

COVID-19 FAQs

Updated April 24, 2020

SCDC is working closely with the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control and Gov. Henry McMaster's office to take every precaution to protect and prepare our staff and inmate population against the public health threat posed from COVID-19.

The agency began preparations in February when we first learned about the virus. SCDC suspended visitation, volunteer visits and work-release details to limit the possibility that someone would introduce the virus into an institution.

SCDC understands there are questions about how inmates and staff are being kept safe during this state of emergency.

Have any inmates or staff tested positive for COVID-19? Yes. You can find details of that here: <http://www.doc.sc.gov/covid.html>

If an inmate gets sick, what happens? If an inmate develops flu-like symptoms, he/she is masked, separated from the general population and given a flu test. If that is negative, SCDC follows SC DHEC guidelines on whether to test him/her for COVID-19. If he/she is tested, SCDC isolates him/her from the general population until test results come back.

What is happening to inmates who test positive for COVID-19? Health care professionals are caring for him/her. If his/her symptoms are more serious than our medical staff can treat, he/she will be taken to the hospital.

What about inmates and staff who were in close contact with someone who tests positive? Those individuals will receive contact tracing by SCDC, in accordance with CDC and DHEC guidelines. Any need for isolation or quarantine will be determined by health professionals accordingly.

How are you making sure staff members aren't sick when they come to work? SCDC has a screening tool for everyone who enters an institution that includes questions about exposure, health, travel and social interactions. They also get their temperature taken. Staff members who have traveled to areas considered to be at high risk are sent home for monitoring before they are allowed to return to work. Anyone with a temperature exceeding 100.4 degrees or answers yes to any of the screening questions is sent home and instructed to call the Infectious Disease Department and they will be evaluated to determine when they can return the office/institution.

How are you making sure inmates are protected and their living areas are clean? Inmates are cleaning their cells and living areas every two hours. There is plenty of soap, sanitizer and cleaning supplies for them to use. Inmates' hands are also being sprayed with disinfectant by the officers. Inmates and staff have two masks each, one to wear and one to wash.

How are inmates reacting to this situation? The majority of the inmate population is responding appropriately as no one wants to get sick. Most inmates are wearing their masks, keeping their area sanitized and honoring social distancing as much as possible. The inmates are concerned about their families and understand that restricted access into our facilities helps them and staff stay safe and healthy.

Are inmates with health conditions or short sentences being released early? SCDC has no statutory or other authority for releasing inmates based upon the COVID-19 pandemic. SCDC is charged by statute with enforcing the sentences of the courts, and we have no power to shorten or amend an inmate's sentence. SCDC is working hard to keep medically fragile inmates away from the general population.

When will we be able to visit again? Visitation is currently suspended through May 31 and will be reassessed to determine if an extension is needed. If visitation needs to be extended for the protection of inmates and staff because of the public health emergency, SCDC will communicate it to inmates and their families.

Are any special arrangements being made for inmates to communicate with family? SCDC is asking our telephone provider, GTL, to extend its free call program.

What are the inmates doing while the institutions are closed? Inmates are still following their daily routines as much as possible. That means time out of their cells, going to recreation, medical visits and sick call, work and the cafeteria. SCDC is encouraging and working to keep appropriate social distances. SCDC's Palmetto Unified School District is conducting digital remote classes for inmates enrolled in our GED program.

Are legal visits continuing? Yes. However, attorneys are asked to postpone any visits that are not considered emergencies and to use phone calls as much as possible. If it is necessary for an attorney to visit their client during this time, the attorney will be subjected to the same screening as staff.

Are inmates be released as usual? Yes. SCDC is working with inmates who are scheduled for release to make sure they understand the health risk that exists in our state. SCDC will have a staging area for families to pick up their loved ones that lessens the possibility of close contact with others. Inmates housed at the Columbia Broad River complex will be brought by van to the SCDC recruiting office parking lot and released to their families there. For inmates who do not have transportation home, SCDC will make arrangements to have them delivered to their hometown.