

**PRESS RELEASE** | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | February 23, 2021

## **COVID-19 vaccinations commence at DOCR facilities**

Bismarck, ND – The North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (ND DOCR) has commenced COVID-19 vaccinations for staff and residents at each facility, including the Dakota Women’s Correctional and Rehabilitation Center (DWCRC) in New England. The vaccinations are completely voluntary and all facilities should have the first round of vaccinations completed by the end of the week.

Medical staff at the ND DOCR have been working with the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) to administer the vaccines. Each facility has provided educational materials to help residents and staff make informed decisions about whether or not they would like to receive the vaccine. Residents in DOCR facilities as a group tend to have a higher rate of high-risk conditions such as diabetes, heart problems, and history of smoking.

More than 500 DOCR residents have been infected with COVID-19. This is largely due to the difficulty of safe distancing in prison; the average ND DOCR resident lives and sleeps in a single room with seven to 20 individuals, uses congregate bathrooms, and often eats with others. Since the start of the pandemic, the DOCR has taken proactive measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, including frequent testing, reducing resident populations, and implementing safety protocols including personal protective equipment (PPE).

“Making the vaccine available for both our staff and the residents in our care brings us one step closer to normalcy and resuming visitation,” said Dave Krabbenhoft, Interim Director. “As more people volunteer to receive the vaccine, it makes our communities safer inside and outside, ultimately keeping our staff safer as well. Our highly proactive approach to fighting COVID-19 in our corrections system continues with this vaccine rollout, and we are pleased that many are choosing to get vaccinated.”

North Dakota’s COVID-19 vaccine prioritization groups include three phases: 1A, 1B, and 1C. In phase 1B, staff and persons living in other congregate settings, including corrections, are eligible for the vaccination, which occurs when most people in phase 1A have been offered the vaccination and demand is declining, according to the NDDoH. The North Dakota Advisory Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination Ethics is tasked with providing recommendations to the State of North Dakota and health care providers for prioritizing and allocating doses of vaccines as they arrive

within the state. The committee is comprised of five voting members: a physician, an ethicist, a local public health representative, a representative of the Department of Human Services, and a representative of NDDoH. The committee is facilitated by a retired medical epidemiologist who is acting as an advisor to the NDDoH Division of Immunization.

For more data and information regarding COVID-19 within the DOCR, please visit <https://www.docr.nd.gov/covid-19-information>. For more information regarding the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's vaccination recommendations for incarcerated individuals, please visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/correction-detention/vaccine-faqs.html>.

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## CONTACT:

Kayli Richards | 701-328-6650 • 701-390-4285 • [karichards@nd.gov](mailto:karichards@nd.gov)

3100 Railroad Avenue  
Bismarck, ND 58501



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