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**JHA COVID-19 Prison  
Survey Comment  
Report**



# Perceptions and Experiences from People inside Prison during the Pandemic

**Section: Hygiene**

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# Overview

JHA's COVID-19 Prison Survey Comment Report presents information from comments shared in response to [JHA's COVID-19 survey](#), contextualized with survey data and other information. This survey was responded to by 16,351 people incarcerated in IDOC in late April and early May 2020.

This section of the report summarizes people's comments regarding hygiene. This is one of 12 sections reflecting the comments JHA received from people in prisons; the report's Executive Summary and all other sections can be found on our website [www.thejha.org](http://www.thejha.org).



## Hygiene

**P**rior to COVID-19, prisoners in IDOC frequently reported insufficient hygiene provisions. Of the 12,780 people who responded to [prior JHA surveys](#) at 21 facilities between April 2018 and May 2019, 78% of people reported they were dissatisfied with IDOC's provision of hygiene items. Due to the pandemic, IDOC is now providing some additional supplies. We hope that greater attention to these issues can yield better results in the future.

This section includes the following subsections:

- Soap
- Hand Sanitizer
- Covering Coughs & Sneezes
- Access to Showers
- Laundry
- Toilet Paper
- Haircuts & Razors



## SOAP

Prevention guidance for COVID-19 includes following good health practices such as washing hands often. The majority of people (61.2%) reported in [JHA COVID-19 surveys](#) that they had enough soap for regular hand washing, while 34.8% (5,493 people) reported they did not. However, in another question, almost all people (97.2%) reported they followed good health practices and washed their hands often. The majority of people, however, either felt that others around them did not wash their hands often (29.3%) or were unsure what others were doing (44.1%), as in the case where people were locked down in cells and could not see what those around them other than cellmates were doing. Some people commented expressing concerns about others' hygiene.

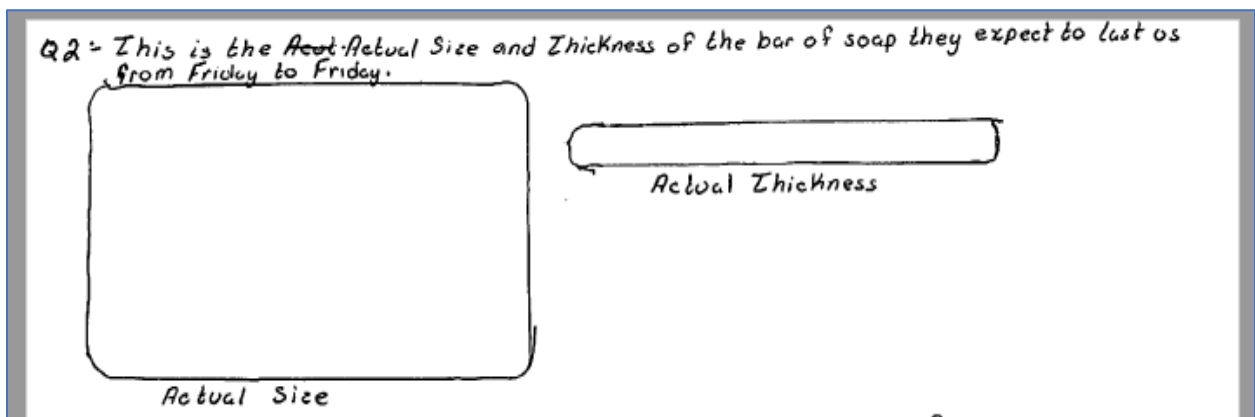
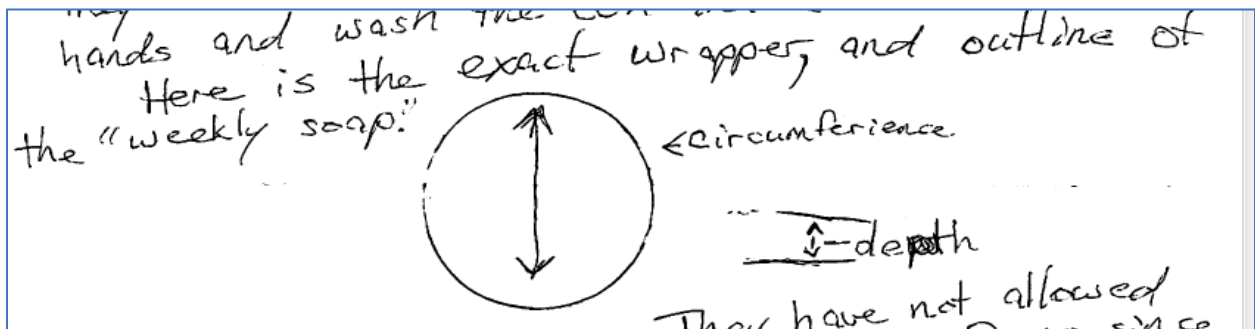


Specific reports of soap distribution by IDOC at various places and times have varied. In several cases and at many facilities, people reported that soap distribution had not started until shortly prior to survey distribution, mid-to-late April.

*The prison hasn't provided any hand soap until April 28 and even then you have to be friends with guards or porters. – Graham*

Several people describe the distributed soap as “hotel size.” Typically, in hotels, soap would be provided for a one-night stay and refreshed daily as needed.

*State soap issued has gotten real, real small. The size of a half dollar coin. – Menard*



IDOC has represented that two 1.5-ounce bars or one 3-ounce bar were distributed to every incarcerated person weekly, and has made public its [inventory information](#) and a [representative distribution checklist](#). However, just as demonstrating the existence of a policy on paper is not

equivalent to showing the policy in fact is practiced, presenting a point-in-time inventory or distribution list of soap is not equal to showing how people were and are being supplied with soap across a massive prison system over time.

Some soap has been donated by community members to prisons. It was unclear how donations factored into supplies and what tracking of use was being performed. JHA again recommends public accounting for donated goods.

Many people commented that the small soap bars do not last long, usually only a day or two. However, as noted in the Laundry and Cleaning sections of this report, many people reported having to use bar soap for multiple purposes to try to keep themselves and their living quarters clean.

*I haven't been to store since March and I was only given one soap. – Pontiac*

*We were allowed to purchase 6 bars of soap. This is nowhere near enough soap when you have to constantly wash your hands, body, and clothes and sheets. – Menard*

Additionally, people reported different levels of access to commissary and limits on what they could buy, as discussed in the Commissary section of this report. People who indicated they did not have enough hygiene products often commented about limited access to commissary, on the fact that they could not afford to buy things on commissary, and on irregularity regarding issuance of indigent hygiene kits. **JHA recommends IDOC review and conform practices and make public expectations of when and what hygiene supplies people will be provided with when they lack funds on their accounts.**

*Asking for soap to wash hands only to be denied. Guards would tell me 'you bought some' well I bought 2 bars and only get to shop once a month, so if I use my 2 bars how do I clean myself in the shower? My wife called up to complain saying 'website shows they are suppose to give it to you' but they don't. Begging and hoping for a bar on Sundays only, only to not get any. – Graham*

*Commissary restrictions is too little to sustain for weeks and should be raised (or more exceptions granted, so hygiene doesn't affect ones spending limit). Some people would rather eat than be clean and sacrifice their hygiene as a result! – Illinois River*

There were some comments that soap was only provided on request and at times only after insistent, repeated requests or after grievances were filed. We believe, as good hygiene protects everyone, items should be proactively distributed.

*Asking for soap and toilet paper from staff is made hard for us. They act like it's coming out of their paycheck. – Vandalia*

People in dorms with shared bathrooms often commented that soap dispensers were unavailable or not kept full. Logan administrators responded to this concern raised in survey responses that the dispensers were checked twice every shift and these checks are documented at the end of every shift in a report submitted by the shift supervisor. Some in dorm settings reported that they were not individually supplied with soap and not enough soap for all the people in the area was made available. Some acknowledged that other prisoners hoarded such available supplies.

At Logan, someone pointed out, “*Our handwashing bulletin says to use paper towels to turn off the sink. We are not ever given paper towels.*” Logan administrators responded that paper towels were issued upon request from security staff. People at other facilities also commented on the lack of availability of paper towels.

Some people expressed concerns about soap not being antibacterial. Again, it is important for IDOC to clearly communicate what the public health officials recommend and what is expected to be available. CDC guidance does not suggest antibacterial soap is necessary; rather, good hand washing technique is stressed.

In comments some people wrote that plumbing issues also limited their access to hand washing. Additionally, people commented about specific areas where handwashing was not available to them, including some dayrooms, yards, dining areas, and in some healthcare settings. Other jurisdictions quickly created additional handwashing stations for such areas, and Illinois Correctional Industries has produced some. In such situations, where hand washing is unavailable, use of hand sanitizer also should be considered.



## Hand Sanitizer

*Still no hand sanitizer for us*

Although there were no survey questions specifically pertaining to hand sanitizer (this was because when the surveys were created, it was unclear what hygiene provisions were expected), many prisoners commented about the lack of hand sanitizer, as did some staff in [staff surveys](#). People again noted they had seen a bulletin that suggested hand sanitizer would be provided when it was not, which was confusing to them. Some reported they could purchase sanitizer without alcohol on commissary, although others reported all hand sanitizer available through commissary was sold out. CDC guidance recommends at least 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

*Yard COs spray our hands with sanitizer going out of the cell house, before we go on yard, and once we come off yard.* – Western

*Sanitizers are supposed to be brought around before every meal, mail, medication and for any item passed through the bars, and it is not.* – Stateville

*They have one hand sanitizer dispenser on the wall in the foyer of each building... but porters steal the liquid and refill with other substances. So it's not even effective for its purpose.* – Centralia

*There is a hand sanitizer dispenser in the foyer - empty for 2 weeks now. I asked and was told someone might drink it.* – Lawrence

*The dept issued a memo dated 4/17 instructing us to use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, but the hand sanitizer they sell here is alcohol free and they refuse to sell any alcohol-based products despite their memo.* – Danville

*It took a while before staff started wearing PPE's and issuing caustics and hand sanitizer to the general population, but now these things are available upon request.*  
– Danville

*They put up soap and sanitizer dispensers, but they are negligent in keeping them full.*  
– Robinson

*We have never been given sanitizer and if it is delivered to the housing unit it is kept in the staff's area.* – Jacksonville

*They did put up a soap dispenser and hand sanitizer, but there's days they will be empty and bring it up to staff, they just laugh and shrug.* – Southwestern

*No hand sanitizer is placed in the pumps we have in the entry ways to the houses nor any major areas but chapel.* – Graham

*IDOC is selling us alcohol free hand-sanitizer on commissary. They are not giving it to us like they tell you. The officer has one bottle of hand sanitizer in the control room, and you can ask him for 'one use' of hand sanitizer during your two-hour dayroom period. We are locked in the cell the other 22 hours per day, so you don't have access to use it.* – Graham

This is an area where, again, expectations needed to be managed about whether prisoners would be given hand sanitizer for personal use or if this could only be dispensed by staff on request or from communal dispensers. For example, Hill administrators responded to concern regarding lack of hand sanitizer at their facility by stating, “Due to the high alcohol content of the hand sanitizer and to avoid offender misuse, containers of hand sanitizer are not provided to the offenders to keep in their cells. However, it is available upon request from security staff in single use quantities.”

At Vandalia, some people commented that certain people at the facility had been poisoned by ingesting hand sanitizer and incurred significant medical restitution.

Some people knew that hand sanitizer also had been donated for the prison population through various initiatives but were upset it was unavailable to them. Many people suspected it was just taken for staff use. Again, JHA continues to recommend IDOC track and publicly report on use of donations, including where any cost savings are allocated.



## **Covering Coughs & Sneezes**

Prevention guidance also advises covering one's mouth or nose when coughing or sneezing. Again, in [COVID-19 surveys](#) the majority of people reported that they personally practiced good hygiene in this regard (94.9%) but reported others around them did not (39.4%). Additionally, several people commented about staff not following this guidance in their presence.

*Good health practices inconsistent. Many inmates do not get it! Need better effort to explain and monitor! – Pontiac*

*There is no direction from staff regarding following the proper hygiene practices - inmates sneeze in the air, cough because the staff doesn't take initiative to formally advise inmates of the seriousness of the pandemic. – Danville*

*Some people wash their hands and cover their mouths, but a good 70% are very nasty. They use the bathroom and don't wash their hands, and then they go straight to a playing card table, the phone, or the ice machines. – Robinson*



## Access to Showers

*I feel we should be able to clean ourselves especially in a time like this. – Dixon*

*I'm washing my body with dishwashing liquid. Please help me. No shower in a week. – Lawrence*

*Showers was once the first nine days and every four days now. – Illinois River*

*It was over a month before they started to run a shower and you are good if you get one shower a week. A lot of the showers don't work at all. – Stateville*

Of the 12,780 people who responded to [prior JHA surveys](#) at 21 facilities between April 2018 and May 2019, 58% of people reported that they had adequate access to showers.

In [JHA's April 8<sup>th</sup> recommendations](#) we reiterated that IDOC should allow everyone access to showers within official COVID-19 prevention guidelines from health authorities.

While 82.9% of people in [JHA COVID-19 survey](#) responses reported they were able to shower at least three times in the prior week, 17.1% (2,721 people) reported they could not. Again, level of lockdown at some facilities may have influenced these results, as everyone in IDOC, even those in segregation status, is supposed to now receive at least [three weekly showers](#). The facilities with the highest percentage of people reporting (at the time they completed the surveys) that they could not shower at least three times weekly in the prior week were male medium-security celled facilities Hill (88.6%, 550) and Illinois River (77.8%, 597), and male maximum-security prison Stateville (58.1%, 313),<sup>1</sup> where there may have been medical quarantines at the time.

Many people reported not being able to shower, or more limited access to showers, during the first week or weeks of quarantine (e.g. once a week at Centralia, and no showers for the first two weeks at Menard). Some administrators responded to JHA survey facility feedback by stating that Administrative Directive 05.01.301-Lockdowns determines the guidelines for movement and states that for the initial seven days of a lockdown, showers shall be offered at least once and every three days thereafter. Some people reported more than a week between showers.

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<sup>1</sup> JHA sent surveys to the maximum-security part of Stateville and not the Northern Reception and Classification Center or the minimum-security unit.

Additionally, incarcerated workers at various facilities reported issues getting regular showers, or timely access to showers. Lack of shower access, particularly after work assignments which likely involves workers' exposure to more people, seems contrary to good health practices.

JHA received reports that many people, during limited out-of-cell or dayroom time, were having to choose between showers and phone calls. Logan administrators responded to this concern, stating that per the Shower/Phone schedule, prisoners were allotted at the minimum an hour twice every day for showers and phone use. Some people reported that certain staff did not permit them out of cells or rooms for showers. Some people on crisis or suicide watch reported being unable to shower, to which some administrators responded that this is a case-by-case determination made in consultation with mental health staff.

*Shower ice cold so didn't want to shower.* – Graham

Also, people commented regarding plumbing issues, water temperature, and lack of shower cleanliness, including mold, mildew, or worse, such as bodily waste or insects. Some people wrote they were not showering because they felt the lack of shower cleanliness was a risk to their health. Some people expressed particular concern about lack of ventilation in shower areas, which is also a factor that contributes to mold and mildew concerns

*Showers not being cleaned is the biggest issue and risk factor I see right now. The shower I have access to ... has a very bad odor, dirty floors and cell bars, there is hair spread on the floor and in the shower some of which has not moved in two weeks which proves to me that here has not even been a good attempt to clean. I have tried to address the issue with COs and they all say to fill out a grievance but when I ask for a grievance form they say they don't have any in the cell house.* – Pontiac

*The showers get cleaned every once in a while. They just spray the shower with bleach. They don't clean the trash, hair, or puddles of water that are left behind by the inmates after they leave the shower.* – Menard

Additionally, some people reported that taking the opportunity to shower put them in a position where they could not maintain proper social distancing from others, both staff and prisoners. Several people wrote about multi-person showers, being too close to others in the showers, or being placed in bullpens with many others while awaiting showers. All of these practices raise concerns. At Menard, there were reports that people were being forced to shower with 10 or more other people, including people from other galleries, e.g. someone asked, "Why did they put 25-30 people in a shower when there's only like 15-16 shower heads?"

*We have to use shower on quarantine side if we want to get out in time for phone because our side only has one shower head. Plus, they try to get us in at same time, same shower. I don't feel comfortable being nude in front of my cellie* – Sheridan

*There are no showers curtains period at Vienna CC. Our building wing with 48 inmates per wing to share a 4 to 8 head shower. No divider or curtain between, and no curtain on outside to block from people walking back and forth through the area. You should have some sort of privacy when it comes to showering. I feel extremely uncomfortable at times, and sometimes afraid because there are predators and perverts all around.*  
– Vienna



*We are being forced to take showers with other inmates. Instead of just putting 1 inmate in the shower at a time, we are forced 2 at a time. Problem is showers are very close, you are 1 to 2 feet apart. – Western*

Administrators at Western Illinois Correctional Center responded that during administrative quarantine, people had daily access to showers. However, they reported that at the beginning of May (when Western first went on medical quarantine), cellmates were offered showers at the same time and if both accepted, they did shower at the same time.

Some people wrote specifically about the lack of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible showers, e.g., they wanted access to ADA handrails in showers. As IDOC's population continues to age, this is a foreseeable issue for many.



## Laundry

For laundry services, 65.8% of [COVID-19 survey](#) respondents reported that their clothing items were cleaned in the week prior to the survey, while 18.8% reported their items were laundered without detergent and 9.3% reported laundry was not offered. Some administrators responded to JHA's concerns over survey feedback that, during lockdown, unit porters were responsible for laundry and that institutional laundry services resumed when the lockdown was lifted. There were some reports of inadequate supervision and porters stealing chemicals or charging other prisoners for laundry services as well as clothing going missing in laundry.

*We get laundry service twice a week, but the porters don't put soap on the clothes. They steal it, and I'm on state pay and barely afford to buy laundry soap. – Lawrence*

*When they do my laundry, they don't use soap. And, I cannot go to the store and get some laundry detergent because I do not have a family that sends me money so that I can get things, and the joint don't give that to me. – Lincoln*

*Clothes often get stolen when sent to laundry and we only wash clothes once a week. So I often wash my own clothes in the shower. – Logan*

*The state makes everyone buy their own detergent regardless of COVID-19 lockdown or not – sometimes I buy extra laundry detergent to help out indigents. – Graham*

*Two weeks ago nobody had detergent since the store 'ran out.' – Graham*

*IDOC here at Graham does not provide detergent, so if one is forced to purchase detergent from commissary, and does not have the money for said product, he is forced/subjected to wear dirty clothes. – Graham*

*Graham CC has not offered laundry detergent for free to inmates in over two years (they do sell laundry soap on commissary). Non indigent inmates can purchase laundry soap and have their clothes washed in the cellhouse. If an inmate is declared indigent for the past 30 days, he can send his clothes to institutional laundry once a*

*week (no one ever does because it is picked up approximately 5am and it is never announced). – Graham*

*We are supposed to get 16 oz. of laundry detergent every month, but for the past several months, the soap we are given is so watered-down that the 16 oz. are not enough for a single load, let alone a whole month's worth of laundry. – Dixon*

*The facilities provide Industrial State Laundry but it has only been offered 2 times in the last 6 ½ weeks, as far as them providing soap/sanitizer is unknown because it is out of sight and like 15 different bags of different persons laundry is washed all together mixing everyone's funk together which doesn't seem sanitary. – Illinois River*

*People run out of laundry soap because they are making us go to commissary once a month, not once a week like we are supposed to. – Robinson*

*A couple years ago, they hooked up a water hose splitter to the cold water supply, allowing the washing machines to only accept cold water. There's no hot water running in the washing machines. – Robinson*

*I don't use the laundry anymore because they don't use soap or bleach. – Stateville*

*They put a memo on the institutional channel saying it's okay to wash the clothes of people who tested positive for COVID-19 with everyone else's. – Stateville*

*You can send whites over there and they come back gray or dingy, it's been like that forever. – Stateville*

Many people commented that they must purchase detergent on commissary, even if they are considered indigent, despite having limited access to the commissary during the pandemic. Some people commented they felt that the detergent from commissary is not powerful enough. Many people reported using laundry detergent as well as bar soap to clean their surroundings because of lack of other cleaning supplies.

Some people commented regarding institutional laundry that their laundry would be mixed with others' soiled linens in machines where dirty mop heads also were washed, using cold water and insufficient detergent. They had concerns about others' bodily waste and possible contamination. At Stateville some people reported not having access to institutional laundry, that laundry had not been picked up in over a month, or not being informed of laundry service being offered. Many people commented on lack of proper laundry services or detergent causing clothes to come back unclean. Some people noted rashes or developed breakouts they attributed to laundry. Others reported washers and dryers in their areas were overloaded so that clothes did not get clean, were not working (sometimes for months), that clothes came back wet or "smell of mildew." Some commented that it was difficult to get institutional laundry services for other reasons, e.g. someone said they could not get service because they did not have a laundry bag or that services were suspended.

Some incarcerated workers, e.g. Illinois Correctional Industry (ICI) or dietary workers who were working long shifts, wrote that they were not able to get clothes laundered as needed. Additionally, some people who were medically quarantined reported not having access to laundry services. There are also some reports that there was not enough time to do laundry because there was not enough dayroom time.

*Graham doesn't offer any boxers, socks, or T-shirts to indigent offenders ever. They're supposed to do it every year at the least. I can't afford to buy commissary clothes.*  
– Graham

*We are only issued 2 sets of blues and only have state laundry one time per week. This causes an issue with having to wear the same clothes for a week. They should offer state laundry at least twice a week.* – Robinson

*Have been using same undergarments for whole week. Only own 2 pairs. Can't purchase more.* – Logan (likely from someone in Reception & Classification (R&C) status)

*It was almost 3 weeks we didn't get our clothes washed.* – Graham R&C

Some people reported not having proper clothing changes, particularly in reception status. At Robinson, someone reported that “whites” were not being given, including pillowcases, sheets, boxers, and socks. Also some people, particularly workers and women at Logan, reported that because of commissary restrictions they were unable purchase clothing items that they needed, or poor condition of their clothing. Logan administrators responded to this concern raised in survey responses that women were, at the time of administrators’ response to JHA, again able to buy clothing.

*At least 50 inmates' bags go into one washer with little to no laundry soap.* – Menard

*Our facility laundry isn't going to be washing our linens anymore, so we have no way to have clean bedding.* – Decatur

*I believe we should be able to wash our blanket every 2 months or 3 instead of 6. That creates a lot of germs.* – Western

Some people also commented on the poor condition of bedding or mattresses and wanted to be able to exchange items. At Sheridan, some people reported they are not allowed to wash sheets and blankets. One person at Robinson commented that state laundry had not been offered since February and that “*This is important because certain items (blankets, coats, etc.) can only be washed in state laundry. Inmates are using blankets and coats that haven't been washed in 3 months.*” JHA has observed bedding and mattresses in poor condition on prior IDOC visits and has concerns about proper cleaning and sanitation. While IDOC has a new policy addressing handling of mattresses of people in medical isolation, it appears to lack policy for regular, preventative cleaning and exchange practices for bedding. Again, we recommend uniform guidelines be put in place and made public for laundering of bedding and replacement of bedding and mattresses, as well as clothing.

Logan administrators responded to concerns from surveys regarding laundry that schedules have been developed and implemented, institutional laundry is in place for those unable to purchase laundry detergent and for those housing units that currently do not have access to laundry facilities, and that a new washer/dryer policy statewide is in the process of purchasing new machines for every housing unit. JHA looks forward to observing improvements during future visits.



## Toilet Paper

At some facilities, people commented that they did not believe they were receiving enough toilet paper, e.g. only two or three rolls a month. While toilet paper was scarce in the community, this remains unacceptable. Logan administrators responded to this concern raised by JHA by stating that toilet paper is distributed to every prisoner every Saturday and that additional toilet paper is supplied upon request, and that their available toilet paper had not been restricted during the COVID-19 crisis. Some people at Taylorville commented the first time they got toilet paper distributed was around a month after the pandemic response began, around April 23.

*Run out early, and they tell you to “use a sock” or “rip a sleeve off one of your shirts” to wipe. Inhumane! And humiliating. – Centralia*

*Staff or COs will not give us a roll of toilet paper if we run out and only live on state pay ... all the staff said is buy it off of commissary. – Taylorville*

*We are not able to buy tissue paper, nor do they give us enough with only one roll a week. – Jacksonville*



## Haircuts & Razors

*We looking like animals. I haven't had a haircut and shave in 3 months. – Pontiac*

Several people commented about the lack of haircuts at facilities during COVID-19 response. While in the community people also could not always get these services during the early part of the pandemic, people in prison (unlike people in the community) can be punished for cutting their own hair. There are also other consequences; for example, someone reported being charged for a new ID card for “change of appearance” when he could not get barber services. Items such as razors and hair trimmers and batteries also were reported not to be accessible in the typical manner or on commissary at a few facilities. Transwomen in particular reported this was difficult for them.



This report was written by JHA staff.  
Media inquiries should be directed to JHA's Executive Director Jennifer Vollen-Katz  
at (312) 291-9555 x205 or [jvollen@thejha.org](mailto:jvollen@thejha.org).  
Learn more about JHA at our website [www.thejha.org](http://www.thejha.org).

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