

Special Report | COVID-19

OFFICE OF THE
Independent Juvenile Ombudsperson
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE JUSTICE



Special Report on Covid-19

April 9, 2020

The Ombudsperson's Office is aware that community members, families, youth advocates and others are interested in the safety and well-being of youth in the custody of the DJJ Youth Centers during the Covid-19 outbreak. Our Office has put together this special report to inform the public about how youth in DJJ custody are doing and the measures currently in place to keep them safe.

As of April 1, 2020, there were 159 youth in DJJ custody statewide: 107 had indeterminate sentences (youth adjudicated delinquent, those with extended jurisdiction juvenile status and court evaluations) and 52 had determinate sentences (juveniles sentenced as adults and those with habitual or violent juvenile offender status). To date, there are no known/confirmed cases of the COVID-19 virus among youth at any of the facilities.

DJJ has taken these precautions to minimize the likelihood of Covid-19 infections inside of the Illinois Youth Centers:

- Screening every person entering DJJ facilities using procedures recommended by the Center for Disease Control and the Department of Public Health. The current procedure includes a questionnaire and temperature reading.
- Taking a daily temperature reading of every youth in custody.
- Implementing universal masking of all staff entering IDJJ facilities (4/6/2020).
- Increasing the frequency and intensity of the cleaning practices at each facility and requiring that all staff and visitors sanitize their hands upon entry and when exiting facilities.
- Limiting the access of all non-employees entering DJJ youth centers and office buildings. In line with state and local stay at home orders, all in-person visits are suspended until April 30, 2020. When possible, visits and meetings are converted to video visits and additional phone calls.
- Reducing programing options provided by outside entities and volunteers and converting to virtual visits and instruction when possible.
- Educating youth about the virus and detailing for them the personal precautions they should take to reduce their risk of infection. Precautions include: practicing social distancing, increased showers, frequent hand washing and frequent use of hand sanitizer that is available in every living unit and common area.

In order to further reduce the likelihood of a Covid-19 outbreak within the Illinois Youth Centers that would endanger the health and safety of both youth and staff as well as the communities to which youth return, DJJ has worked to lower the numbers of youth in custody. Beginning in mid-March, DJJ has postponed the intake of new commitments. On the back end, DJJ has continued to follow its process for reviewing youth for release but has expedited and increased the frequency of release reviews for youth who were relatively close to their target release dates or otherwise potentially eligible for release.

Consequently, Aftercare has expedited and expanded services and surveillance of youth returning home, including virtual check-ins with youth and home confinement. These youth will

also need their communities to provide wide-ranging and easy opportunities to enroll in school, mental health and other treatment, skill building programs as well as age appropriate recreational outlets.

As for the youth who remain in custody, the Ombudsperson's Office has visited each facility to meet with youth at least once since March 2020. DJJ executive staff members, including the Director also visit each facility at least once a week to check in on staff and youth. The Ombudsperson's Office has a daily call with the Director for Covid-19 updates. While external monitoring visits have been postponed, the Ombudsperson's Office retains access to all Illinois Youth Centers and conducts virtual visits by video conferencing. Between visits, youth in Illinois Youth Centers, residential placement and Aftercare can contact the Ombudsperson or Deputy Ombudsperson seven days a week by telephone at any time. Complaints, issues and inquiries from youth are addressed directly with DJJ facility administrators and/or executive staff.

If a young person shows Covid-19 symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath), a member of the Executive staff is immediately notified as well as DJJ's medical director. The Ombudsperson's Office is also requesting notification. As a precaution, that youth is moved into isolation in a separate living unit in the charge of a staff member outfitted in protective clothing until he or she can be tested. DJJ has the capacity to test youth quickly.

If the youth is positive for Coronavirus, she or he is quarantined in his or her room. While under quarantine, the youth is monitored closely. All available programming, educational services and access to books, games, television and/or radio is provided.

DJJ continues to provide as many programs and educational services as possible and is working to mitigate boredom and restlessness for youth remaining in custody by purchasing and providing extra radios, televisions, games and books. The Department is also accepting donations for all of the above to provide for as many youth as possible.

Additional Resources:

IDJJ Covid-19 Updates- [Click here for Guidance, FAQs, and Detailed Mitigation Action Reports](#)

State of Illinois Covid-19 Info- [Click here for daily updates on Covid-19 and Executive Orders](#)

Contact the Ombudsperson's Office

Don't hesitate to contact our Office with any questions or concerns you may have about how DJJ youth are doing. Our Office is here to help youth and their families navigate through this particularly troubling and confusing time in every way we can.

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