



## Announcements and Updates from the Office

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## FROM THE OMBUDSMAN

*By Lauren "Laurie" Andersen, MM, RN, CEN, CCRN*

Happy New Year!

A new year is a good time to reset and reinvest in yourself, your family, your friends, and your health! Take the opportunity of a new year to refocus on making your life better, healthier, and more connected. The Office of the Ombudsman (Office) hopes that joy, hope, and peace are all part of 2023 for you!

First, I have admired how each of you has faced all of the challenges of COVID-19 and its impact within the walls of DOC facilities. The Office respects how difficult this pandemic has been on your lives, spirits, activities, and families.

Though the COVID-19 pandemic continues to influence our daily lives in the Massachusetts Department of Correction (DOC), gratefully, both the number of COVID-19 infections and the acuity of those infected with COVID-19 have decreased significantly. COVID-19 variants (currently called BQ.1 and BQ1.1 and XBB.1.1) continue to result in positive COVID-19 infections that require isolation and quarantine. We still have inmates who are testing positive and are symptomatic from the COVID-19 virus. At this time, the Office continues to recommend testing and isolation/quarantine for positive COVID-19 cases but has adjusted the time frame for the follow-up.

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## FROM THE OMBUDSMAN - CONTINUED

Additionally, on November 29, 2022, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released updated guidance for corrections facilities. As a result, on December 16, 2022, the Office updated the guidelines to include the newest CDC advice.

### Isolation

If an inmate tests positive for COVID-19, that person must be kept in isolation for 7 days. COVID-19 testing will be performed, as soon as possible, after an inmate complains of symptoms, and, if positive for COVID-19, retesting should be repeated on day 5 or later. The inmate will be released as soon as day 8 from isolation after the initial positive COVID-19 test result. The inmate should continue to mask and have a symptom review each day until day 10. If the inmate tests positive after day 5, a 10-day isolation should be considered.

### Quarantine

If an inmate is a close contact to someone with COVID-19, or otherwise exposed to COVID-19 infection, then that inmate and, if necessary, that inmate's unit, should be kept on quarantine for 7 days with a review of symptoms each day. Testing should be done as soon as possible after the initial exposure to COVID-19 and should be repeated on day 5 or later.

### DOC Interdepartmental Transfers

COVID-19 testing should be conducted prior to any inmate being transferred to another facility. A symptom review should also be done prior to the transfer and again 5 days after the transfer has happened. Inmates transferring within the DOC do not need to quarantine on arrival at the new DOC facility.

### New Intakes

All new intakes to a DOC facility should be tested for COVID-19 on arrival and again after 5 days. These new inmates should remain on quarantine/ observation for 7 days and can be released on day 8 if COVID-19 negative.

### Healthcare Appointments/Trips to Hospital

All inmates should be tested for COVID-19 prior to going to any healthcare appointments or to the hospital. Inmates should wear masks in route to all healthcare appointments.

### COVID-19 Surveillance Testing

COVID-19 surveillance testing shall be completed any time there is concern about COVID-19 positivity or outbreak. Tools including symptomatic inmate numbers, COVID-19 positive inmate numbers, symptomatic DOC staff numbers, CDC community levels, symptomatic staff numbers, and wastewater testing results will be reviewed and shall direct the need for COVID-19 surveillance testing at each DOC facility.

These new guidelines will help DOC facilities return to everyday operations sooner while still protecting everyone from spreading the COVID-19 virus.

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## FROM THE OMBUDSMAN - CONTINUED

A specialized environmental cleaning company, *Lighthouse Environmental Infection Prevention* (Lighthouse EIP), has partnered with the Office to provide support and oversight of the cleaning processes at all DOC facilities. Tom LaRochelle from Lighthouse EIP will be the Office's representative for oversight of the cleaning processes, chemicals used, and maintenance of standards of cleaning. Mr. LaRochelle is also available to support training and answer questions about the cleaning process.

As you know, with the onset of the winter months, there is an increase in illnesses including influenza (Flu), respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and gastrointestinal illness. Use the basic infection control standards and healthy habits to avoid illness when possible.

Some healthy infection control and COVID-19 prevention habits include:

- ✓ Let DOC or Wellpath staff know if you have symptoms of illness.
- ✓ Get tested for COVID-19 if you are feeling sick or are exposed to someone who is.
- ✓ Wash your hands frequently.
- ✓ Clean high-touch areas like phones and tables before you use them.
- ✓ Cover your mouth if you cough or sneeze.
- ✓ Get vaccinated for Flu and/or COVID-19 to lower your chances of getting infected.

Best,

*Laurie Andersen*

## ABOUT THE OFFICE



### Office of the Ombudsman

Independent COVID-19 Oversight to  
MA Department of Correction

The independently operated Office of the Ombudsman, run by Lauren M. Andersen, MM, RN, CEN, CCRN, Director/Ombudsman, monitors, and reports on the Massachusetts Department of Correction's efforts to limit the spread of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) in the DOC's facilities across Massachusetts.

## CONTACTING US



**Website:** <https://covidombudsman-madoc.org>

Inquiries can be submitted anonymously if desired. If you provide your contact information when filling out the form, the Office will use its best efforts to respond within 2 business days.

We look forward to addressing your COVID-19-related questions, concerns, and inquiries.

**Free Call: 1-833-662-8410**

You may also submit your COVID-19 inquiry or concern via our telephone number. COVID-19-related inquiries may be left anonymously. If you would like a response from the Office, then please leave your contact information as instructed on voicemail.

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## KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS & CONCERNS

### Responsive Actions / Accomplishments:

The Office would like to share with you a few items that have already been reviewed, including:

- ✓ **Concerns about Inmate Access to the Office:** We have established a *CorrLinks* account to notify you that we received your concern. This account is a “Do Not Reply” account and is not monitored frequently.
- ✓ **Newsletters Delivered Directly to your Tablets:** We are happy to hear that you can now get these newsletters on your tablet. This provides one more way of direct communication between each of you and the Office.
- ✓ **New CDC Corrections Guidance:** The CDC released updated COVID-19 guidance was released for corrections facilities on November 29, 2022, and the Office updated guidelines on December 16, 2022, for all DOC facilities.

### Common Concerns for the Past Three Months:

- **COVID-19 Quarantine:** Concerns from incarcerated people that “rules” about COVID-19 are not being followed by different members of the DOC community.
- **Vaccines and Boosters:** The HSA from Wellpath at each DOC facility is offering vaccines and boosters for COVID-19 weekly. Please fill out a sick slip if you would like to get a COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccines are always available. Vaccine clinics for both COVID-19 and Flu were offered and held in October and November.
- **Anti-viral Treatment:** Paxlovid and Monoclonal Antibodies are available for inmates who have COVID-19 and are at higher risk for developing severe illness. Providers in all DOC facilities can order and administer these treatments to anyone with COVID-19 that meets the need.
- **Lighthouse EIP Cleaning:** Cleaning teams from *Lighthouse EIP* repeated biologic testing and found much improvement since the spring of 2022. Tom LaRochelle is the representative from Lighthouse EIP for the Office and will continue to work with the DOC to provide support and education on cleaning, chemical mixing, and cleaning-related challenges. A cleaner environment is a healthier environment for all who are working at or living in DOC facilities.
- **Masking is Now Voluntary:** In DOC facilities where there is not an outbreak of COVID-19 or other exposure, masking is now voluntary. Masks are available for anyone who wants to wear one. Masks are not required if there are no COVID-19 infections or exposures to COVID-19 in the DOC facility or if there is no one on quarantine.

Please keep in mind that the Office is here for you, and we encourage all inmates to provide their feedback via a free phone call to 1-833-662-8410.