

# Immigration

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By Monique O. Madan

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# Miami Herald

## All incoming ICE detainees at Krome to be tested as coronavirus cases in detention surge | Miami Herald

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Detainees at Krome Processing Center in Miami-Dade and Broward Transitional Center in Pompano Beach have been begging to be released since the coronavirus pandemic started. They say they have no access to professional protective equipment. By Courtesy of Miramar Circle of Protection | Marta Oliver Craviotto

### Immigration inmates say they have no access to masks, gloves amid coronavirus

Detainees at Krome Processing Center in Miami-Dade and Broward Transitional Center in Pompano Beach have been begging to be released since the coronavirus pandemic started. They say they have no access to professional protective equipment. By Courtesy of Miramar Circle of Protection | Marta Oliver Craviotto

Every immigration detainee who gets booked into the Krome detention center in West Miami-Dade will be tested for the coronavirus starting Thursday, immigration officials told a Miami federal judge.

The decision to test detainees at Krome — as well as 21 other U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention centers nationwide — comes as COVID-19 cases surge behind bars. The only centers that have committed to testing new detainees are facilities that are operated by ICE's in-house medical provider, Health Service Corps. About 200 other facilities are operated by third-party contractors and will not be testing detainees at intake.

ICE detailed its new testing protocol in court documents submitted Thursday in an ongoing federal lawsuit filed in April seeking the release of detainees at three South Florida detention centers — Krome, the Broward Transitional Center in Pompano Beach and the Glades County detention center in Moore Haven.

Medical services at BTC are provided by a private company, GEO Group. Services at Glades are provided by the Glades County Sheriff's Office, which runs the facility.

As part of ICE's sworn statement, the agency also revealed that cases of COVID-19 are spreading so quickly at Glades that the facility has been placed on a complete lockdown.

"Due to an increase in positive cases, all detainees are being medically assessed approximately every six hours, four times a day," the agency said, noting that 61 detainees and 11 sheriff deputies have tested positive as of Thursday and that all of the facility's 320 detainees have been exposed to the coronavirus, including one who was sent to the hospital for treatment.

"In light of the laboratory-confirmed COVID positive cases at Glades County detention center, the facility is not accepting new detainees, and the facility is not accepting transfers," Liana J. Castano, ICE's acting officer in charge, told the court.

She added that all exposed detainees have been placed in one housing unit as a "precautionary measure" for 14 days; the quarantine is scheduled to end on June 15. Data show Glades is now among the nation's top 10 detention centers with the most COVID-19 positive cases.

As of Monday, Krome has had 16 detainees and 13 staffers test positive for the coronavirus, and Broward has had 20, ICE told the court. Krome has 37 other people who have been exposed to the virus; Broward has 84.

ICE said that in order to slow the spread at South Florida detention centers, the agency will begin quarantining all detainees together, which the agency calls "cohorting," for two weeks after they arrive at any facility and that both symptomatic and asymptomatic detainees will have their temperatures taken daily. Detainees who refuse testing will be quarantined for two weeks.

"The refusal will be documented," Castano added. "Staff may offer the COVID-19 test again during their cohort period in the event the detainee will reconsider testing. Should a detainee become symptomatic or test positive for COVID-19, the detainee will be monitored and treated by medical staff."

ICE told the court that Krome will also begin testing ICE detainees for COVID-19 prior to deportation as long as the foreign government and the United States have an agreement for such a protocol.

ICE has told the Herald that it will not disclose which countries have requested that testing be done prior to deportation because the situation is very "fluid."

In April, Guatemala created a political firestorm when it suspended deportations from the U.S. until the Trump administration agreed to test all of its migrants before returning them. The announcement was made after health officials reported that at least 70 deported Guatemalan migrants tested positive for COVID-19 upon arrival.

The infections were detected after the Guatemalan health ministry did a random testing of the arriving detainees, all of whom are supposed to be tested by ICE before deportation under a protocol negotiated by the Guatemalan government with the Trump administration.

On Thursday, Ana Patricia Letona, a spokeswoman for the Guatemalan government, told the Miami Herald that the country is refusing to accept ICE deportees “because the U.S. keeps sending over people who have coronavirus, despite their medical records saying otherwise.” The last repatriation flight was May 29.

“Fundamentally, all we are asking is that they do not send us people who have coronavirus or anyone who carries the risk of infecting everyone else,” Letona said. “The problem has been that the deportees have come with negative results in hand but end up testing positive here.”

Letona added that part of the problem has been that ICE has been testing deportees more than 72 hours before the flight.

Last week, the Department of Homeland Security told the Herald that it is using a 15-minute rapid test — called the Abbott ID NOW — to determine if detainees have the coronavirus. The test has been recently scrutinized by the FDA, which cautioned that early data “suggests potential inaccurate results from using the Abbott ID NOW point-of-care test to diagnose COVID-19. Specifically, the test may return false negative results.”

In response to the FDA’s warning, a spokesperson with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement said its health officials were “provided the rapid tests through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.”

The agency also noted that it is testing only a sample of the detainees it is removing from the United States, unless the deportations are to countries with which the U.S. has other arrangements.

According to what ICE told the court Thursday, detainees tested at intake at ICE’s 22 centers are getting the LabCorp SARS-CoV-2 nucleic amplification assay test.



Tour inside Krome Detention Center. Dirty laundry hangs from a bunk in a common living area in building 8. Jose A. Iglesias [jiglesias@elnuevoherald.com](mailto:jiglesias@elnuevoherald.com)

Monique O. Madan covers immigration and enterprise; she previously covered breaking news and local government. Her work has appeared in The New York Times, The Boston Globe, The Boston Herald and The Dallas Morning News. She is currently a Reveal Fellow at the Center for Investigative Reporting. She graduated from Miami Dade College and Emerson College in Boston. A note to tipsters: If you want to send Monique confidential information, her email and mailbox are open. The address is 3511 NW 91st Ave, Doral, FL 33172. You can also direct message her on social media and she'll provide encrypted Signal details.