

More than 1.3 million people in the U.S. are incarcerated in state and federal prisons, and COVID-19 has created significant problems for correctional facilities. One of the greatest challenges is the inability of incarcerated people to maintain safe social distancing because of their confinement in small shared spaces. As of mid-August, correctional facilities represented 19 of the top 20 clusters of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the U.S. By Sept. 1, UCLA's COVID-19 data project had reported that more than 155,000 COVID-19 cases and more than 1,000 deaths among people working and housed in state and federal prisons.

At its third meeting, the Commission was presented with [a study of COVID-19's impacts on prisons](#) authored by [Kevin Schnepel](#), an assistant professor of economics at Simon Fraser University. The report, based on data through Aug. 19, 2020, found that COVID-19 prison cases increased rapidly in July and August, growing at a faster rate than cases in the general U.S. population.

## Findings

- On average, the COVID-19 **mortality rate** within prisons (61.8 deaths per 100,000 people in prison) was twice as large as the mortality rate for the general population, after adjusting for the sex, age, and race/ethnicity of those incarcerated. Note: This disparity is 60% higher than a comparison using an unadjusted population mortality rate.
- The rate of COVID-19 **cases** reported by state and federal prisons in the U.S. (7,000 cases per 100,000 people in prison) was more than four times the rate of confirmed cases per 100,000 U.S. residents. Note: This rate is not adjusted for sex, age, and race/ethnicity.
- There were substantial differences among states in the rate of prison cases and deaths.
  - Seventeen states reported COVID-19 case rates for prisons that were five times higher than the rates for the general state population.
  - Five states reported mortality rates that were more than eight times higher than adjusted state rates. One state, Arkansas, reported a prisoner mortality rate that is nearly 20 times the adjusted state rate.
  - Among large correctional systems, Ohio had a prison mortality rate that was about 11 times the adjusted state rate, Texas reported a prison mortality rate that was about three times the state rate, and California's prison death rate was about

twice the state rate.

- Fourteen states reported zero COVID-19 deaths within their prisons, and six states reported COVID-19 death rates below adjusted state mortality rates.
- The highest COVID-19 mortality rates have been seen in large prisons (over 1,000 people) and in prisons located in the Midwest. Overall, large facilities accounted for 83% of total cases and 87% of total deaths.

[Read the Report](#)