Good morning, we are about to send out this press release to inform the public about all the efforts we are making keep COVID-19 out of our facilities and offices. Thank you for all of your hard work and sustained commitment to our mission during a very difficult time.

I firmly believe this is a time for all of us to come together and lean on each other’s strengths and talents to develop viable options and the best path forward. Lean on each other. Take care of each other. And please don’t hesitate to contact me and/or your supervisor if you have any questions or concerns.

Paul Schnell

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Dept. of Corrections Sets Up Agency Command Post and Implements Other Measures to Address COVID-19 Concerns

Measures implemented include canceling visitation, waiving medical copays, and planning for expanded access to video visiting

St. Paul, MN: In close coordination with the statewide response led by the Department of Health, the Minnesota Department of Corrections is standing up an agency command post and incident management team to ensure coordination with the state’s health and emergency management functions and DOC correctional facilities and field offices. The DOC has also implemented a number of measures to keep COVID-19 out of Minnesota’s correctional facilities.

The DOC pandemic response team has been meeting regularly since early February to ensure the existing pandemic response and continuity of operations plans are up-to-date and sufficient to cover the response to COVID-19. Planning for any possible development is a priority and various segments of the agency are meeting daily to implement the response.

“COVID-19 has not been detected in any facility,” Minnesota Department of Corrections Commissioner Paul Schnell said. “We are actively working to prevent that from happening while simultaneously preparing for the possibility that it will. Our planning includes several
considerations to ensure safety for staff, inmates, and people under correctional supervision in the community.”

The Department of Corrections has been monitoring developments related to COVID-19 and is closely involved with the coordinated statewide response led by the Minnesota Department of Health. DOC is also planning for the ongoing delivery of essential services including food, water, and health services in the worst case scenario of an outbreak in the facilities.

The measures implemented include:

1) **Waive medical copays**
   
   All medical copays are waived until further notice. The agency is committed to ensuring that individual economic concerns do not limit an inmate’s willingness to seek medical care.

2) **Suspension of in-person visiting**
   
   Effective immediately, in-person visiting in all Minnesota correctional facilities is suspended until conditions warrant a change.

   Professional and attorney visits will continue, emphasizing phone calls and video conferences/visits, or non-contact visits if necessary.

3) **Planning to implement no-cost video visiting**
   
   DOC is working with the agency’s video visiting and tablet vendors to provide no cost video visiting to allow incarcerated people to maintain pro-social contact with family members.

4) **Postpone March/April Education Graduations**
   
   All graduation ceremonies held at DOC correctional facilities are being postponed until further notice.

   The DOC recognizes that academic success is one of many proven strategies for reducing the likelihood of return to prison.

   Correctional facility graduation ceremonies are important methods of recognizing and reinforcing accomplishments that serve the interests of both the incarcerated persons, their families, and the people of Minnesota through reduced offending.

   The DOC will look to recognize the accomplishments of these graduates when the current health concerns are not so acute.

5) **Enhance handwashing and hand sanitizing procedures**
The DOC is deploying additional handwashing and hand-sanitizing stations for use by anyone entering and exiting the state’s correctional facilities.

6) **Provide and make available additional bars of soap**
   The DOC provides hand soap for incarcerated people. We will be distributing extra bars of soap to each facility to ensure a sufficient supply.

7) **Begin symptom screening for staff, contractors, vendors, and incarcerated persons**
   DOC health services is currently developing a symptom screening tool for staff, contractors, vendors, and incarcerated persons.

8) **Increase signage at entry points for all DOC locations**
   DOC is developing signs that will be posted at all the state’s correctional facilities and field services offices.

9) **Tele-work**
   DOC has established a workgroup to quickly address the immediate short-term policies and procedures necessary for broad tele-work across the agency for administrative staff not providing direct services.

10) **ILI (influenza like illness) guidelines**
    We updated guidance for facility health services staff for procedures to follow when an inmate exhibits symptoms.

11) **Cancel all out of state travel and in-state attendance at conferences and training.**
    Effective immediately, out of state travel, excluding CTU interstate inmate transfers, will be cancelled. Under rare circumstances, when training is deemed a critical need and not otherwise immediately available, it will be reviewed on a case by case basis.

12) **Monitoring food, medical, and cleaning items daily to ensure adequate supplies and forecast need.**
    DOC is monitoring its food and medical and cleaning items daily to ensure adequate supplies. The agency is also actively forecasting need based on the latest developments.

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