



THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PRISONS AND JAILS

The United States holds 2.3 million people in involuntary confinement, including 2.2 million adults and 44,000 youths in corrections.

Protecting detained and incarcerated people from COVID-19 is a critical public health priority that will also benefit community health more broadly.

PRISON

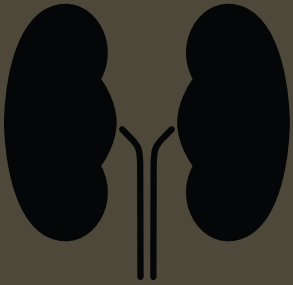
An institution for confinement of persons convicted of serious crimes.

VS

JAIL

Such a place for the confinement of persons awaiting trial or those convicted of minor crimes.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?



Overcrowding in dormitory-style housing or in small double or triple-occupancy cells, inadequate ventilation, and insufficient hygiene can increase the risk of COVID-19 spread.

Prisons and jails also experience a daily influx of individuals which poses great risk for the spread of infection between facilities and surrounding communities.

In addition, physical and emotional responses to being in involuntary confinement may weaken the immune system; for example, involuntary confinement is stressful and poor sleep is common.

WHO IS AT RISK?

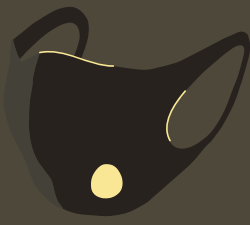


Known predictors of COVID-19 severity and fatality include age and underlying comorbidities. As the prison population is aging, with 11% of the population being aged 55 years and older, this amounts to 165,000 people at even greater risk for suffering from COVID-19.

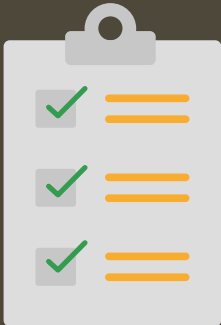
Additionally, prisons operate at or above capacity and many are understaffed. Should COVID-19 infect residents and staff, identifying the housing, staff, and equipment needed for effective quarantining will be challenging.

Lastly, there are 750,000 people held in US jails on any given day. Pretrial detainees being held in jail tend to remain in jail due to inability to afford bail. People of color and people with low incomes are disproportionately affected by bail practices as they tend to be discriminatory, with Black and Latino men receiving higher bail amounts than White men for similar crimes.

MOVING FORWARD



Because prisons and jails are so uniquely vulnerable to outbreak, it is important for these agencies to adopt stringent, evidence-based infection control policies and practices.



It may be vital in the long run to develop national guidelines for fundamental environmental health in correctional facilities however clear and enforceable pathways are needed immediately for people who are already incarcerated.

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Sources:

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Barnert E, Ahalt C, Williams B. Prisons: Amplifiers of the COVID-19 Pandemic Hiding in Plain Sight. Am J Public Health. 2020;110(7):964-966. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2020.305713

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