

Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic

Last update: June 01, 2020

Newest page updates:

- Since a March 25th executive order, Colorado has released 290 people early from state prisons. (See [prison releases](#) section.)
- In North Dakota, the Cass County Jail population dropped 30% and the Stutsman County Jail population dropped 50% since mid-March. (See [jail releases](#) section.)
- Only three states have not suspended medical co-pays for people in state prisons: Nevada, Hawaii, and Delaware. (See [medical co-pays](#) section.)

Can't find what you're looking for on this page?

See our [main coronavirus page](#) for other resources.

Prisons and jails are [amplifiers of infectious diseases](#) such as the coronavirus, because social distancing is impossible inside and movement in and out of facilities is common. But criminal justice officials have the power to prevent coronavirus deaths.

On this page, we're tracking which state and local governments are taking meaningful steps to protect people behind bars (and the general public). We've also published a [detailed guide to what the criminal justice system should be doing](#), as well as [several other resources](#) about the coronavirus in prisons and jails.

Jails releasing people

Jails and prisons house large numbers of people with chronic diseases and complex medical needs who are [more vulnerable](#) to COVID-19.

One of the best ways to protect these people is to reduce overcrowding in correctional facilities. **Many jails are already making these changes:**

- On April 6th, California set an statewide emergency bail schedule that [reduced bail to \\$0](#) for most misdemeanor and some low-level felony

Visited on 06/02/2020

- offenses. Since then, California jail populations have dropped. In Los Angeles County and Sacramento County, jail populations have decreased by over 30%. Orange County's jail population has dropped by almost 45%, while other counties — including San Diego, San Mateo, and Stanislaus — have released hundreds of people held pretrial. (May 27)
- In North Dakota, the Cass County Jail population has declined by over 30% since mid-March, and the Stutsman County Jail population has dropped by about 50%. (May 26)
 - Following an April 5th order from the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, which authorized the release of people held in jails pretrial for “nonviolent” offenses and those held on technical probation and parole violations, both the Plymouth County and Norfolk County jails have reduced their populations by around 20%. The Bristol County jail population, meanwhile, has decreased 11% since April 5th. (An April 14th story previously reported that 300 people held in jails across the state had been released as a result of the court order.) (May 20)
 - In Colorado Springs, Colorado, the El Paso County Jail population has dropped by about 30% from February to May. News reports are unclear about how the county achieved these population cuts. (May 20)
 - In Miami-Dade County jails, in Florida, the jail population has reportedly dropped from about 4,000 people before the pandemic to about 3,200 people -- about a 20% decrease in the average daily population. This reduction is the result of efforts by “lawyers and judges.” (May 19)
 - In March, Ohio courts in Cuyahoga County (Cleveland) and Hamilton County began to issue court orders and conduct special hearings to increase the number of people released from local jails. Since March 10th, the Cuyahoga County jail has released about 900 people, reducing its population by more than 30%. (May 13)
 - The Northwestern Regional Adult Detention Center in Virginia has reduced the jail population by about 20% from the daily average of the past 5 years. Most people who were released were placed on probation. (April 29)
 - In Charles County, Maryland, people have been released from jail following recent bail hearings and people serving short weekend sentences,

Prisons releasing people

and the jail is now reportedly “at less than 30% capacity.” A county public defender reports that of the 60 motions for release that he has filed, 30 people have been released as of April 28th when compared to local jails, as we explain in a May 1st Florida jail population has dropped by up to 60% over the past few weeks, but the jail has reported that for weeks now, the number of people held in the jail has remained at the same level as before the pandemic. (April 26)

Prisons are also releasing people in response to the pandemic. **taking steps to reduce the prison population** in the face of the pandemic.

- level” offenses have reportedly helped drop the jail population by
- The Colorado Department of Corrections has released 290 people following the March 25th executive order from the governor, which gave the DOC authority to release people within 180 days of their parole eligibility date. In April reports suggested that “hundreds” of people could be eligible for early release. (May 29)
- Maricopa County, Arizona, reduced the jail population since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic from an average of 7,500 to 5,300 people on April 24th (almost a 30% reduction). (April 27)

Visited on 06/02/2020

- [The Ohio State University's Deputy Director of the Office of the Warden is 60 years old and has been in the job for 10 years. He is a former police officer and has worked for 30 years for the state of Ohio. He is a member of the Ohio State Bar Association and has been a member of the Ohio State Bar Association for 20 years. He is a member of the Ohio State Bar Association and has been a member of the Ohio State Bar Association for 20 years.](#)
- [The New York State Office of the Attorney General has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The Illinois State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The Michigan State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The California State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The Texas State's Department of Criminal Justice has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The Florida State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The Pennsylvania State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The Washington State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The Arizona State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The Colorado State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The Nevada State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The Utah State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The Idaho State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The Montana State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The Wyoming State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The New Mexico State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The Alaska State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)
- [The Hawaii State's Department of Corrections has announced that it will be reviewing the state's bail laws to determine if they are appropriate for the current situation.](#)

Eliminating medical co-pays

In most states, incarcerated people are expected to pay \$2-\$5 co-pay for physical visits, medications, and testing. Because incarcerated people typically earn 14 to 65 cents per hour, these charges are the equivalent of charging a free-world worker \$200 or \$300 for a medical visit. The result is to discourage medical treatment and to put public health at risk. In 2019, some states recognized the harm and eliminated these co-pays. We are tracking how states are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- [The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ordered that people held pretrial for non-violent offenses and those held for technical probation/parole](#)
- [In Louisiana, according to the judge, state determine if they more people from local jails on personal bonds \(about 50% more often than usual\), focusing](#)
- [Kept only 100 people with health issues on a charge of non-violent offense from 186 in the jail system of felonies! The state also plans to](#)
- [District 74 to pay in San Francisco, California and British Columbia to take steps to release people held pretrial, with limited time left on their sentence, and charged with non-violent offenses. \(March 11 and March 16\)](#)
- [Read 40+ more entries](#)

Visited on 06/02/2020

- In Wisconsin, the Department of Corrections released 1,000 people held on probation or parole detainers (i.e. for a probation or parole violation). (April 1)
- 2) States that have suspended all co-pays for incarcerated people in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. States that have suspended all co-pays for incarcerated people in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. States that have not made any changes in their co-pay policy regarding COVID-19 pandemic.
- In the month of March, the West Virginia Division of Corrections and Rehabilitation released 100 people from prison respiratory or COVID-19 related or COVID-19 symptoms. The policy changes in the state regarding COVID-19 pandemic.
- Releases included people who were serving short prison terms for parole-related sanctions, and some people who were eligible for weekend furloughs have had their furloughs extended to two weeks. (April 1)
- California: The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) announced on March 31 that it would expedite the transition to parole for 3,500 non-Morongo offenders with 60 days or less left on their sentences, with priority going to individuals with less than 30 days left. (March 31)
- Montana: The Montana Board of Pardons and Paroles has begun to review approximately 700 people for early release. They are considering people serving time for non-violent offenses who are within 180 days of completing their prison sentences (or of their tentative parole date). (March 31)
- In New York, Governor Cuomo announced that up to 1,100 people who are being held in jails and prisons across the state may be released with community supervision. (March 27)
- The Utah Department of Corrections has recommended over 80 people for release from state prisons to the Board of Pardons and Parole. The DOC reports that the people referred for release are within 90 days of completing their sentences. (March 26)
- The Director of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections is submitting weekly lists of people being held on low bail amounts to the public defender's and attorney general's offices for assessment in efforts to have them released. (Rhode Island is one of a handful of states that do not have jails, meaning that pretrial detainees are held in prisons.) The state DOC is also evaluating people with less than 4 years on their sentences to see if they can apply good time and release them early. (March 23)
- In Illinois, the governor signed an executive order that eases the restrictions on early prison releases for "good behavior" by waiving the required 14-day notification to the State Attorney's Office. The executive order explicitly states that this is an effort to reduce the prison population, which is particularly vulnerable to the COVID-19 outbreak. (March 23)
- Read 20+ more entries

Reducing the cost of phone and video calls

Most federal prisons, state prisons and many local jails have decided to drastically reduce or completely eliminate friends and family visitation so as to reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure in facilities. In normal times, we would point to the significant evidence that sustained meaningful contact with family and friends benefits incarcerated people in the long run, including reducing recidivism. But it is even more important, in this time of crisis, for incarcerated people to know that their loved ones are safe and vice versa. While many facilities have suspended in-

Visited on 06/02/2020

person visitation, only a few have made an effort to supplement this loss by waiving fees for phone calls and video communication. Here are two notable examples:

- The Federal Bureau of Prisons has made phone calls and video calls free. Access to these communication services is likely limited by facility-specific policies, lockdowns, and availability of video calling equipment. (April 14)
- Shelby County, Tennessee suspended jail visitations, but to maintain these vital connections between families, they are waiving fees for all phone calls and video communication. (March 12)
- The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) is providing free calls on three days each week (although there may be time limits imposed by individual facilities). (March 31)

Other jurisdictions have implemented cost reductions that - while better than nothing - still severely restrict contact between incarcerated people and their loved ones:

- The Utah Department of Corrections is giving people in prison 10 free phone calls per week, with each call limited to 15 minutes. (Calls that go beyond the 15-minute limit will incur charges.)
- Prisons in Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Vermont, and Pennsylvania are offering residents even smaller numbers of free calls per week. The same is true for jails in Middlesex County, Massachusetts; Harris County, Texas; and Montgomery County, Ohio.

Help us update this page

If you know of notable reforms that should be listed here, please let us know at virusresponse@prisonpolicy.org. We won't list everything, but we appreciate what you can send us.
