

Media Statement

14 April 2020

Containment and Treatment activated by DCS as COVID-19 cases increase

The number of inmates who tested positive for COVID-19 at East London Correctional facility has increased by 49 cases. Overall figures will therefore reflect, 53 inmates and 25 officials (inclusive of St Albans and Head Office), thus placing DCS at a combined total of 78 cases.

As the number of infected people increases in correctional services, the containment and treatment pillar of the Disaster Management Response Strategy of the department has been activated. This is looking at the rapid identification of laboratory-confirmed cases, the isolation of those who test positive and management of the pandemic within our centres.

Health care teams are on site, armed with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), which includes goggles, gloves, masks and gowns, rendering care services to distressed patients and monitoring those likely to develop acute respiratory challenges.

Working together with the Department of Health and Provinces, DCS has a list of hospitals and health care centres where inmates could be transferred in case they require admissions. Appropriate safe escorts will be employed in order to limit the risk for officials and hospitals receiving inmates in need of care.

Disinfection of the environment at East London Correctional Centre is underway. This is to prevent contamination of surfaces and inanimate objects.

DCS is now splitting out-of-cell time for the distribution of food. This will mean that units or wings are divided in order to avoid concentration of inmates and officials in open spaces. This measure does not abolish access to open air which is mandatory for inmates.

Visits will remain restricted and the DCS has since issued a circular advising correctional centres to increase the limit on the amount that inmates are allowed to buy items for from Centre tuckshops. This will allow inmates to purchase items from the tuck shops, adhering to social distancing protocols. We have also ramped up toiletries that we provide to inmates so that they are not disadvantaged.

Only two out of 243 centres have reported positive cases of the virus thus far, therefore, it remains critical that prevention measures remain in force and be granulated in order to keep other centres COVID-19 free. Valuable lessons have been learned at East London and this will influence our disaster response plan moving forward.

However, it must be acknowledged that, as the virus continues to spread in communities, correctional centres within the same localities will remain vulnerable. Officials attending gatherings and movements from their residences to places of work is receiving attention, in addition to screening.

Working jointly with other stakeholders on emergency possibilities and response interventions should the epidemic reach unimagined proportions in the country remains critical. We have also procured mobile quarantine sites that will assist with isolation cases. This is in addition to centres already identified and prepared for this purpose across all provinces.

Ends.

Issued by Department of Correctional Services

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