

Correctional Services

# COVID-19 Plans and Preparedness

*Updated May 1, 2020*

The Ministry of the Solicitor General continues to evaluate all measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 within our institutions and workplaces, protect the health and well-being of those in our custody and our staff, and help keep our communities safe.

## *Increasing available space in institutions*

To decrease the public health risk in our institutions, justice sector partners are making joint efforts to decrease the inmate count while maintaining publicly safety. Initiatives include:

- Where safe and feasible, **non-custodial options**, like temporary absence permits for lower risk offenders, are being considered for individuals charged with non-violent or less serious offences.
- Lower risk, eligible inmates near the end of their sentence are being reviewed for **early release** and issued temporary absence permits. Where feasible, the ministry is helping to support the inmate's safe return to the community (e.g., providing transportation, helping make connections to community supports, etc.).
- Working closely with Corrections Canada to coordinate moving federal inmates from our custody.
- Temporary absences permits are being issued so those serving **intermittent sentences** do not have to report to a correctional facility every weekend.
- Peace officers are being encouraged to consider **releasing individuals from the police station**, with or without conditions, bearing in mind all relevant considerations.
- Working to provide **GPS monitoring devices** for low-risk individuals who may require this as a condition of release or as a non-custodial option.
- **Ontario Parole Board hearings** are now being held by phone, video or in writing so decision continue to be made to allow for conditional releases.

## *Preventing introduction of COVID-19 into our institutions*

- Those being admitted to our institutions are being **screened for respiratory illness** according to MOH guidance and are housed in a separate intake unit for 14 days, where they are monitored for COVID-19. All inmates are tested for COVID-19 prior to being moved into the general inmate population.
- All professional visitors are screened before entry, including a temperature check, according to procedures developed with MOH.

- Staff are required to perform **self-screening and complete a mandatory temperature check** prior to entering an institution. Staff are advised to monitor their own health and report to management any changes to their health status.
- **Personal visits** are suspended until further notice (professional visits from lawyers and spiritual volunteers continue). To support inmates during this time, the ministry implemented an **enhanced phone system** that allows them to call cell phones for lawyers and family members, limiting the need for in-person counsel visits and allowing greater connection to family.
- **Non-essential movement** restricted between institutions.
- The justice sector is maximizing **audio and video court appearances** to reduce movement between institutions and the court.

### *Preventing the spread within the institution*

- Pandemic plans are in place at each institution. Institutions work collaboratively with local public health units, as required.
- Working with MOH and the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services (MGCS) to ensure the availability of **personal protective equipment (PPE)**, such as masks, gloves, gowns, etc., at each of our institutions. Staff and visitors wear surgical masks within the institution.
- Facilities are inspected and thoroughly **cleaned daily** and/or as required. Telephones are disinfected between individual use. Soap and cleaning products are provided to inmates free of charge.
- Any inmate who is believed to have been exposed to COVID-19 is immediately placed in isolation; environment is deep cleaned; measures are taken to prevent direct contact with others; and protocols are strictly adhered to under the direction of the local medical officer of health.
- **Non-essential movement** is restricted within an institution. Access to virtual courts continues.
- Inmates have been advised of proper handwashing and cough/sneezing protocol and information is posted in inmate areas.

### *Maintaining Community Services*

- Community Services is operating at full capacity on a rotating schedule, with 70 per cent of probation and parole (P&P) staff **working remotely**, where operationally feasible, and the remaining 30 per cent in the office.
- Institutional liaison officers (ILOs) are working on-site at their institutions as operationally required. Court liaison officers (CLOs) are reporting to P&P offices rather than the courts to perform their duties as part of the staff rotation.

- All offenders and visitors entering P&P offices are **screened** per MOH guidance. Offenders are only interviewed in a secure interview room or at the front counter, in both cases separated by a protective barrier.
- All P&P staff must **self-screen** for COVID-19 symptoms and recent travel or exposure before entering the office.
- Core business hours for P&P offices remain 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., [unless otherwise noted](#). **All remote reporting centres are temporarily closed.**
- Enhanced **cleaning protocols** in place, including repeated cleaning of key public areas: secure rooms, entrances, waiting rooms, countertops, and washrooms.
- Hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes provided, and physical distancing implemented within P&P offices. Additional PPE needs being evaluated on an ongoing basis.

### *Maintaining coordination and communication*

- Working closely with the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) Corrections Bargaining Unit, at all levels every day, to identify and implement measures to support staff and inmates' health and safety.
- Daily meetings with the **Ministry of the Attorney General** to coordinate joint-response to efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 within the justice system, from the courts to the institutions.
- The ministry's Corporate Health Care (CHC) team consults regularly with **the Ministry of Health (MOH) and Public Health Ontario (PHO)** to ensure the response to COVID-19 is closely aligned with their recommendations.
- CHC and local health services actively engage with **local public health units** who are responsible for COVID-19 surveillance, testing, case management and contact tracing.
- CHC provides ongoing guidance and direction to corrections staff regarding prevention, screening, and containment of COVID-19, in alignment with direction from MOH and PHO.
- Regular **communication with inmates** through local management and posting key public health messaging as well as measures in place to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Visit Ontario's [website](https://www.covid-19.ontario.ca) (covid-19.ontario.ca) to learn more about how the province continues to protect Ontarians from COVID-19.