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San Diego County Sheriff's Department – Media Relations

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May 21, 2020

Statement on COVID-19 Testing in County Jails

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented several challenges to the San Diego County jail system. We are committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of our inmate population and staff. We have taken many steps to protect their health, which were outlined in an [April 24th news release](#). We continue to provide a safe environment with several mitigation strategies in place and have added asymptomatic testing to our intake process.

It is important to note we have always followed infectious disease protocols to protect against outbreaks in our facilities. These protocols include many of the mitigation strategies we utilize for possible COVID-19 patients. All inmates presenting symptoms of COVID-19 or other respiratory illnesses are tested. If there are positive results, quarantine and respiratory isolation housing continue to be our best strategy to contain the spread of any disease. We have been successful in managing our population by implementing this strategy early in the COVID-19 outbreak. To date, there have only been seven confirmed positive cases of COVID-19 in our inmate population. Currently, only two inmates are actively positive. Each of these cases resulted in inmates being moved to isolation housing, quarantine of areas when applicable and daily monitoring for symptoms of inmates who may have been in close proximity to the infected inmate. This strategy has been effective in containing the disease.

An additional measure implemented recently was the advent of voluntary asymptomatic COVID-19 testing during the intake process. Coupled with our strategy to quarantine those being booked into our jails for a seven-day period and daily temperature checks, we effectively minimize the potential for any widespread outbreak of COVID-19. It is important to note inmates have the right to refuse testing. To date, 72% have refused.

The Sheriff's Department has asked the County's Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) for their assistance in expanding voluntary testing of inmates and employees in our jails. HHS staff will be allowed into our facilities to test all.

We continue to evaluate additional strategies to maintain safe jails. These include researching antibody testing, discussions with County Public Health about increasing testing availability in



our jails and how to safely reinstate normal jail operations moving forward.

We are in receipt of and have reviewed the guidance for congregate living facilities from Public Health Officer Dr. Wilma Wooten. We have been following each of the five mitigation strategies laid out in the document and will continue to do so. Our staff has worked hard to ensure the continued safety and well-being of our inmate population and will continue to be diligent in our efforts. We recognize the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the world and are committed to keeping the community and inmate population safe from exposure and infection to the best of our ability.

Dr. Wilma Wooten's guidance for congregate living facilities is included on pages 3 and 4 of this news release.

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County of San Diego

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WILMA J. WOOTEN, M.D., M.P.H.
PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER

May 19, 2020

TO: Long-Term Care Facilities
Correctional Facilities
Homeless Shelters

FROM: Wilma J. Wooten, M.D., M.P.H.,
Public Health Officer & Director,
Public Health Services

RE: CONGREGATE FACILITIES GUIDANCE FOR COVID-19

On behalf of the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) Public Health Services Department, I am sending you this letter to follow-up on the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) requirements for protecting the vulnerable populations.

Given the congregate nature and population served, the populations of long-term care facilities (e.g., skilled nursing facilities, intermediate care facilities, residential care facilities for the elderly, adult residential facilities), correctional, and homeless shelters (Facilities) may be at higher risk of being affected by COVID-19 and at increased risk for serious illness and complications. The County of San Diego recognizes that Facilities are doing everything in their power to protect their clients from COVID-19 and its complications.

The County of San Diego expects that Facilities are taking the necessary precautions to follow the mandatory requirements of their funding and licensing agencies, in addition to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, to mitigate the risk of individuals at the Facilities contracting COVID-19. This also entails the following:

- The ability to track and notify any receiving Facilities upon the transfer of COVID-19 positive individuals, as appropriate.
- The ability to safely isolate COVID-19 positive individuals.
- The ability to safely quarantine individuals who have been exposed.
- The access to staffing agencies if and when staff shortages related to COVID-19 occur.
- The development of policies and procedures to appropriately train your workforce in infection prevention and control procedures.

Tailored resources and guidance for the Facilities is provided below.

- [CDPH All Facilities Letter 20-52 to Skilled Nursing Facilities \(SNFs\)](#) that includes the Mitigation Plan Implementation and Submission Requirements for SNFs and Infection Control Guidance for Health Care Personnel.
- [CDC Interim Guidance on Management of COVID-19 in Correctional and Detention Facilities.](#)
- [CDC Interim Guidance for Homeless Service Providers](#) to Plan and Respond to COVID-19.
- County of San Diego Public Health Officer [Isolation](#) and [Quarantine](#) Orders.

I encourage you to continue to visit the [CDC COVID-19 website](#) for more resources. Also, on this website, you can sign up for email updates and to participate on the weekly [telebriefings for various community sectors](#). If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at MOC.PHO.HHSA@sdcountry.ca.gov.

Thank you for your continued support to keep the residents of San Diego County healthy, safe, and thriving.

Sincerely,


WILMA J. WOOTEN, M.D., M.P.H.
Public Health Officer & Director
Public Health Services

cc: Helen Robbins-Meyer, County of San Diego, Chief Administrative Officer
Nick Macchione, County of San Diego, Health and Human Services Agency, Agency Director