

Press Release

Source: Union of Canadian Correctional Officers–CSN (UCCO-SACC-CSN)

COVID-19

Statement From the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers–CSN

(Montréal, March 30, 2020) — In light of the information confirmed by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and made public by Correctional Service Canada (CSC), UCCO-SACC-CSN would like to state that since the confirmation of the first case of COVID-19 at Port-Cartier Institution on March 25, the union has maintained pressure on the employer to implement necessary measures to protect all of our members and to limit the spread of the virus among other staff and the inmate population.

As of March 29, some of the measures implemented at Port-Cartier Institution have included the following:

- The institution was locked down to prevent any further spread while PHAC and CSC officials conducted contact tracing.
- Only correctional officers who did not have any contact with those who tested positive are reporting for duty.
- Medical staff are taking the temperature of all employees when they enter the institution for all shifts.
- Every correctional officer is provided with a mask, and proper instruction has been given for the safe donning and doffing of this personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Enhanced cleaning protocols were initiated.
- Employees must also change out of their uniforms when leaving the institution and are asked to wash their clothes each day to prevent the virus from spreading indirectly.
- Visits, temporary absences (unless medically necessary), and international/inter-regional transfers remain suspended.
- The two inmates who received positive test results are being quarantined from the general population and treated by health care workers.

These measures, which have been implemented at Port-Cartier, should immediately be initiated in any of our institutions in which a COVID-19 case is confirmed, whether the case involves a staff member or an inmate.

Besides these measures, UCCO-SACC-CSN is demanding that the federal government initiate a different set of criteria for the testing of correctional officers and other critical staff. In order to keep the front lines strong in our institutions, there may be a requirement to test employees who may not be showing symptoms but may have had contact with a confirmed positive individual, as quarantining such asymptomatic employees for a 14-day period may not be operationally feasible.

Inmate Behaviour

The Union of Canadian Correctional Officers–CSN is also calling on the Correctional Service of Canada to educate the inmate population on all recommendations made by PHAC officials. Our institutions must provide guidance on safe distancing, minimizing group gatherings, proper hygiene, and self-isolation techniques to control any potential spread of COVID-19. Such measures will require changes to institutional routines, but certainly need to be taken immediately.

Release of Inmates

The recent call from Senator Kim Pate and other inmate advocacy groups for the immediate release of inmates under the care, custody, and control of the Correctional Service of Canada signals a complete disregard for public safety.

The release of a few inmates would not solve the potential spread of COVID-19 in our facilities; it would only increase the risk for Canadians. We need not look further than the recent tragedy in Quebec involving the murder of a citizen by an inmate on day parole to understand that even inmates on conditional release may pose a threat to society.

The focus must be on changing routines in our institutions to respect social distancing and self-isolation practices to every extent possible. Canada is in crisis, and its citizens are already dealing with a potentially deadly threat. It is irresponsible to introduce further threats into our communities.

About the Union

The Union of Canadian Correctional Officers (UCCO-SACC-CSN) represents over 7400 members in the five major regions of Canada: the Pacific, the Prairies, Ontario, Quebec, and the Atlantic. UCCO-SACC-CSN represents correctional officers in 49 federal institutions.

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