

A background image showing a microscopic view of COVID-19 virus particles. The particles are spherical with a textured surface and numerous protruding spikes, characteristic of the coronavirus. They are scattered across a teal-to-blue gradient background.

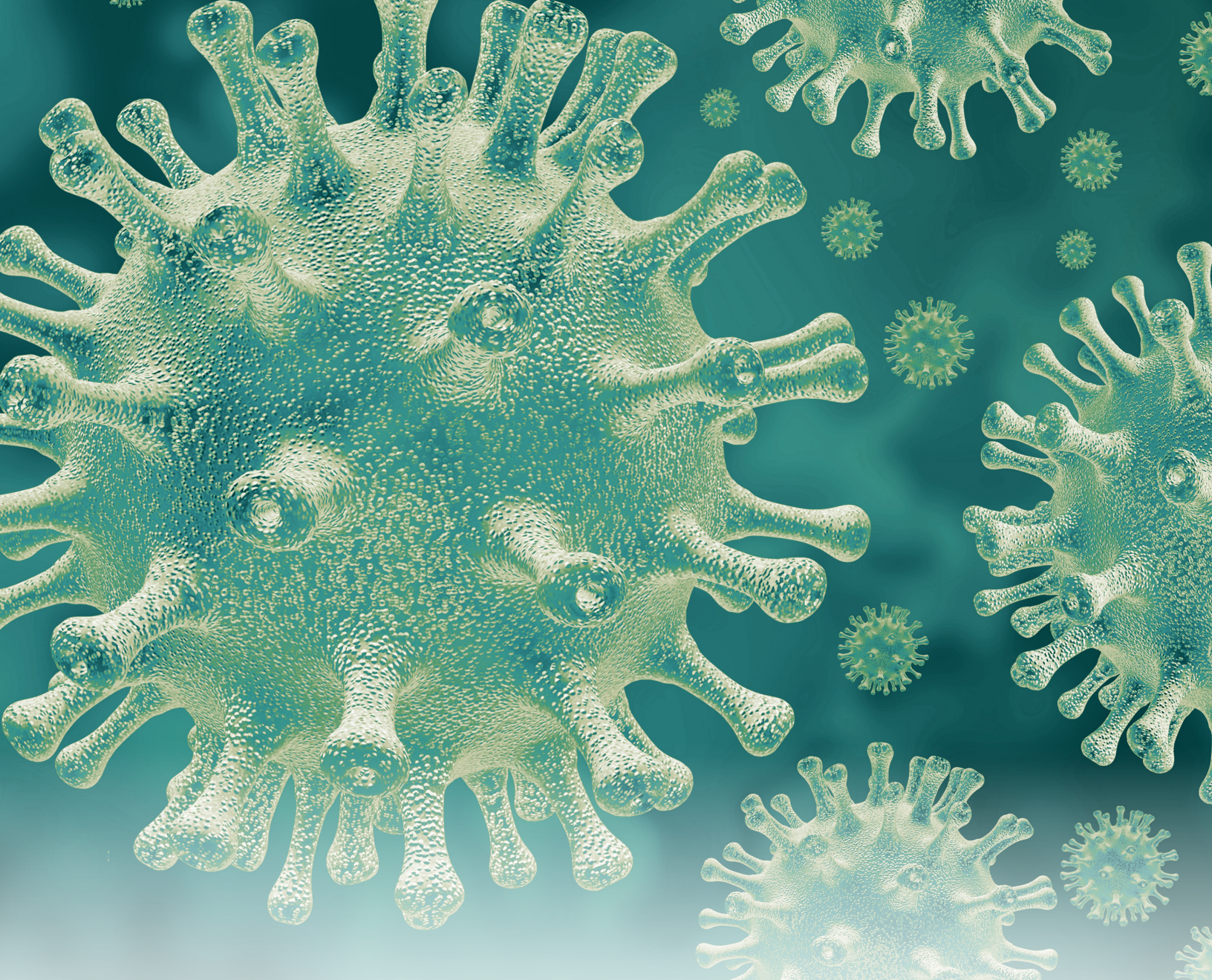
Disarming the Invisible Enemy:

Inside One Jail's COVID-19 Response Playbook

SHERIFF TOM DART

A two-day winter weather advisory was in place for a major snowstorm that was expected to come roaring out of the Rockies. Ultimately, Chicago was spared, leaving only a cloud of fog hanging over city streets on the morning of Friday, January 24, 2020.

Inside the walls of the Cook County Jail, medical professionals were laser-focused on an almost unimaginable threat as they conferred with jail staff about increasing illness screening for incoming detainees. A new pneumonia-like virus that began in China had already spread across Europe. The first case in Illinois had just been diagnosed that day. There was no time to lose.



The outbreak of the coronavirus spread globally with unprecedented force, and the response required power and efficiency. Protocols to handle medical emergencies had been in place at the jail well before my administration with the Cook County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) began in 2006. My office initiated every known precaution for weeks, but the sneaky and silent aspect of COVID-19 delivered challenges we never imagined.

Although the fog lifted that day of the first meeting, the fear of the unknown hung heavy. "When I look back, it feels like the fog of war. We were in a war," said Dr. Connie Mennella, Chairperson of the Department of Correctional Health for Cook County Health, the pro-

vider of healthcare at the jail. "There wasn't COVID-specific guidance on what to do in jails," she continued. "We knew it wasn't if coronavirus was coming to the jail. If it's in the city of Chicago, it's coming to the jail. We leveraged our years of experience in dealing with infectious diseases in the jail and made enhancements and adjustments based on what the medical community was learning about COVID-19 to prepare for the battle."

At the time, no official protocols or guidance existed to help jails with combatting the little-known and deadly virus. Easily transmitted when an infected individual coughed, sneezed, or even talked, confined quarters like jails and prisons were an ideal site for a mas-

sive and uncontrollable outbreak. The risk was compounded when the virus was new—everyone was susceptible, treatment was limited, and asymptomatic spread was possible.

Following that initial January meeting, medical professionals and security staff worked closely to review all aspects of jail management, and protocols were quickly created to identify the infected and to limit the potential spread. Until testing kits were available, staff screened inmates and took their temperatures at intake. Special lanes were designated for detainees released on bond to avoid contact with staff. To ensure that no individual was contagious and either asymptomatic or had not yet shown symptoms, they were placed in a

newly established holding tier where their symptoms were monitored for 14 days.

On March 23, the first two cases were identified among detainees. By early April, the number of detainee cases peaked at 623. As it did outside of the jail walls in the city of Chicago, the virus proved adept at spreading even with key protocols in place.

Fortunately, with a multidisciplinary team empowered to make radical changes to jail protocols and procedures, the virus was quickly put on its heels. By early May, the numbers of new positive cases started to decline. By July, new cases among detainees and employees totaled fewer than 20 each; numbers that even included asymptomatic carriers thanks to a critical and far-reaching testing policy.

It quickly became obvious that testing was the most important element in stopping a spreading virus.

Containment

Testing was critical to our mission. Armed with the knowledge of those who tested positive and where they were housed, we could implement a playbook to reduce the number of cases.

Research conducted by CCSO found that approximately 2,000 detainees would have been infected by April 14 if the virus had spread at the same rate through the jail as it did in the first areas it appeared. Instead, only 398 detained had contracted the virus by that date.

A report issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on July 14 found that the outbreak in the jail had been effectively managed and curtailed. In part, the CDC credited teamwork and communication: "As with other outbreaks in correctional and detention facilities, close cooperation between onsite medical service providers, law enforcement, and local and federal public health officials were critical to the successful containment of COVID-19."

The CDC report credited Cook County Department of Corrections and Cermak Health Services, a division of Cook County Health, with the following aggressive actions to stem the spread of the virus:

- Expansive quarantine and isolation policies.
- Significantly limited detainee and staff movement.
- Single-celled detainees.
- Off-site isolation and quarantine facility.
- Aggressive testing.
- Mandatory use of personal protective equipment (PPE) by staff and detainees.
- Increased cleaning and sanitizing regimens.

The following is a closer look at several key elements of the plan and lessons learned.

Communication

Communication is the cornerstone of survival in any crisis. The CCSO activated the Critical Incident Command Center to serve around the clock as a centralized information source for the COVID-19 response. A dashboard displayed a

daily snapshot about detainees and employees, PPE supply levels, and mitigation measures.

Staff were encouraged to call the center to report any issues with PPE or sanitation equipment and to ask questions about the Quarantine and Isolation tiers in order to rapidly address all problems and concerns. The center also served as a main communication point for local, state, and federal stakeholders and relayed the information to departments within the office. This tracking and documenting of information about infected detainees and employees was used to guide the decisions about future movement and responses.

Messages from the administration to update employees on the number of confirmed cases of both detainees and employees were emailed daily. These emails also communicated information about emergency orders and actions by local and state government and included a public health tip with rotating themes to improve employee morale, such as how to reduce the spread of the virus or hygiene and sanitation procedures for the home and office.

Incident command dashboard

COOK COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
CICC DAILY SNAPSHOT
 COVID-19
 4497
 Tuesday, June 16, 2020
 Prepared by the Critical Incident Command Center v1.0
 133,639 / 6,398

COVID-19 DAILY STATISTICS

	Nationwide CDC		Illinois		[W.H.O.] Globally	
	Infected	Fatalities	Infected	Deaths	Infected	Fatalities
Yesterday	2,085,769	115,644	133,016	6,326	7,823,289	431,541
Difference	+18,577	+496	+623	+72	+118,502	+3,255
Today	2,104,346	116,140	133,639	6,398	7,941,791	434,796

STAFF UPDATES:
 28 staff members are positively confirmed to have COVID-19:
 - 2 Correctional Staff
 - 2 Civilians
 - 2 Dispatches
 - 2 Police
 404 staff members have returned to work. Of this group:
 - 342 Correctional Staff
 - 12 Civilians
 - 28 Dispatches
 - 18 Police
 1498 individuals have called into CICC for COVID related issues.

DETAINEE UPDATES:
 • COVID-19 POSITIVE: 23w DETAINÉES
 524x DETAINÉES
 • COVID-19 Recovered: 54x DETAINÉES
 • COVID-19 PENDING: 34x DETAINÉES
 • COVID-19 NEGATIVE: 327x DETAINÉES
 • COVID-19 REFERRED TO OUTLYING: 0x
 (0x) at Stroger
 • COVID-19 Discharge: 131x DETAINÉES
 • COVID-19 Positive EM: 92x DETAINÉES

QUARANTINED TIERS
 TOTAL INMATES: 169
 DIVISION 5 (1)
 1K
 DIVISION 2 (2)
 Dorm 2 - V, Dorm 3 - HH
 Division 8 (1)
 DIVISION SREEN
 41
 TE
 Division 11 (1)
 BC
 Division 16 (1)
 1C
 RTU / RTU / RTU ANNEX (1)
 3F, 4B

PPE INVENTORY (On-Hand)
 • N95 Respirator Masks = 60,219
 • Face Shields = 7,732
 • Surgical Masks = 388,388
 • Protective Gowns = 80,078
 • Safety Glasses = 7,728
 • Coveralls = 695
 • Medium Gloves = 158,088
 • Large Gloves = 363,778
 • X-Large Gloves = 115,916

ISOLATION AND OBSERVATION
 TOTAL INMATES: 50
 Cermak (2)
 3 South, 3 East
 Outlying Hospitals
 RTU / RTU / RTU ANNEX (1)
 2E, 3A, 3C

Convalescent and 2.0 Tiers
 TOTAL INMATES: 398
 DIVISION 4 - J2
 DIVISION 8 - 2A
 RTU / RTU / RTU ANNEX - 2G, 3G, 3H, 5C
 DIVISION 8 - 1C
 DIVISION 10 - 1A, 1D
 DIVISION 11 - 0A

Alerts / News / Updates

Homeland Security / OEMC Updates / Dept of Health

Messages were broadcast for detainees on televisions throughout the complex about the symptoms of COVID-19, social distancing, no-touch greetings, not touching one's face, proper handwashing techniques, court closures, and how to contact attorneys.

Cermak Health Services educated detainees about symptoms of the coronavirus so they could report any symptoms they observed in themselves or in others. Information was also provided about how to stop the spread of infection through frequent hand-washing and other good hygiene practices.

The CCSO has a longstanding reputation for being accessible and responsive to local and national media inquiries. Managing the massive number of media inquiries during a pandemic added more stress to staff. Correcting false information provided to the media by outside sources was a distraction that took precious time away from the focus on battling the coronavirus.

In keeping with our commitment to transparency and accuracy, COVID-19 case numbers were updated daily on the public-facing website. And in order to communicate with visitors and loved ones, updates about visitation and jail policies and procedures were also posted regularly to the website.

Reducing the Population

While the CCSO cannot unilaterally release detainees, the staff played a critical role in assisting the judicial system in reducing the population to make social distancing in the jail—such as single celling—easier.

Staff utilized their unique understanding of detainee data to identify populations requested by the State's Attorney's Office and the Public Defender's Office to consider for bond reduction. Although the CCSO was always in communication with the other agencies, they excessively increased their outreach. The first daily list was sent starting March

Medical tier at former boot camp barracks



12 when the jail population was approximately 5,600.

Detainees identified on the list included high-risk individuals with underlying health conditions, detainees who were 55 years old and older, and those with low-level charges or low bonds with the inability to pay. By May 18, the population was reduced to 4,090 inmates. Cermak Health Services provided released detainees with educational materials regarding COVID-19 and other important health matters. For example, detainees being treated for substance-use disorders were provided with information on accessing services in the community.

In addition, the CCSO initiated the following:

- All social visits and programs by volunteer groups were suspended in mid-March to reduce the risk of infecting detainees.
- Every detainee received 30 minutes of free calls per week.
- To reduce in-person contact when possible, medical visits and bond court appearances were held by videoconference. In many instances, Cermak staff visited detainees in the housing unit.

- Staff quickly set up technology that allowed detainees to conduct video visits with their loved ones as well as to conduct detainee bond hearings remotely.

Testing, Testing

Asymptomatic and symptomatic testing was added to the new protocols. Every new detainee was tested upon arrival, then placed in isolation housing for 14 days. They were then tested again before being placed in the general population. From March through July 19, more than 6,200 tests were administered. As a result of increased testing, the positivity rate plummeted from 97% in March to less than 10% in May. By mid-July, the positivity rate was less than 1%.

An Illinois-based laboratory developed the first rapid COVID-19 test. Two units were acquired by Cook County Health and deployed on April 13, the first week they were available. The tests ran on an existing, portable platform that could be used in multiple settings. They delivered positive results in 5 minutes and negative results within 13 minutes. The rapid tests were exactly what was needed to quickly manage and assess risk.

On-site employee testing in partnership with The Roseland Community Hospital



“We are fortunate that Cermak is part of a large health system. Having access to the system’s entire portfolio of resources proved to be critical in staffing, supplies, and testing. Cook County Health leadership prioritized the jail from the very beginning, understanding the inherent risks of managing an emerging disease in a congregate facility,” said Mennella.

By May, testing included symptomatic, asymptomatic, intake, and surveillance testing.

Managing Detainee Movement and Spread

To curb the spread of the virus, we needed to limit the movement of people and their interactions. Because the technology already was in place at the jail, we could navigate the complicated task of assigning detainees to the Quarantine and Isolation tiers with less stress.

In the computerized jail management system, detainees were flagged with medical alerts to indicate if they were in quarantine or isolation. A list of these tiers was posted on the CCSO’s intranet site to ensure employees were aware of the designated tiers. Large orange or gold signage marked with a large “I” or “Q” were placed to remind officers of the special designations prior to entering.

For the protection of employees, proper PPE was required for all officers assigned to those tiers, and no officer was required to work within six feet of any detainees. Strict regulations prohibited the movement of any detainee unless there was authorization from the leadership at Cermak Health Services or if there was a medical emergency.

Quantity of Required Supplies to Battle COVID-19

The Sheriff’s Office worked aggressively to obtain priority delivery of cleaning supplies, hygiene supplies, and PPE. Supplies on hand as of June 29:

- 50,446 N95 respirator masks
- 7,828 face shields
- 209,201 surgical masks
- 114,338 disposable coveralls/lab coats
- 6,614 safety glasses and goggles
- 541,401 gloves (includes medium, large, and extra-large)
- More than 5,100 gallons of hand sanitizer
- More than 459,000 bars of soap

Importantly, detainees were provided with additional soap, and the jail provided previously banned hand sanitizer to the tiers. Detainees also received surgical masks and were repeatedly encouraged to wear them throughout the day.

A massive move to single cells was made possible due to the decrease in the population and the expansion of the jail footprint by reopening previously closed buildings. The effort began on March 26 and was complete by April 12.

Protecting Staff

At the beginning and end of every shift, staff temperatures were taken. Employees were also screened for virus symptoms by answering questions on a daily prevention list. If questions about workplace and coworker compliance were answered “no,” they were required to explain the situation in a comment section.

Every day, PPE, hand sanitizer, and cleaning supplies were distributed to all staff, and a hotline was open to order additional supplies. Providing daily information and updates to staff as our understanding of the virus evolved was key to helping them stay safe. Increased sanitation of the facilities was also a major component of the effort.

To offer support, a dedicated PPE team of sworn staff worked in the jail to ensure other staff and the detainees were properly wearing PPE. This team provided education and training to staff, performed a daily inventory, and addressed issues as they arose.

A proactive crisis team offered support and resources for employees who dealt with stressful incidents that affected their mental health. Members of the team were experts in mental health treatment, substance abuse, crisis intervention, and peer support.

The nation’s first on-site mobile testing unit at a jail began with a partnership between CCDOC and The New Roseland Hospital. On the

first day of testing in early April, 140 staff members were tested either by a swab or blood test. By the end of the first week, 555 total tests were complete. The on-site testing was not only convenient for employees, but it also filled a void as community testing options were limited at the beginning of the outbreak in Chicago. This testing site provided answers for the brave frontline employees who battled the pandemic every day. It was made possible thanks to the dedicated staff of The New Roseland Hospital.

As community testing sites increased, the number of employees seeking tests from Roseland decreased. "After testing hundreds of Cook County Sheriff's Office staff, we were pleased to expand testing to the community" said Tim Egan, CEO at The New Roseland Hospital. Nasal swab tests were available each day in limited amounts.

If an employee tested positive but did not require hospitalization, a partnership with a Chicago hotel allowed employees to recover in individual rooms with peace of mind and without fear of infecting their loved ones.

Impact on Staff and Human Resources Response

Flexible sick-leave options for sworn staff were introduced as part of the CCSO's effort to encourage possibly ill or exposed employees to stay away from work. Because of this, more than 1,600 CCSO staff required leave due to COVID-19 issues since March. These employees were either symptomatic, the primary caregiver to someone with COVID-19, or at high risk due to underlying health conditions. Others had close contact with confirmed cases or tested positive themselves. Many staff lost colleagues, family members, or friends. And those who remained healthy had to cover for the hundreds who were absent. An additional 26 staff were added to assist Human Resources (HR).

The HR hours expanded from regular work hours to 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. and 7 days a week. A care center set up by HR made and received thousands of calls throughout the crisis. Wellness checks were made to more than 2,700 correctional staff and civilians who continued working in the Cook County Department of Corrections.

For employees returning to work, HR assured they were compliant with CDC and other local health agency guidelines.

Moving Ahead

"We are not out of the woods and we will remain vigilant," Mennella said. "Understand, COVID still exists in the community. And if it exists in the community, it poses a threat to our environment. But we hope that we can help other settings learn from what we did in the jail."

Now that we have contained the virus in the jail, the environment has settled into a necessary and new normal. Although we are very thankful that we are past a massive outbreak in the jail, we remain on constant guard with a strong defense against the coronavirus. Our jail was one of the first in the nation to resume visits with social distancing. Step by cautious step, we continue to reopen in-person programming, family visits, and volunteer visits.

Technology will continue to play a major role in the new and evolving ways in how we move forward. As our programs restart, most volunteer sign-ups and materials will be contactless to reduce the sharing and passing of pens, papers, and books. Everything we do will be viewed through a public health lens as we remain laser-focused on keeping our detainees and employees safe. ■

Sheriff Tom Dart is dedicated to effecting change, protecting the unprotected, and fighting for social justice. After serving as a prosecutor and state legislator, he decided to run for Cook County Sheriff in 2006 on a promise to advocate on behalf of the most vulnerable and neglected communities among us. He has fulfilled that promise and reduced the number of nonviolent offenders detained at Cook County Jail while spreading awareness nationally of the ongoing criminalization of mental illness. For more information, contact ccso.communications@cookcountyl.gov.

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