

COVID-19 FAQs

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. These answers are current as of March 30, 2020:

Have any inmates tested positive for COVID-19? No

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 will happen if an inmate tests positive for COVID-19? Health care professionals will continue to care 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 SCDHEC 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 living areas are clean? Inmates have plenty of soap, sanitizer and cleaning supplies and are afforded the opportunity to utilize them regularly. Inmates' hands are also being sprayed with disinfectant by the officers.

How are inmates reacting to this situation? The majority of the inmate population is responding appropriately as no one wants to get sick, so most inmates are keeping their area clean, 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 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? All inmates, not just those with telephone privileges, are given two free five-minute calls each week during the suspended visitation.

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? SCDC continues to monitor the rapidly changing information surrounding the coronavirus. In order to keep our inmates and our staff safe attorney visits to SCDC institutions have not been halted; however, attorneys are asked to postpone any visits that are not considered emergencies and to utilize phone calls as much as possible. Inmates' attorney phone calls will take place in a confidential setting inside of the institution. 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; their temperature may be taken and they will be asked a series of questions to ensure the safety of SCDC inmates and staff. If you have experienced, or have cared for someone who has experienced, any coronavirus or flu like symptoms, please send someone in your place to meet with the inmate. SCDC must take all precautions to ensure that this virus is not introduced into any of our institutions so as to avoid it spreading across the inmate population.

Will inmates be released as usual on April 1? Yes. SCDC is working with inmates who are scheduled for release April 1 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.