



The FRAKES Files

20-09

Director Scott R. Frakes
April 23, 2020

Dear NDCS Teammates,

We are two already two months into our efforts to keep COVID-19 out of our prisons, and out of your homes. Your work so far has given us the best possible results – no sick inmates and one staff member diagnosed with COVID-19 a month ago (and is currently recovering).

This is a life-threatening virus directly linked to the deaths of many corrections staff across America. While not all cases can be linked to exposure at work, there are now prisons in other states with large numbers of staff and inmates infected with COVID-19. We implemented our prevention strategies early, aggressively, and (so far) effectively. If we rigorously apply our strategies on and off the job, we may keep COVID-19 out of our workplaces, and our homes.

Complacency is always our enemy. Every after-action review identifies complacency as a contributing factor. Unfortunately, I'm seeing complacency rearing its ugly head. Staff are not wearing their protective masks correctly, sanitation inspections are being conducted from desk tops, and the simple act of social distancing is not being followed. This is a situation where failing to follow the rules puts you, and everyone around you at risk. That is not your decision to make. I cannot control behavior outside of work, but I am making it perfectly clear that everyone working for NDCS will follow the rules established for the agency:

- Wear your protective mask whenever you are at work. It should be on before you walk through the front door and it should stay on for the duration of your shift. The mask must cover your nose and your mouth, and not open at the bottom (tie the bottom strings). When you remove the mask to eat or drink, do so in a way that prevents your airborne droplets from reaching others.
- Maintain social distancing wherever/whenever possible. While the nature of work inside prison makes this challenging at times, it isn't just about being 6 feet away from everyone. If everyone is wearing a mask, and you are less than 6 feet away for less than 10 minutes – you have avoided close contact, greatly reducing the risk of transmission.
- Sanitation is the first line of defense. Virus transmission is about numbers, and the cleaner we keep things, the lower our risk. We have the tools (bleach), the incentivized workers, and an inspection process. But, this will only work if we continue to use fresh bleach solution, replace workers who are not performing excellent work, and conduct thorough inspections with follow-up. This is repetitive, monotonous work, but it isn't hard work.

I know that most of you are going above and beyond to do your jobs. It only takes a handful of complacent staff to cause a large failure. This is a time where holding each other accountable is a matter of life and death. I know there are struggles with getting inmates to wear the issued masks. How can we expect the inmates to comply if all of us are not modelling the way? I know there are inmate porters who will only perform if they know someone is watching and inspecting. Their work will only be as good as your sanitation expectations and inspections. If your porters are not producing the quality needed, replace them.

The COVID-19 pandemic is far from over. Nebraska has done an excellent job of flattening the rate of infection, and not overwhelming community resources. NDCS has done an equally excellent job so far. It is too soon to relax our efforts. The most important thing we can do right now is double our efforts to stop transmission of the virus within our system. I want you and your families/friends to stay safe and healthy.



Scott R. Frakes

