficial programming opportunities as we enter a new phase of vigilance.

## ONLINE INFORMATION

You can find additional information that will help address many commonly-asked questions regarding the DOC's response to COVID-19 and the steps we have taken to help protect the health of employees and inmates [here](#) or at:

<https://www.mass.gov/guides/doc-coronavirus-information-guide>



*\*Photo-Pondville Correctional Center entrance*

# RESPONSE

Before the first known case of COVID-19 in a DOC facility, the DOC established a response plan to this unprecedented viral threat. The DOC screened and surveyed all inmates and dramatically increased cleaning and sanitizing operations across all facilities – especially high-touch surfaces such as doorknobs, handrails, and telephones. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer was made available throughout all of our facilities, and quarantine areas were designated for inmates to safely recover without transmitting the virus.

To help prevent the introduction of the virus into facilities, the DOC established screening areas at each entry point where anyone entering is surveyed for CDC-designated risk factors and has their temperature taken. In accordance with public health guidance, masks or face coverings are mandatory for anyone entering any DOC facility, and masks have been made available to all inmates and staff, regardless of facility, testing status, or symptoms. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the DOC has distributed over 750,000 pieces of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), including gowns, coveralls, masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, and thermometers in every facility to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to staff and inmates.

The DOC has provided guidance to all staff and inmates on preventing the spread of infectious disease, including COVID-19, by posting CDC recommendations throughout all facilities. The DOC has also issued a mandatory “read and sign” informational document on the DOC’s Intranet, which houses a resource portal for staff to view all COVID-19-related notices and guidance. Personnel have been instructed to report illness, exposure, and other risk factors, and to stay home if sick.

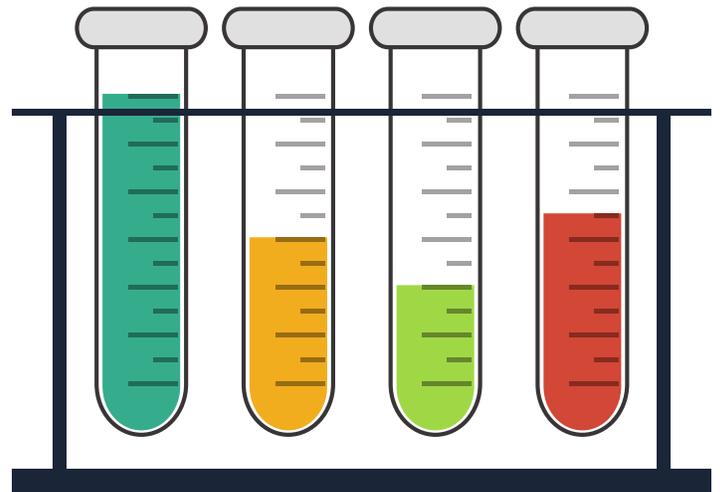
These elevated health and safety protocols remain in place at all DOC facilities.

# TESTING

In partnership with the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security and with the assistance of our medical vendor, Wellpath, the DOC provided universal mobile COVID-19 testing for all inmates at all facilities. Mobile testing continues on a strategic basis and is currently scheduled at each facility through the end of August. Through Wellpath, the DOC also provides COVID-19 testing on a regular, as-needed basis for symptomatic inmates or patients and their close contacts.

As of July 21, there are approximately 7,000 inmates in DOC custody and zero active COVID-19 cases. Over 8,500 COVID-19 tests have been performed for DOC inmates, with many inmates being tested more than once.

Testing is also offered to DOC staff, representing an alternative or supplement to testing through their personal medical providers. These tests allow the Department to make informed, data-driven decisions and ensure that appropriate steps are taken to isolate inmates and staff who are sick from those who are healthy, and that sufficient medical care continues to be available for those inmates who need it.



**Click here to access DOC  
Covid-19 Testing Reports**

<https://www.mass.gov/guides/doc-coronavirus-information-guide#-chapter-93-of-the-acts-of-2020-reporting->



# Continuing Services

Throughout the unprecedented global health crisis posed by COVID-19, inmate access to medical treatment, mental health programming, in-person attorney visits, mail, and laundry have all remained in place. Releases from custody continue as scheduled, and Wellpath follows a COVID-19 pre-release protocol for all inmates approaching their discharge date that includes review and screening by medical staff and testing if clinically indicated.

The DOC has taken steps to continue to provide inmates with an opportunity to earn good time credits, even while certain programming was suspended for health and safety reasons. In addition to good time credit that was offered for programming provided by clinical staff, an innovative journaling project was created and made available to all inmates so they could earn up to ten days of good time. The DOC identified three clusters of inmates within 80 days of release to supervision (RTS) and offered additional RTS time for those inmates completing COVID-19 programming. Program and vocational education staff returned to the facilities during the month of July, and good time is being awarded to inmates for participation in programming. Teachers and educational opportunities are scheduled to return to the facilities in August, offering yet another option for self-improvement and pro-social engagement, with the attendee having the opportunity to earn good time credits.



*\*Photo- NECC's outdoor visiting area*



*\*Photo- Pondville's outdoor visiting area*

*While every part of life in Massachusetts has been touched by this global public health crisis, the DOC has taken unprecedented steps to confront and to recover from the crisis at a pace consistent with that of the Commonwealth at large. We remain focused on our core mission and on reducing, to the greatest degree possible, the potential impact of this virus on our staff, our inmate population, and the community at large.*

## RE-OPENING

To promote social distancing and suppress the potential for the virus to spread, the DOC in late March curtailed general visitation, and in early April, intra-facility movement and congregate activities. As Massachusetts moves forward toward re-opening, the DOC is now monitoring facility and public health data to adjust those precautions and reflect the positive data trends inside and outside the facilities. General visitation has resumed with health and safety precautions in place at four DOC minimum-security and pre-release facilities, and attorney visits remain ongoing. The phased resumption of visitation is contingent upon testing data and positivity rates within that facility and the broader community.

In line with public health guidance, the DOC has begun to slowly reinstate certain services and activities. The DOC has implemented additional tier time and outdoor “fresh air” time at each facility. Limited community work crews have been reinstated on a case-by-case basis and inmate employment resumed, with approximately 2000 inmates currently back at work. MassCor Industries alone has seen the return of approximately 200 inmates to their workshops. Chaplains, programming/vocational staff, and librarians have also returned to work. Barber shops are re-opening, and outdoor dining has been implemented at some facilities.

The DOC continues to make assessments to further relax internal movement restrictions in a way that is responsible, appropriate, and safe for inmates, staff, and the public.

To further promote connected relationships with families and loved ones, video visitation is scheduled to be operational at Souza Baranowski Correctional Center and at the Massachusetts Alcohol and Substance Abuse Center this month, and the DOC is consulting proposals for the expansion of video visitation stations at other facilities, as well. Video conferencing for attorneys has already been implemented at the Massachusetts Treatment Center and should be operational Department-wide in the next 60 days.