



MEASURES AND GUIDELINES AGAINST COVID-19 IN PRISONS

#COVID19INPRISONS

Sociedade Brasileira de Medicina de Família e Comunidade
(the Brazilian Society of Family and Community Medicine - SBMFC)

Work group of Prison Healthcare

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Document developed by the Work Group of Prison Healthcare of the Brazilian Society of Family and Community Medicine (SBMFC) with the objective of guiding health professionals working in the prison system and other professionals to confront with and prevent COVID -19 which drastically affects Brazil and the world and especially the most vulnerable population, living in the corectional facilities and without access to resources and materials to carry out their hygiene properly.

This material was produced in accordance with the guidance of health agencies and scientific evidence and is subject to updates.

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The Brazilian penitentiary system holds more than 725 thousand people living in correctional facilities. These men and women, who are under the responsibility of the federal and state governmental units in the country, live under severe insalubrity in subhuman circumstances of incarceration. Moreover, the penitentiary servants, which include security agents, health professionals, cleaning staff and general services, and the administrative sector workers, are also forced to work under these precarious work conditions. Data from the National Penitentiary Department (Depen), indicate that the majority of the inmates in Brazil is black and with low level of education, living in overcrowded cells. Studies show that the imprisoned population fall ill mostly from infectious diseases, especially pulmonary tuberculosis and HIV. In the face of the current COVID-19 pandemic situation, inmates and penitentiary servants experience a major challenge fighting this disease, which most effective treatment still relies on preventive measures related to personal and public space hygiene, appropriate ventilation and social isolation. Such preventive measures are proven to be almost impossible in the Brazilian penitentiary system. The challenge that our society and prison population now have is to prepare themselves to deal with imminent risks of an outbreak of cases and fatalities.

T.N.: Translated by members of the Voluntary translation of informative materials related to COVID-19 project, offered by NUPEL / UFBA and supervised by professors, Dr. Lucielen Porfirio, Dr. Monique Pfau and MA. Daniel Vasoncelos. Translators: Amanda da Silva Espírito Santo and Ariane Galvão e Silva.



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Concerning the penitentiary servants, Ellaine Oliveira & Paulo Oliveira's (2016) research "O contexto do trabalho prisional, a relação com o sofrimento psíquico e os modos de subjetivação dos trabalhadores penitenciários" (the context of the prison work, its relation to psychological suffering, and the ways of subjectification of penitentiary workers) state that they live in a primordial relationship of suffering. For them, the main connection between the inmates and the society is the penitentiary servants themselves, since they are in direct contact with the inmates. They are responsible for providing inmates' basic rights, such as food; dwelling; medical, social, psychological, and legal assistance; contact with their families, among others. Therefore, difficult working conditions is a situation that comes from suffering conditions. The results of the penitentiary servants' speeches, those who took part of the research, show that the work organization and its lack of proper conditions and structure; the absence of psychological assistance; and the feeling of abandonment by the penitentiary management are the main suffering elements in the work environment. In this regard, the servants' mental healthcare (which includes the penitentiary agents and all health professionals at the facility) is another challenge to be faced by federal states penitentiary management against COVID-19, a situation that cannot be ignored at all.

In the context of freedom deprivation, another challenge that relies on the confrontation against COVID-19 is related to preventing, decreasing and treating psychological problems among the inmates.



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As more restrictive measures are adopted in a context of already imposed restrictions, new limitations caused by the pandemic can be considered extremely punitive. From suspension of visitation — of relatives, lawyers, and religious representatives — to suspension of collective activities — religious services and vocational courses —, these actions contribute to an even more severe inmate isolation, establishing a favourable environment to increase several psychological problems, namely stress, irritability, mood swings, anguish, anxiety, aggressiveness, etc. Concerning family members, we emphasize that the lack of interaction and information about the prisoners' relatives have frequently caused anxiety and agony. This leads us to reflect on strategies to deepen family bonds, even by means of letters or video conferences. Double confinement for those who are in jail is a special situation. Already deprived of their freedom, now inmates are in a second confinement caused by COVID-19. In this sense, we emphasize the need for developing actions in order to take care of the imprisoned men and women's psychological health. Those actions should prevent the spread of mental problems that could cause an overflow of demands for the penitentiary workers as well as for related sectors of the Brazilian municipal and state network (extramural). The spread of mental problems may also cause disastrous consequences to the prison environment, from a psychological outbreak to irritability and hostility that could lead to riots and rebellions. We understand that releasement and non-imprisonment measures play a crucial role in our society.



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They must be enforced as a rule based on constitutional principles, considering that they can even save lives. This can be illustrated by decisions made in some countries and in some Brazilian states. They have adopted practices for releasing inmates who meet the requirement for progression from incarceration, as well as the practice of the guidelines provided on the National Council of Justice (CNJ). These requirements take into account the situation of elderly people, pregnant women, and people who have chronic illnesses, to name a few, according to Recommendation number 62/2020. Therefore, this report presents some measures and guidelines with the purpose of reducing the damages caused by COVID-19 to inmates and penitentiary servants. We focus on the health agents as they play a crucial role in the organization and correct orientations of necessary precautions against this crisis..



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GENERAL MEASURES

Discuss COVID-19 with the whole penitentiary community and its workers: how it spreads, which symptoms might appear, what the risks are, and which precautions are needed and possible;

Deconstruct fake news through a reliable source of information with all the penitentiary community;

Guide professional servers on necessary precautions: how to handle inmates and which situations require the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE);

Discuss the importance of keeping the inmates outdoors (sunbathing) as much as possible, considering even the possibility of moon bathing;

Suspend visitation for at least 30 days to be extended depending on the pandemic progress in the country;

The prison management must provide PPEs to all penitentiary servants and train them on the correct usage;

The prison management must keep personal hygiene supplies (especially water and soap) for every inmate;

The prison management must provide enough hygiene supplies for cleaning all cells and common areas;



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GENERAL MEASURES

Move inmates away from overcrowded cells;

Penitentiary agents must measure the temperature by means of infrared thermometers at every shift change;

Agents must pay close attention to their own respiratory symptoms and to the rise of body temperature. The ones who present respiratory symptoms must not go to work and must inform their conditions to the penitentiary health team;

Maintain all prison facilities areas always cleaned with water and washing powder or bleach, and, if possible, they should be washed at least once a day, including the floor, doors, walls, and bars;

Clean the penitentiary servants' workplace every day (at least once per shift, during the shift change);

Do not touch the bars that separate the areas;

Keep a calm and constructive environment in order to optimize the efforts against the coronavirus; follow the recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO), the Brazilian Ministry of Health, and the State Health Department for practices and precautions with personal hygiene and social behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic;



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GENERAL MEASURES

All professionals must pay attention to hygiene care as they return to their homes (by taking shoes off before going inside, taking a shower and sanitizing personal belongings);

Guide sports activities through a physical education professional, respecting the strategies used against COVID-19;

Do not touch mouth, nose and eyes; Avoid sharing silverware, cups, plates and drinking from plastic bottles; The prison management must ensure drinking water supply for consumption and sanitation of the correctional centres.



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INSIDE THE PRISON MODULES OR UNITS (PRISON POPULATION INTERACTION)

Maintain the floor, the bars and the doors clean, washing daily with water and washing powder or bleach;

Maintain the cells clean, wash the toilet seat with water and washing powder or bleach;

Maintain door, windows and vents open whenever possible;

Keep the fans on while the cells are closed, whenever possible;

Maintain the cell door open whenever possible; Maintain distance of at least 1.5 metre (4 feet); from other people; Do not touch hands nor hug;

Avoid sharing silverware, cups, plates, and drinking directly from plastic bottles;

Always wash hands with soap after coughing, sneezing or touching another person;

Adopt the respiratory hygiene: when sneezing or coughing, always protect the face with the inner elbow;

Keep distance when picking up meals, avoid being close or in agglomerations. It will certainly take longer, but it will be safer for everyone;



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Keep practicing physical activities, respecting the social distancing strategies



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SECURITY AGENTS

Seek information about health and hygiene precautions alongside the penitentiary health team;

Check if there are PPEs in the workplace and ensure the availability of this material with the prison management;

Keep in mind that handcuffed inmates cannot cover their mouth and nose when sneezing and coughing;

Maintain handcuffs, keys and the other daily used collective or individual equipment sanitized with alcohol;

Use proper gloves whenever taking inmates somewhere;

Put surgical mask on the inmates who are going to be taken somewhere;

Monitor the orientations given by the prison healthcare provider or the prison management when it comes to dealing with suspect or actual cases of COVID-19.



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HEALTH WORKERS

Encourage periodic discussions with the team: this pandemic requires anticipation, action planning, and technical and emotional training from the penitentiary community;

Plan strategies to keep the care routine and health programs along with the prison healthcare team, inmates, security agents and the prison management that goes beyond assisting only those confirmed or suspected to have the infection;

Document with the prison management, for the judicial power, the cases who fit in the Recommendation number 62, March 17, 2020, of the National Council of Justice (CNJ) for inmates of higher vulnerability (older than 60 years old with or without morbidity or comorbidity, inmates who present HIV, HBP, MD, pulmonary tuberculosis, sickle cell anaemia, rheumatic diseases, pregnancy, etc.);

Acknowledge, among all the penitentiary servants, who are in the vulnerable group and can have deadly side effects if infected by COVID - 19. Those people must be protected by being away from prison activities, whenever is needed, with a medical certificate;

Highlight that house confinement means the isolation of the most vulnerable people from the consequences of the COVID - 19. This preserves a safer environment for the prison population as well as for the vulnerable inmates with chronic diseases to get infected. It also relieves the health system workload when these people are prevented from getting infected;



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HEALTH WORKERS

Highlight that house confinement can represent more healthcare assistance to those who are imprisoned, in view of the difficulty to take care of them in prison due to overcrowding, physical barriers, lack of security agents to conduct the inmates, among others;

Inform the families or legal representatives of inmates who are suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 about their health condition, creating strategies with the social service.



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