



Jail Facility Processes and Policies for COVID-19 and Beyond

Zooming in on Public Health

The January CoP provided an overview of jail facilities, especially for public health professionals to learn more about general and COVID-19 specific jail facility processes and policies. The presenters included **Matt Costello**, LMSW from the CBHJ, **Brian Asbell, MBA**, Sheriff of Peoria County, IL, **Alyse Wurcel, MD MS**, Infectious Diseases Physician, Tufts Medical Center, Assistant Professor, Tufts School of Medicine, Infectious Diseases Liaison, Massachusetts Sheriffs Association.

QUESTION: Have you experienced vaccine hesitancy amongst jail staff, and if so, how have you encouraged vaccines? I'm (pleasantly) surprised to hear that there was little vaccine hesitancy and wondering if that's specific to MA. Would like to hear from IL & MI about it and efforts.

ANSWER: Dr. Wurcel: *Yes, we have experienced hesitancy in MA. I think the goal is not to put all people who are "hesitant" in the same bucket. Some people will never get the vaccine. Other people are more inclined to be convinced with time/education. Asking people their concerns is the most important part of addressing hesitancy. We should not make assumptions that everyone is hearing the same information. Creating an environment where questions can be asked without stigmatization or repercussion is of incredible importance. Potentially setting up anonymous Q / A boxes, bringing in experts from the community who have no relationship to the jails, etc. Overall, meeting people where they are at.*

ANSWER: Sheriff Asbell: *With detainees, it should first be recognized that currently only a small number of the in-custody individuals are eligible for vaccination. Due to scarcity of vaccination, it was decided only detainees who were sentenced to our jail with a known release date were eligible for vaccination. The decision was made because non-sentenced or pre-trial detainees do not have a scheduled release and there is a risk in providing the first vaccination and no longer being in custody at the time for the second dose, 3-4 weeks later. Most of the jail population consists of detainees on pre-trial status, so this was a relatively small sample size eligible for vaccination thus far. Once more vaccination is available, we will move to the pre-trial population.*

Hesitancy for both staff and detainees is no different than general population. Some are concerned with side-effects, some just have personal beliefs, and quite a few have already been Covid-positive and are waiting for several months post-infection to receive vaccination. However, in acknowledging this, we have seen an increased desire for vaccination with both staff and detainee populations after they have observed others receive both rounds of vaccination with no or minimal side effects.

To encourage vaccinations with the detainee population we are fully prepared to develop policy related to classification status. Meaning, detainees who receive vaccination would be eligible for increased privileges including facility movement, programs and work opportunities.

I feel this will be more of a struggle with staff and there is going to be many legal hearings in the future related to this issue. In Illinois, there is specific language which protects first responders, basically acknowledging there is a presumption Covid exposure is work related unless there is clear and convincing proof the exposure occurred off-duty. Now the



question is, how this will be managed if employees have the opportunity to be vaccinated but choose not to. Will Covid-related illness and exposure requirements be eligible for work comp claims? Acknowledging this, I believe once there are more judicial rulings related to work comp issues, this may put more pressure on the employee population to receive vaccination.

QUESTION: Can there be more elaboration on the history of harm to black and brown bodies that took place in the medical community and how to truly address that?

I have personal advice folks in jail and prisons to not resist because jail and prison administration have the potential to retaliate if you don't.

ANSWER: *Alysse, There is much to unpack in this question. As much progress as we have made to combat racism. It still exists. It may not be in the blatant ways, but in the more insidious ways. I think it a call to the leaders of jails and prisons to set an atmosphere where all employees and detainees can report these incidents. Having an outside group/committee convened to evaluate any declaration of racism is incredibly important too.*

Note: The February COVID-19 Mitigation Strategies in Jail Settings Community of Practice (CoP) webinar is the third of a monthly series that aims to contribute to the mitigation of COVID-19 in jail and other incarceration settings. Titled "Ask an Expert: Engaging Dialogue with Criminal Justice and Public Health Champions", this CoP will be a Q&A discussion with public health, criminal-legal and advocacy experts working along the criminal justice spectrum to combat COVID-19. The February event will provide an opportunity to learn more about current COVID-19 mitigation strategies, including but not limited to COVID-19 vaccinations, collaboration with external organizations in this space, and more.