

# Dept. of Corrections: Implementing temporary changes as omicron cases rise

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Madison, Wis. – The Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) is making temporary changes regarding entry into our adult facilities, in light of increasing COVID-19 cases in our institutions and across Wisconsin.

“Like the rest of the state and nation, Wisconsin DOC has seen positive cases rise sharply in this wave of the Omicron variant of COVID-19,” said DOC Secretary Kevin Carr. “DOC has not seen any corresponding increase in serious illness among people in our care, likely due to a combination of the high vaccination rate in our facilities and evidence that this Omicron variant causes less severe disease. However, we feel making these temporary changes is the best way to protect our staff, those in our care and the communities surrounding our institutions.”

Health experts are predicting infections from the highly-contagious Omicron variant of COVID-19 may continue to rise in the coming weeks, and DOC expects numbers in its institutions to increase, as well, in the short term. The agency is reminding all people in its care and staff that vaccination, including boosters, provides the best defense against severe illness and death from COVID-19.

Many health experts also acknowledge the possibility that cases of the Omicron variant could recede as quickly as they increased over the past month. With that in mind, in early February, DOC will review and may lift the suspensions noted below.

Beginning Thursday, January 13, DOC will:

Temporarily suspend all in-person visits to persons in our care across all adult

institutions and offer video visits only.

Temporarily switch to video visits and phone calls only for attorney/professional visits.

Temporarily suspend entry for volunteers, contractors, maintenance, agency staff and any other non-DOC staff, except for emergency services and ongoing, necessary facility projects.

This suspension does not apply to religious volunteers, who will be allowed continued entry to DOC facilities.

]Those allowed entry under the exception for religious volunteers, emergency services and ongoing, necessary facility projects will be required to take a rapid COVID-19 test upon entrance beginning Tuesday, January 18 and must follow all institution COVID-19 precautions (i.e., face coverings, social distancing).

Offsite medical visits will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Transfers between institutions may be adjusted or suspended on a facility-by-facility basis based on the number of COVID-19 infections at the respective facilities.

Educational, vocational and treatment programming, including Bureau of Correctional Enterprises operations, conducted by DOC institution staff will continue with protocols related to face coverings and physical distancing remaining in place.

Work release, project crews, community service and off-site education will continue, but DOC will increase rapid testing of those participating to 2-3 days per week upon return to the institution.