

America's county jails detain approximately 11 million individuals every year, or about 750,000 people each day. Jails present a significant risk of community transmission because of their high rates of turnover, as individuals are booked, detained for a brief period, and then released. Jails also present transmission challenges because of the inability of incarcerated people to maintain safe social distancing.

Information about infection and mortality rates in jails has been relatively limited, but at its third meeting, the Commission was presented with findings from a sampling of jails – 375 facilities across 39 states. [The study](#), conducted by [Anna Harvey](#) and [Orion Taylor](#) of the [NYU Public Safety Lab](#), was based on 14 million daily jail population records collected between Jan. 1 and July 20.

## Findings

- Jail populations began to decrease immediately after the issuance of the White House Coronavirus Guidelines on March 16, reaching a 31% average decrease by May 2.
  - The decreases in jail populations between March 16 and May 2 were achieved both through reductions in admissions as well as releases.
- There were significant differences among jurisdictions in the average jail population decreases, which ranged from 9% to 66%.
- The population declines were accompanied by changes in the makeup of jail populations.
  - As the population dropped, there were increases in the proportion of people in jail who were booked on felony charges, who were male, who were 25 or younger, and who were Black. These changes in the population composition persisted even as jail populations began to rise.
  - After March 16, people released from jail were 34% more likely to be booked on felony charges and had been detained for 71% longer than those released just prior to that date.
- Despite the changes in the population makeup, there were no differences in 30-, 60-, or 90-day rebooking rates for those released after March 16, compared to those released earlier.
- Generally, rebooking rates for jailed individuals released after March 16 remained below

pre-pandemic rebooking rates. This was true for felonies as well as misdemeanors.

- Between May 2 and July 20, jail populations rose again, by 12% on average, despite steep increases in new COVID-19 cases in local communities.

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