

COVID-19 Update from Hampshire Sheriff Patrick J. Cahillane

December 7th, 2021

Comparing Outbreaks

What a difference science and knowledge can make.

As of 11 am on Tuesday, December 7th, there is one case of Covid-19 inside the Hampshire County Jail and House of Correction. The positive individual remains in quarantine at our facility, appears to have a mild case and is recovering.

We have had two outbreaks of Covid-19 at the jail since the pandemic began in March of 2020 and a comparison of the two, I believe, offers some insight into the efficacy of vaccines and rapid testing.

Our first confirmed case appeared on April 10th, 2020 in a unit housing 25 men. By April 17th, we had 12 confirmed cases. With the help of Cooley Dickinson Hospital we were able to test 23 men who had been living in the housing unit or who had had close contact with one of the positive cases. Those tests, conducted well before Covid testing became more readily available, and roughly nine months before vaccines arrived, revealed eight more positives, all of those asymptomatic. By April 18th, 2020 we had 20 cases total: 12 symptomatic, eight asymptomatic.

In approximately eight days, our Covid positives went from one to 20, and I think there can be little doubt that the testing assistance we received from Cooley Dickinson, which helped us identify those asymptomatic individuals, prevented a much wider outbreak.

All 20 of those men recovered fully and our facility was declared Covid free on May 1st, 2020.

Flash forward to our second outbreak, which occurred 575 days later on November 27th, 2021 when an unvaccinated pre-trial detainee began exhibiting symptoms, was immediately placed in quarantine and subsequently tested positive. Our medical team then administered tests to 28 men who had been living in the same housing unit or who might have had close contact with the positive individual. All 28 of those men tested negative, and of those 28, 14 had been vaccinated.

To recap: Without vaccines and with limited access to testing, one case in early April of 2020 became 20 cases within eight days. With vaccines and with greater access to testing, one case in late November of 2021 remains one case 10 days later.

We currently have vaccination rates of 75 percent for staff and roughly 70 percent for the men in our care. Our medical team is continuing its educational efforts with the goal of vaccinating 100 percent of the people under our roof.

With the holidays upon us, and as we plan to spend more time indoors with family and friends, please do your part to stop this virus and get vaccinated, and boosted if you are eligible. And don't forget to wear a mask and wash your hands.

When we are all protected together, we can all return to normal sooner.

Patrick J. Cahillane
Sheriff, Hampshire County