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N.J. has tested fewer than 200 state prisoners for coronavirus. Now all 18K could be tested.

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After weeks of delay, New Jersey is moving to test all of the approximately 18,000 state prisoners as well as every prison employee for COVID-19, NJ Advance Media has learned.

Testing could begin this week, and thousands more saliva tests from Rutgers University should arrive next week for both inmates and staff, according to PBA Local 105 President William Sullivan, who said he was briefed by corrections officials Tuesday.

Those details were confirmed by a second corrections source with knowledge of the plans who is not authorized to discuss prison policies publicly and requested anonymity.

Matt Platkin, Gov. Phil Murphy's chief counsel, said at Wednesday's coronavirus briefing that the state was working with Rutgers to test inmates. A letter from the governor's office to the union obtained by NJ Advance Media also acknowledged the adult and juvenile systems were working with Rutgers "to test all staff."

The letter also denied officers' request for hazard pay.

The corrections department did not immediately return a request for comment Wednesday.

The move to expand testing comes as New Jersey grapples with an unprecedented spread of contagion behind bars, which so far has touched more than 500 employees and 141 inmates, though public health experts and prison reform advocates say the virus' real spread is likely much broader.

Testing will begin more than two weeks after authorities at the Essex County jail launched a similar program.

To date, about 1 percent of the prison population — 196 inmates — have been tested, 150 of whom were positive. Twenty-nine inmates and at least two corrections officers have died.

In the letter, Murphy's office told the union Wednesday that while they were "deeply appreciative" of officers' work, the state was "not in a financial position to approve a request for hazard pay."

That denial, coupled with a lack of protective gear and testing, showed that Murphy didn't value officers' lives, Sullivan said in a statement.

“The disappointment and anger for our Governor’s lack of respect is indescribable,” the union president wrote.

A Murphy spokesman declined comment.

Platkin, Murphy’s chief counsel, also said Wednesday that 54 inmates had been temporarily released so far and another 24 were scheduled for home confinement in the near future, as part of the plan to ease pressure behind bars.

Staff writer Joe Atmonavage contributed to this report.