



COVID-19 Outbreaks in Jails and Prisons are Spreading – Action is Needed

Many of our nation's jails and prisons have now become hot spots of COVID-19 infections. Similar to nursing homes, prisons and jails are places where the virus can easily spread, exposing people detained or working there and, in turn, their families and communities.

- According to [The New York Times](#), 8 out of 10 of the biggest outbreaks in the nation are now in jails or prisons.
- The [number of infections](#) in prisons quadrupled during the week of April 22 alone.
- The latest count published by [The Marshall Project](#) has approximately 9,500 infections among people detained and 3,950 infections among staff in prisons. The actual number is most likely much higher given how little testing is occurring inside prisons and the lack of reporting from many states and the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

[Public health experts](#) are now saying that with so many incarcerated people infected, it is inevitable that the virus will spread to nearby communities, as well as put even more strain on nearby health systems. There are key solutions that can be taken in states to stem [this spread of Coronavirus that is already reaching into surrounding communities](#). State governments must take urgent action to accelerate testing in correctional facilities and safely reduce incarceration.

As part of the [#StopTheSpread Action Plan](#), the [Alliance for Safety and Justice](#) has highlighted five ways to safely reduce incarceration right now.

1) Release People Most At-Risk to COVID-19: Elderly, People with Medical Conditions.

The people most at-risk of contracting COVID-19 and getting seriously ill are the elderly, and people with serious health conditions or who are immunocompromised. They pose practically no risk to public safety and there are more effective and less costly options to incarceration. Research demonstrates that recidivism rates drop to approximately 2 percent in people ages 50 to 65 years old and to almost zero percent for those older than 65 years old. To #StopTheSpread, people who are older or have medical conditions should be released.

2) Release People Slated to be Released Soon Anyways or Who Would be Better Served Elsewhere.

If someone has served most of their sentence, and are coming home in a few months, there is virtually no public safety benefit to keep them in prisons and jails any longer. There is a public health benefit to releasing them sooner to reduce the likelihood of their contracting COVID-19 before that impending release. People who are incarcerated for other technical reasons, such as failure to pay or appear, also should be released to #StopTheSpread. People who are either close to the end of their sentence, or could safely serve their sentences outside of correctional facilities, should be released from jails and prisons to limit the risk of COVID-19's spread.

3) Expand Alternatives to Incarceration.

The use of alternatives to arrests and incarceration in cases that have no risk to public safety can be expanded to safely reduce incarceration. Courts and law enforcement officials should utilize the range of options that will avoid unnecessarily exposing people to COVID-19 from their cycling in and out of crowded jail and prison facilities (i.e. home confinement, treatment, etc.).

4) Prevent People on Probation or Parole from Unnecessary Incarceration.

While there are more than 2 million people sentenced to prisons and jails, over 4.5 million people are on probation or parole. For those who have been compliant and/or are at low risk to recidivate, supervision should be terminated. Incarceration should no longer be a response to technical violations of supervision, such as missing a meeting, and penalties for violations that are dependent on financial stability (i.e. maintaining employment) must also cease during this time of economic hardship. In-person supervision meetings should be converted to virtual/phone check-ins to prevent people on supervision from traveling to meetings in cramped offices that increase the risks of contracting and spreading Coronavirus.

5) Support Reentry Programs to Ensure People Successfully Exit System & Return to Communities.

It has never been more important to make sure that when someone leaves a prison or jail, they have help finding safe housing, connections to health services, treatment, and other support. Before Coronavirus, approximately 20,000 people per day were released from jails and prisons. Reentry programs that help people exiting the justice system return to communities are essential services to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and make communities safer. States must support their designation as essential, and ensure they have the necessary virus protection and support to continue safely serving people. The strength of reentry programs is now more vital than ever to #StopTheSpread.

For more information on #StopTheSpread, visit www.ensuringsafety.org.