Corrective Services NSW’s (CSNSW’s) current response to COVID-19

CSNSW has taken a rigorous and pro-active approach to managing risks to inmates, staff and the community since the start of the pandemic last year.

The CSNSW Coronavirus Command Post, established in March 2020, remains a full time, seven day per week, operation and is the central point of advice and information across the organisation.

Importantly, CSNSW continues to use subject matter experts, including NSW Health and other medical experts, to guide and inform its responses.

Key elements of CSNSW’s response to COVID-19 include:

- screening and temperature testing of anyone entering a correctional centre;
- mandating the use of face masks and other personal protection equipment (PPE) in correctional centres and court locations;
- quarantining all inmates for 14 days upon their arrival into a centre, and testing them twice before being cleared by the medical provider to move into the general population;
- isolating any inmate who has cold/flu like symptoms, or has had close contact with a person diagnosed with or suspected of being exposed to COVID-19. Inmates return to the general population once they are cleared by the health provider;
- limiting the movement of inmates across and between correctional centres;
- providing health education for inmates;
- enhanced cleaning regimes for correctional centres, court cells and vehicles; and
- adopting formal protocols for managing anyone exposed to or who has tested positive to COVID-19.

Isolation hubs have been established to manage inmates who are confirmed to be COVID-19 positive. These hubs are staffed by trained officers, and are contained environments where inmates can be safely and securely managed with minimal inmate movement and limited direct contact with CSNSW staff. Strict protocols are in place for the management and transport of any COVID-19 positive inmates. CSNSW ensures that inmates have continued access to services including video link services to allow them to maintain contact with family and friends.

Since the identification recently of a number of COVID-19 positive inmates at the Parklea Correctional Centre, CSNSW has implemented a number of extra precautions after inmates, who may have been exposed to the virus, were recently transferred to other prisons from Parklea. All those inmates have been identified, isolated and tested by Justice Health as part of health protocols. In line with NSW Health advice, as a precaution, these inmates will remain isolated for 14 days. All non-essential movements of inmates have been stopped. Rapid antigen screening (RAS) has been introduced for staff and inmates to boost our frontline defences.

The transition of confirmed positive inmates from custody to the community is a challenge. CSNSW is working with the Public Health team to put in place appropriate arrangements wherever possible. It is essential that we work closely with NSW Health, as it has the power to impose enforceable conditions on matters that include accommodation and isolation.

As you may be aware, CSNSW has suspended in-person social visits and external leave programs for inmates – a critical measure in limiting the risk of transmission of the virus into correctional centres. A number of steps have been taken to address the impact of these measures on inmates, such as the introduction of video visits for inmates and their families, free phone calls and in cell activity packs for inmates.