

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF IDAHO

JASON HARMON,

Plaintiff,

v.

CITY OF TWIN FALLS; TWIN
FALLS COUNTY; IDAHO
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION;
and STATE OF IDAHO,

Defendants.

Case No. 1:20-cv-00525-BLW

**INITIAL REVIEW ORDER BY
SCREENING JUDGE**

The Clerk of Court conditionally filed Plaintiff Harmon's Complaint as a result of Plaintiff's status as an inmate and in forma pauperis request.¹ The Court now reviews the Complaint to determine whether it should be summarily dismissed in whole or in part under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915 and 1915A. Having reviewed the record, and otherwise being fully informed, the Court enters the following Order directing Plaintiff to file an amended complaint if Plaintiff intends to proceed.

1. Screening Requirement

The Court must review complaints filed by prisoners seeking relief against a governmental entity or an officer or employee of a governmental entity, as well as

¹ Plaintiff Harmon was originally a co-plaintiff, along with Michael E. Jackson, in Jackson v. City of Twin Falls, Case No. 1:20-cv-00525-BLW. Plaintiff Harmon's claims have been severed into this new action. See Dkt. 5.

complaints filed in forma pauperis, to determine whether summary dismissal is appropriate. The Court must dismiss a complaint or any portion thereof that states a frivolous or malicious claim, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) & 1915A(b).

2. Pleading Standard

A complaint must contain “a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2). A complaint fails to state a claim for relief under Rule 8 if the factual assertions in the complaint, taken as true, are insufficient for the reviewing court plausibly “to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009). “[D]etailed factual allegations” are not required, but a plaintiff must offer “more than ... unadorned, the-defendant-unlawfully-harmed-me accusation[s].” *Id.* (internal quotation marks omitted). If the facts pleaded are “merely consistent with a defendant’s liability,” or if there is an “obvious alternative explanation” that would not result in liability, the complaint has not stated a claim for relief that is plausible on its face. *Id.* at 678, 682 (internal quotation marks omitted). And, a court is not required to comb through a plaintiff’s exhibits or other filings to determine if the complaint states a plausible claim.²

² Therefore, in its review under §§ 1915 and 1915A, the Court has reviewed only the Complaint found at Dkt. No. 1, not the affidavit attached to the Complaint. *See also* General Order 342, *In Re: Procedural Rules for Prisoner Civil Case Filings and for Prisoner E-Filing Program*, § A(1)(b)-(c) (“No exhibits may be attached to a complaint or any type of amended complaint, except those showing exhaustion of

3. Factual Allegations

Plaintiff is a convicted inmate incarcerated in the Twin Falls County Jail, serving a 120-day sentence for driving while intoxicated. Dkt. 1-1. Plaintiff claims that he is at substantial risk of coronavirus infection because he is in the high-risk category. Plaintiff has serious heart problems, including two holes in his heart. *Compl.*, Dkt. 1, at 3. Plaintiff asserts generally that inmates in jails and prisons are especially vulnerable to the pandemic. *Id.* at 5. However, the Complaint does not provide any specific allegations about Plaintiff's medical treatment, about the conditions in the Twin Falls County Jail that have allegedly created an unsafe environment, or about the response to the pandemic undertaken by jail officials.

4. Discussion

Plaintiff has not alleged sufficient facts to proceed with the Complaint. The Court will, however, grant Plaintiff 60 days to amend the Complaint. Any amended complaint should take into consideration the following.

A. Legal Standards Governing Plaintiff's Claims

Plaintiff brings claims under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, the civil rights statute. To state a plausible civil rights claim, a plaintiff must allege a violation of rights protected by the Constitution or created by federal statute proximately caused by conduct of a person acting under color of state law. *Crumpton v. Gates*, 947 F.2d 1418, 1420 (9th Cir. 1991). To be liable under § 1983, “the defendant must possess a purposeful, a knowing, or

administrative remedies[,] [and] [n]o affidavits may be attached to a complaint or any type of amended complaint.”).

possibly a reckless state of mind.” *Kingsley v. Hendrickson*, 135 S. Ct. 2466, 2472 (2015). Negligence is not actionable under § 1983, because a negligent act by a public official is not an abuse of governmental power but merely a “failure to measure up to the conduct of a reasonable person.” *Daniels v. Williams*, 474 U.S. 327, 332 (1986).

Plaintiff has not sued any individual Defendants, only governmental entities. To bring a § 1983 claim against a local governmental entity, such as Twin Falls County or the City of Twin Falls, a plaintiff must allege that the execution of an official policy or unofficial custom inflicted the injury of which the plaintiff complains, as required by *Monell v. Department of Social Services of New York*, 436 U.S. 658, 694 (1978). Under *Monell*, the requisite elements of a § 1983 claim against such an entity are the following: (1) the plaintiff was deprived of a constitutional right; (2) the entity had a policy or custom; (3) the policy or custom amounted to deliberate indifference to the plaintiff’s constitutional right; and (4) the policy or custom was the moving force behind the constitutional violation. *Mabe v. San Bernardino Cnty.*, 237 F.3d 1101, 1110–11 (9th Cir. 2001).

An unwritten policy or custom must be so “persistent and widespread” that it constitutes a “permanent and well settled” practice. *Monell*, 436 U.S. at 691 (quoting *Adickes v. S.H. Kress & Co.*, 398 U.S. 144, 167–168 (1970)). “Liability for improper custom may not be predicated on isolated or sporadic incidents; it must be founded upon practices of sufficient duration, frequency and consistency that the conduct has become a traditional method of carrying out policy.” *Trevino v. Gates*, 99 F.3d 911, 918 (9th Cir. 1996).

If Plaintiff decides to name an individual in an amended complaint, he should be aware that governmental officials or jail medical providers generally are not liable for damages in their individual capacities under § 1983 unless they personally participated in the alleged constitutional violations. *Taylor v. List*, 880 F.2d 1040, 1045 (9th Cir. 1989); *see also Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 677 (“[E]ach Government official, his or her title notwithstanding, is only liable for his or her own misconduct.”). Section 1983 does not allow for recovery against an employer or principal simply because an employee or agent committed misconduct. *Taylor*, 880 F.2d at 1045.

However, “[a] defendant may be held liable as a supervisor under § 1983 ‘if there exists ... a sufficient causal connection between the supervisor’s wrongful conduct and the constitutional violation.’” *Starr v. Baca*, 652 F.3d 1202, 1207 (9th Cir. 2011) (quoting *Hansen v. Black*, 885 F.2d 642, 646 (9th Cir. 1989)). A plaintiff can establish this causal connection by alleging that a defendant (1) “set[] in motion a series of acts by others”; (2) “knowingly refus[ed] to terminate a series of acts by others, which [the supervisor] knew or reasonably should have known would cause others to inflict a constitutional injury”; (3) failed to act or improperly acted in the training, supervision, or control of his subordinates”; (4) “acquiesc[ed] in the constitutional deprivation”; or (5) engag[ed] in “conduct that showed a reckless or callous indifference to the rights of others.” *Id.* at 1205–09. A plaintiff may also seek injunctive relief from officials who have direct responsibility in the area in which the plaintiff seeks relief. *See Rounds v. Or. State Bd. of Higher Educ.*, 166 F.3d 1032, 1036 (9th Cir. 1999).

Plaintiff asserts that he is at an increased risk from COVID-19 and that, therefore, the conditions of his detention create a substantial risk of serious harm. Because Plaintiff is a convicted inmate, his claims of unconstitutional conditions of confinement are analyzed under the Eighth Amendment, which protects prisoners against cruel and unusual punishment.³

To state a claim under the Eighth Amendment, inmates must plausibly allege that they are “incarcerated under conditions posing a substantial risk of serious harm,” or that they have been deprived of “the minimal civilized measure of life’s necessities” as a result of the defendants’ actions. *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 834 (1994) (internal quotation marks omitted). An Eighth Amendment claim requires the plaintiff to satisfy both (1) an objective standard, “that the deprivation was serious enough to constitute cruel and unusual punishment,” and (2) a subjective standard, that the defendant acted with “deliberate indifference.” *Snow v. McDaniel*, 681 F.3d 978, 985 (9th Cir. 2012), *overruled in part on other grounds by Peralta v. Dillard*, 744 F.3d 1076 (9th Cir. 2014) (en banc).

The Eighth Amendment includes the right to adequate medical and mental health treatment in prison. Jail and prison officials or medical providers can be held liable if their “acts or omissions [were] sufficiently harmful to evidence deliberate indifference to serious medical needs.” *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976).

³ Plaintiff’s claims under the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment are implausible because that clause applies only to the federal government, not to states or local governmental entities.

Regarding the objective standard for prisoners' medical care claims, "society does not expect that prisoners will have unqualified access to health care." *Hudson v. McMillian*, 503 U.S. 1, 9 (1992). Therefore, "deliberate indifference to medical needs amounts to an Eighth Amendment violation only if those needs are 'serious.'" *Id.* The Ninth Circuit has defined a "serious medical need" in the following ways:

failure to treat a prisoner's condition [that] could result in further significant injury or the unnecessary and wanton infliction of pain[;] ... [t]he existence of an injury that a reasonable doctor or patient would find important and worthy of comment or treatment; the presence of a medical condition that significantly affects an individual's daily activities; or the existence of chronic and substantial pain

McGuckin v. Smith, 974 F.2d 1050, 1059-60 (9th Cir. 1992) (internal citations omitted), *overruled on other grounds*, *WMX Techs., Inc. v. Miller*, 104 F.3d 1133 (9th Cir. 1997) (en banc).

As to the subjective standard, "deliberate indifference entails something more than mere negligence, [but] is satisfied by something less than acts or omissions for the very purpose of causing harm or with knowledge that harm will result." *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 835. A prison official or prison medical provider acts with deliberate indifference "only if the [prison official or provider] knows of and disregards an excessive risk to inmate health and safety." *Gibson v. Cnty. of Washoe*, 290 F.3d 1175, 1187 (9th Cir. 2002) (internal quotation marks omitted), *overruled on other grounds by Castro v. Cty. of Los Angeles*, 833 F.3d 1060 (9th Cir. 2016) (en banc). "Under this standard, the prison official must not only 'be aware of facts from which the inference could be drawn that a substantial risk of serious harm exists,' but that person 'must also draw the inference.'"

Toguchi v. Chung, 391 F.3d 1051, 1057 (9th Cir. 2004) (quoting *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 837).

In the medical context, deliberate indifference can be “manifested by prison doctors in their response to the prisoner’s needs or by prison guards in intentionally denying or delaying access to medical care or intentionally interfering with the treatment once prescribed.” *Estelle*, 429 U.S. at 104-05 (footnotes omitted). Medical malpractice or negligence does not support a cause of action under the Eighth Amendment, *Broughton v. Cutter Labs.*, 622 F.2d 458, 460 (9th Cir. 1980) (per curiam), and a delay in medical treatment does not violate the Eighth Amendment unless that delay causes further harm, *McGuckin*, 974 F.2d at 1060. Additionally, there is no constitutional right to an outside medical provider of one’s own choice. *See Roberts v. Spalding*, 783 F.2d 867, 870 (9th Cir. 1986) (“A prison inmate has no independent constitutional right to outside medical care additional and supplemental to the medical care provided by the prison staff within the institution.”).

“If a [prison official] should have been aware of the risk, but was not, then the [official] has not violated the Eighth Amendment, no matter how severe the risk.” *Gibson*, 290 F.3d at 1188. Moreover, even prison officials or medical providers who *did* actually know of a substantial risk to inmate health will not be liable under § 1983 “if they responded reasonably to the risk, even if the harm ultimately was not averted.” *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 844. If medical personnel have been “consistently responsive to [the inmate’s] medical needs,” and the plaintiff has not shown that the medical personnel had

“subjective knowledge and conscious disregard of a substantial risk of serious injury,” there has been no Eighth Amendment violation. *Toguchi*, 391 F.3d at 1061.

Differences in judgment as to appropriate medical diagnosis and treatment between an inmate and prison medical providers—or, for that matter, between medical providers—are not enough to establish a deliberate indifference claim. *Sanchez v. Vild*, 891 F.2d 240, 242 (9th Cir. 1989). “[T]o prevail on a claim involving choices between alternative courses of treatment, a prisoner must show that the chosen course of treatment ‘was medically unacceptable under the circumstances,’ and was chosen ‘in conscious disregard of an excessive risk’ to the prisoner’s health.” *Toguchi*, 391 F.3d at 1058 (alteration omitted) (quoting *Jackson v. McIntosh*, 90 F.3d 330, 332 (9th Cir. 1996)). Stated another way, a plaintiff must plausibly allege that medical providers chose one treatment over the plaintiff’s preferred treatment “even though they knew [the plaintiff’s preferred treatment] to be medically necessary based on [the plaintiff’s] records and prevailing medical standards.” *Norsworthy v. Beard*, 87 F. Supp. 3d 1104, 1117 (N.D. Cal. 2015).

Non-medical personnel generally are entitled to rely on the opinions of medical professionals with respect to the medical treatment of an inmate. However, if “a reasonable person would likely determine [the medical treatment] to be inferior,” the fact that an official is not medically trained will not shield that official from liability for deliberate indifference. *Snow*, 681 F.3d at 986 (internal quotation marks omitted); see also *McGee v. Adams*, 721 F.3d 474, 483 (7th Cir. 2013) (stating that non-medical personnel may rely on medical opinions of health care professionals unless “they have a

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reason to believe (or actual knowledge) that prison doctors or their assistants are mistreating (or not treating) a prisoner”) (internal quotation marks omitted).

A plaintiff cannot simply restate these standards of law in a complaint. Instead, a plaintiff must provide specific facts supporting the elements of each claim and must allege facts showing a causal link between each defendant and Plaintiff’s injury or damage. Alleging “the mere possibility of misconduct” is not enough. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679.

B. Claims Against the Idaho Department of Correction (“IDOC”) and the State of Idaho

Plaintiff complains of county jail conditions, not state prison conditions. Therefore, it is unclear why Plaintiff has named the State of Idaho or the IDOC as Defendants, and Plaintiff’s claims against those Defendants are implausible.

In addition, the Eleventh Amendment prohibits a federal court from entertaining a suit brought by a citizen against a state or state entity absent a waiver of state sovereign immunity. *Hans v. Louisiana*, 134 U.S. 1, 16-18 (1890); *Pennhurst State Sch. & Hosp. v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 100 (1984). Section 1983 does not constitute such a waiver, nor has the State of Idaho itself waived its sovereign immunity from constitutional claims. *Quern v. Jordan*, 440 U.S. 332, 342–44 (1979); *Esquibel v. Idaho*, No. 1:11-cv-00606-BLW, 2012 WL 1410105, at *6 (D. Idaho Apr. 23, 2012) (unpublished). Finally, only a “person” may be sued pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, and a state or state entity is not considered a “person” under that statute. *Will v. Mich. Dep’t of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58,

71 (1989). Thus, the State of Idaho and the IDOC should be omitted from any amended complaint.

C. *Claims against the City of Twin Falls and Twin Falls County*

Plaintiff's remaining claims are asserted against the City of Twin Falls and Twin Falls County, Idaho. As with the State of Idaho and the IDOC, it is unclear why Plaintiff has named the City of Twin Falls as a Defendant—given that Plaintiff is challenging the conditions of detention in the county jail.

Nevertheless, the allegations in the Complaint do not support a reasonable inference that a policy or custom of either governmental entity amounts to deliberate indifference, as required by *Monell*. Plaintiff alleges that, as a result of his state of health and the conditions in the jail, he is at a high risk of being infected by the coronavirus. But Plaintiff does not describe any of those jail conditions or provide any other specific facts in support of his claim. Therefore, Plaintiff has not plausibly alleged that the City or County has acted with objective deliberate indifference. *See Gordon*, 888 F.3d at 1124.

5. Standards for Amended Complaint

If Plaintiff chooses to amend the Complaint, Plaintiff must demonstrate how the actions complained of have resulted in a deprivation of Plaintiff's constitutional rights. *See Ellis v. Cassidy*, 625 F.2d 227, 229 (9th Cir. 1980), *abrogated on other grounds by Kay v. Ehler*, 499 U.S. 432 (1991). Plaintiff must also allege a sufficient causal connection between each defendant's actions and the claimed deprivation. *Taylor*, 880 F.2d at 1045; *Johnson v. Duffy*, 588 F.2d 740, 743 (9th Cir. 1978). "Vague and conclusory allegations of official participation in civil rights violations are not sufficient

to withstand a motion to dismiss” or to survive screening under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915 and 1915A. *Ivey v. Bd. of Regents of Univ. of Alaska*, 673 F.2d 266, 268 (9th Cir. 1982); *see also Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678 (“Nor does a complaint suffice if it tenders naked assertions devoid of further factual enhancement.” (internal quotation marks and alteration omitted)).

Rather, for each cause of action against each defendant, Plaintiff must state the following: (1) the name of the person or entity that caused the alleged deprivation of Plaintiff’s constitutional rights; (2) facts showing the defendant is a state actor (such as state employment or a state contract) or a private entity performing a state function; (3) the dates on which the conduct of the defendant allegedly took place; (4) the specific conduct or action Plaintiff alleges is unconstitutional; (5) the particular federal constitutional provision (or state law provision) Plaintiff alleges has been violated; (6) facts alleging that the elements of the violation are met; (7) the injury or damages Plaintiff personally suffered; and (8) the particular type of relief Plaintiff is seeking from each defendant.

Further, any amended complaint must contain all of Plaintiff’s allegations in a single pleading and cannot rely upon, attach, or incorporate by reference other pleadings or documents. Dist. Idaho Loc. Civ. R. 15.1 (“Any amendment to a pleading, whether filed as a matter of course or upon a motion to amend, must reproduce the entire pleading as amended. The proposed amended pleading must be submitted at the time of filing a motion to amend.”); *see also Forsyth v. Humana, Inc.*, 114 F.3d 1467, 1474 (9th Cir. 1997) (“[An] amended complaint supersedes the original, the latter being treated

thereafter as non-existent.”), *overruled in part on other grounds by Lacey v. Maricopa County*, 693 F.3d 896, (9th Cir. 2012) (en banc); *Hal Roach Studios, Inc. v. Richard Feiner and Co., Inc.*, 896 F.2d 1542, 1546 (9th Cir. 1990) (holding that the district court erred by entering judgment against a party named in the initial complaint, but not in the amended complaint).

Plaintiff must set forth each different factual allegation in a separate numbered paragraph. The amended complaint must be legibly written or typed in its entirety, and it should be clearly designated as the “First Amended Complaint.” Plaintiff’s name and address should be clearly printed at the top left corner of the first page of each document filed with the Court.

If Plaintiff files an amended complaint, Plaintiff must also file a “Motion to Review the Amended Complaint.” If Plaintiff does not amend within 60 days, or if the amendment does not comply with Rule 8, this case may be dismissed without further notice. *See Knapp v. Hogan*, 738 F.3d 1106, 1110 (9th Cir. 2013) (“When a litigant knowingly and repeatedly refuses to conform his pleadings to the requirements of the Federal Rules, it is reasonable to conclude that the litigant simply *cannot* state a claim.”).

ORDER

IT IS ORDERED:

1. The Complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted. Plaintiff has 60 days within which to file an amended complaint as described above. If Plaintiff does so, Plaintiff must file (along with the amended complaint) a Motion to Review the Amended Complaint. If

Plaintiff does not amend within 60 days, this case may be dismissed without further notice. Alternatively, Plaintiff may file a Notice of Voluntary Dismissal if Plaintiff no longer intends to pursue this case.⁴

2. Plaintiff's request for class certification (contained in the Complaint) is DENIED.



DATED: January 6, 2021

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B. Lynn Winmill". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

B. Lynn Winmill
U.S. District Court Judge

⁴ A voluntary dismissal under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(a)(1) is not a dismissal for frivolity, for maliciousness, or for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted and, therefore, does not count as a "strike" under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).