

MOHAVE COUNTY

Doug Schuster
SHERIFF



SHERIFF'S OFFICE

MCSO PRESS RELEASE

March 24, 2020

The Mohave County Adult Detention Facility has been preparing and responding to issues involving the COVID-19 virus and is working to keep jail inmates and staff safe. Captain Don Bischoff, said that he and his staff have been working with the Mohave County Department of Public Health as well as the jail medical staff from Wellpath, the health care provider contracted for inmate health services inside the jail.

The jail began sharing information with the entire inmate population on March 6th as an effort to keep the population well informed with accurate information. Those communications have continued in order to be transparent with the inmates and to keep the rumors and "bad information" to a minimum. Also in early March, the Sheriff's Office asked area law enforcement agencies to change some of their booking practices involving felony and misdemeanor arrests. The highest likelihood of the virus entering the jail would be with the in and out movement of arrestees and inmates, especially those that are only in jail custody for a short period of time.

Sheriff Schuster stated, "While we have temporarily modified our booking practices, it should be clear that we will continue to aggressively pursue criminal activity in Mohave County. There are no get out of jail free cards as a result of this epidemic, and while we may modify our timeline and practices, we will continue to hold people accountable for the actions". He went on to add, "We will pull through this together by using common sense and avoiding panic. It is critical that we all make every effort to adhere to The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines regarding prevention measures, and follow their recommendations should you feel ill".

The Arizona State Supreme Court Chief Justice, as well as Mohave County Superior Court Presiding Judge, Charles Gurtler, both issued Administrative Orders last week that authorized the various courts to postpone some trials and continue many scheduled hearings. The orders also recommended that incarcerated defendants not be taken out of the detention facility to appear in court unless their physical presence in the courtroom was constitutionally required. Many hearings will be taking place by telephone or video conference from inside the jail. The jail has also suspended its work release program and has stopped accepting those previously ordered to surrender and start serving a county jail sentence. Again, the desire is to prevent new arrestees or bookings from coming into the jail unless absolutely necessary.

Sheriff Schuster added, "With the cooperation of our local law enforcement agencies, we have been able to reduce our average daily inmate population by a little more than 15%, about 90 inmates. We'd like to lower the population another 10 to 15 percent." By reducing the population, the jail will be able to ease some of the "closeness" in our housing units and create additional housing space to isolate and quarantine inmates, away from the main units, when it becomes necessary. "Jail medical staff and Detention Officers are closely screening all new bookings, following CDC guidelines, and there are no confirmed cases of the virus in our

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facility," said Sheriff Schuster. The jail received one new inmate who displayed symptoms and was immediately isolated from other inmates and tested for the virus. The test results came back negative on Monday (3/23).

On Friday (3/20), Bischoff visited with more than 200 inmates, sharing information and fielded questions about the continued supply of food and supplies for normal jail operations, the impacts on future court hearings, and special consideration for an emergency release from custody. Inmates were directed to communicate with their defense attorneys about consideration for a special release from custody since any consideration for a bond reductions or release on their own recognizance "OR" would involve a request for the court to make such an order.

While the jail has severely restricted all inmate contact from outside the facility to include attorneys, investigators, and other professionals, the public video visitation lobby would remain open and accessible to accommodate visits as long as possible. Protocols are being implemented to limit the number of people in the visitation area frequent disinfecting activities will take place several times throughout the visiting day Bischoff said the jail continues to work with defense attorneys to enhance their ability to stay in contact with inmates, even when working remotely outside their normal work space.