

Wasatch Outbreak FAQ

October 5, 2020

How is commissary impacted by COVID-19?

At this time there are no considerations being made to discontinue commissary services for incarcerated individuals. We are taking measures to keep incarcerated individuals as safe as possible, which may include an increase in temporary lock downs or movement restrictions, but this should not directly limit access to commissary; although there may be times where a facility may see a short delay in delivery of items.

How is culinary impacted by COVID-19?

In order to prepare meals for those housed in our Wasatch Facility, we currently have incarcerated individuals coming from a nearby facility in the morning and afternoon and preparing food in the designated culinary area, which is fully separate from inmate housing. These incarcerated individuals have no interactions with those housed in Wasatch, and meals are primarily delivered at each incarcerated individual's cell door in designated areas of isolation and quarantine by custody staff.

Why are staff coming into isolated areas in full personal protective equipment? What's being provided for these incarcerated individuals? Why are incarcerated individuals who do not have COVID-19 being housed with incarcerated individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19?

Per CDC guidelines, inmates in areas of significant exposure would not be moved from their housing unit, and their area would be designated as quarantined or an area of isolation. Inmates would recreate individually or in small groups on a very limited schedule in order to prevent spread and to allow for frequent cleaning. It's been noted that other correctional facilities in other states who have had outbreaks in the past that the most effective way to resolve an outbreak is to strictly limit the movement in that facility. Staff mostly wear full personal protective equipment in these areas as they are moving throughout the facility and into other housing locations as well, and it's important to prevent any spread as much as possible. It's also important to note that while we've been providing more cleaning supplies (since the outset of the pandemic) in areas of quarantine and isolation those resources are significantly increased as are the frequency of cleanings. In April, we provided every incarcerated individual and staff member with two washable face coverings. We've encouraged incarcerated individuals to wear those coverings when they are not able to social distance, and we have required staff to do so as well.

What if an inmate needs greater care than what can be provided on-site?

In areas of quarantine and isolation, medical care providers are frequently walking the housing units and monitoring symptoms. Our medical staff are highly trained to not only provide care, but to also recognize when a symptomatic incarcerated individual would need greater care. If any of these closely monitored individuals present significantly worse symptoms, they will be moved to a hospital facility out of an abundance of caution.

Are high-risk individuals who have tested positive being treated differently?

Yes, based on the CDC guidelines, any incarcerated individual who is considered high-risk and has tested positive or in a quarantined area is being heavily monitored.

What has been provided to incarcerated individuals in areas of quarantine or isolation?

From the outset of the pandemic, incarcerated individuals have been provided additional soap and cleaning supplies. In April, all incarcerated individuals were provided with two washable face coverings with clear guidance on use and cleaning.

Are incarcerated individuals in isolation/quarantine being given access to showers and phones?

Yes, while time outside of their cell is extremely limited in areas of quarantine and isolation, at a minimum they are provided access to phones and showers for 30 minutes every other day.

How did you go from 3 cases on September 23 to close to 200 cases on Oct.5?

While the majority of incarcerated individuals who have tested positive remain asymptomatic or have minor symptoms, mass testing has shown that COVID-19 has significantly spread within the Wasatch Facility. Out of the 550 inmates incarcerated in Wasatch, nearly 200 have tested positive for COVID-19, since the first case was confirmed on September 23. It is important to understand that as mass testing occurs in housing units experiencing an outbreak, it is expected that the number of positive cases will increase significantly. That does not necessarily mean the number of positive cases has increased significantly. Rather, it means we have become aware of additional positive cases through testing that were likely already positive.

Will you consider releasing any inmates early?

We have been releasing incarcerated individuals early since April, based on a set of simple criteria. You can learn more about this on our website here:

<https://corrections.utah.gov/index.php/home/alerts-2/1254-message-shared-on-current-prison-population-trends-in-context-of-covid-19>

Will incarcerated individuals be charged a copay for any COVID-19 related medical treatment?

Any potential medical treatment provided to an incarcerated individual related to COVID-19 will not be charged a copay.

How are we communicating with offenders?

Not only do we have medical and custody staff walking the floor, but we also been providing handouts from the outset of the pandemic. When an incarcerated individual tests positive, they are notified by our medical staff, and advised accordingly on protocols and symptoms. We are keeping our website regularly updated for families to reference, and we have also provided semi-regular handouts to each incarcerated individual regarding COVID-19 updates.