

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**March 25, 2020**

## **Department of Corrections Extends Visit Suspension, Enhanced Screening of All Employees Through April 10**

**Harrisburg, PA** – As a result of continued mitigation measures called for by Governor Tom Wolf and Department of Health Secretary Dr. Rachel Levine, the Department of Corrections (DOC) is extending inmate visitation suspension through April 10, 2020.

“Currently, we have no positive cases of COVID-19 in our state prison inmate population, and we are working to delay the virus entering our system,” Wetzel said. “We believe that limiting who enters our prisons has been a good protocol to put in place.”

The DOC initially suspended all visits and began enhanced screenings at all of its prisons on March 13. To offset the lack of visits for inmates, DOC officials implemented video visitation and are providing inmates with additional free phone calls and emails.

“We are closely monitoring our entire system and individual facilities daily,” Wetzel said. “We are taking necessary steps to protect our employees and our inmates,” Wetzel said. “Our dedicated team of 16,000 men and women began working toward mitigating this virus’ impact on our system several months ago, and during these difficult times, these employees have continued to report to work to ensure public safety.”

Wetzel said that employees are working long hours, just like the first responders out in the community. “I am grateful for their commitment to this agency, to each other and to their communities,” he said.

Steps taken by DOC employees to mitigate COVID-19:

- Suspended all visits, while increasing phone calls, emails and implementing video visitation
- Suspended entry of non-critical individuals
- Issued personal protective equipment, including masks, to staff and inmates
- Enhanced employee screening
- Provided free bars of anti-bacterial soap to inmates
- Increased availability of hand sanitizers throughout facilities and offices
- Increased cleaning frequency throughout facilities and offices
- Directed non-essential staff to work from home
- Suspended large gatherings of inmates and incorporated social distancing into daily operations in work crews, gyms, transports, receptions, dining halls, exercise yards and treatment and religious programs. Religious services are held, but are shown on the inmate TV channel
- Modified library operations so inmates can still receive books without going to the library
- Closed all barber and cosmetology shops
- Implemented a plan for in-cell education

- Suspended outside inmate work crews
- Provides updated information daily to employees
- Informs inmates through “town hall” meetings, keeping social distancing in mind at all times, and through information on an inmate TV channel
- Reminds everyone about social distancing, hand washing, hygiene issues
- Eliminated inmate co-pay for flu related illness assessment
- Increased medical and pharmaceutical supplies to treat inmates
- Implemented individual quarantine measures for staff and inmate safety.
- Furloughed paroled individuals from centers to home plans
- Revised parole contacts with parolees based upon severity of offense
- Working with the parole board to maximize releases
- Reviewing parole detainees for individuals in county jails and state prisons
- Expediting the release process for anyone with a pending home plan
- Reviewing inmates within the state prison system who are beyond their minimum sentences
- Giving each inmate released a medical screening and referring to doctors when appropriate
- Continued access to law libraries
- Announced that on March 28, the DOC will begin using SCI Retreat as the sole intake facility for male inmates and parole violators
- Worked with unions to form alternate work schedule agreements for essential staff so they can trade/switch shifts due to child care needs

Find the latest information on the DOC’s COVID-19 efforts [here](#).

Find the latest information on the coronavirus [here](#).