Considerations When Developing a Plan for the Coronavirus COVID-19 in Jails

There are numerous articles, checklists, webinars, sample policies and procedures being distributed across the state and the country. The below list are items that I have extracted from various sources to consider when you develop your plan to prepare your facility for the Coronavirus COVID-19. This is not an all-inclusive list; it is simply information extracted from the myriad of items currently being circulated and seek out guidance from your local health department.

Viewing a webinar hosted by the American Correctional Association gave three pieces of advice throughout the two hour session.

First, remain calm, don’t overreact.

Secondly, due to the constantly changing information being updated and distributed keep checking for the most current information. They stressed that yesterday’s, and some instances, this morning’s information may be dated.

Finally, establish a point of contact with your local health department. Stay in touch with them and keep informed of the frequent information that is being disseminated.

Things to consider:

1. Contact your local health department for guidance. Establish a good point of contact to stay current on information.
2. Review your emergency plans. Ensure that all staff is familiar with them.
3. Update your Pandemic Plan. Don’t have one? Establish one. Ensure all staff is familiar with it.
4. Identify space in your jail to be used as quarantine locations should it become necessary.
5. Consider having discussions with local law enforcement agencies. What guidance are they providing? Collaborate with them. Ask that they communicate with you in advance, if they are bringing in a new arrestee that potentially has the signs and symptoms of the Coronavirus so you can be prepared.
6. Have personal protective equipment (PPE) available for staff. Ensure staff knows how to use it. There is a lot of communication being distributed about self-contamination when removing a face mask. Again, reach out to your local health department for guidance.
7. Ensure that you have adequate sanitizing and cleaning supplies on hand.
8. Ramp up your cleaning efforts. This should include all areas (housing, common, support, offices, yes even elevator buttons).
9. Keep all staff, inmates, contract providers, volunteers, service providers informed. Educate them on proper sanitizing procedures.
10. If staff is sick – STAY HOME! There is discussion about some employees having no vacation time and can’t afford to stay off work. That is a discussion that needs to be had on how to address those situations. What we know is, you can’t afford to have a sick person come to work and expose others.
11. Consider curtailing volunteer activities. Evaluate each program and determine what can temporarily be suspended.
12. Speak with your public defenders and local BAR Association. Have them consider non-contact attorney-client visits during this time.
13. If your medical staff identifies someone who may be positive for the Coronavirus and the decision is to send the inmate to the hospital ER, contact the hospital in advance so they are prepared.
14. Don’t communicate information to your staff, inmates, citizens, volunteers, etc., that is not consistent with what is being communicated by your local health department.
15. Recommend encouraging citizens to use remote visitation. If there is a fee, you might consider waiving that to encourage persons to stay at home. If your local community has someone that is identified as being positive for the Coronavirus, you might consider terminating all onsite visits. While video visits help, there is a potential to expose others in the visitation area and your staff.
16. Some agencies have suspended all outside inmate work details and work release programs.
17. Have a mechanism in place for the public to call in and get information. You might speak with your inmate phone provider to assist you with this.
18. Stop inmate co-pay requirements for medical encounters during this period. You don’t want an inmate not to seek out medical assistance because of co-pay.
19. Regarding masking, gloving, etc., speak with your local health department for guidance on how to wear, remove, and dispose of personal protective equipment.
20. Speak with your medical provider about their plan. Have an understanding what it is, and what role your corrections officer play in the plan. If you have inmates who are positive for the Coronavirus, there should be a discharge plan (from medical) for them.
21. One jail indicated that they are checking every new intake with an infra-red no touch thermometer. Their health department has given them specific guidance as to what is a high temperature and what to do if someone registers with a high temperature.
22. If an inmate, who tests positive refuses to wear a mask, quarantine and ensure all persons coming in contact with that inmate wear a mask.
23. Consider additional sanitation stations at front entry & front lobby, living areas, recreation, food service, booking, and posted signs on mandatory use of sanitation stations.