
**John Howard Association Statement
Marking One Year of COVID-19 Prison Lockdowns**

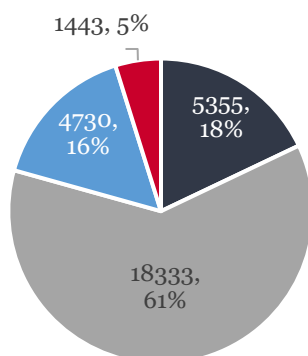
March 14, 2021

On March 14, 2020 the [Illinois Department of Corrections](#) (IDOC) announced that visitation was “temporarily” suspended until further notice due to COVID-19. As we commemorate this most unfortunate one-year anniversary here, JHA continues to hear from incarcerated people and their loved ones who wonder why so many of the challenges and deprivations are the same for them twelve months into the pandemic and who ask why their elected officials seem not to care about the conditions they endure as COVID-19 lockdowns stretch on. For more than a year JHA has fought to call attention to [the pandemic’s effects inside prison](#) in order to bring about appropriate resources and humane responses.

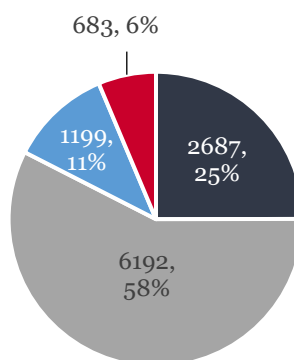
As we call out the extraordinary isolation and hardship for people inside our prisons this year, we must also pause to reflect on and recognize the hard work and good efforts of people inside our prison system over the course of the last unprecedented year. We also acknowledge the strength and resiliency of both staff and those who are incarcerated. While the exposure and contagion rates inside prisons make them one of the most dangerous places to be during COVID and there are far too many stories of sickness, death and poor quality of life, there are also a few testimonials that show people rising to face new challenges presented by the pandemic and mitigating the harms and deprivations accompanying it.

As of March 10, 2021, 87 people incarcerated in IDOC and one staff member (a nurse) had reportedly passed away due to COVID-19 at 22 prisons, with numbers of deaths ranging from one person at some facilities to a high of 13 at Stateville. Two of these deaths were of incarcerated women, one from each of the female prisons (mixed-security Logan and minimum-security Decatur). In male facilities, there were 17 deaths from the three maximum-security prisons, 44 deaths from 10 medium-security prisons, and 24 deaths from seven minimum-security prisons. In 2020, there were [167 total deaths](#) reported in IDOC compared to [96 in 2019](#). The charts below show COVID-19 cases and deaths by types of facility, as of March 10, 2021, along with a breakdown of total IDOC population by type of facility as reported in the latest [IDOC Quarterly Report](#) from January 2021 (30,001).

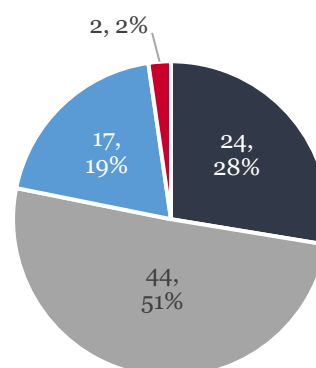
Prison Population



COVID-19 Cases



Deaths



Minimum
 Medium
 Maximum
 Female

However, there are reasons to be hopeful. As of March 10, 2021:

- IDOC's population was 28,002, down from 37,648 on March 15, 2020. In 2020, there were [11,635 people admitted](#) to IDOC, down more than 10,000 people compared to 22,007 in 2019.
- There had been 371,535 [COVID-19 tests](#) of prisoners and 124,968 tests of staff.
- COVID-19 positive case numbers are on a downward trend with 95 staff with active COVID-19 cases while 4,095 had recovered, and there were 123 prisoners with active cases while 10,651 had recovered. Given that robust testing within IDOC did not begin until later in the pandemic there is good reason to believe that the actual number of undiagnosed recovered cases may be even higher.
- There were only three prisoners hospitalized for COVID-19 with none on ventilators; this marks a significant decrease in people requiring intensive medical treatment from earlier in the year (it was reported that there were 40 hospitalizations with 10 on ventilators at the beginning of January).
- **As of March 12, 2021, 21,263 people at all 34 sites within IDOC had received the first round of COVID-19 vaccinations, including 17,577 prisoners and 3,686 staff.**

JHA notes that with 11,440 state-employed staff at IDOC prisons at the latest [public reporting](#), staff vaccination rates at facilities look to be below 33%; however, staff may have opportunity to obtain vaccinations in their communities. JHA again encourages people to take steps to protect themselves when given the opportunity.

IDOC administrators shared that nearly 63% of the incarcerated population had been vaccinated on the first round of vaccine availability. Further, IDOC stated that individuals would be given another chance to opt to be vaccinated if they did not choose to do so at their first opportunity. Encouragingly, IDOC has listened to community members and [shared resources](#) provided to urge people in prison to get vaccinated. JHA has already received some concerns regarding people who received their first vaccination in prison but were released prior to the second vaccination shot and subsequently not able to schedule the second vaccine shot in their community. As many

people in Illinois have struggled to find appointments, this is a developing area and we have encouraged IDOC to prepare for this concern and communicate with public health officials regarding the need for full vaccine availability for those leaving custody.

Marking one year since visitation was restricted, we reflect on the profound loss of life and opportunity while looking forward to making the most of what is to still to come and taking the harsh lessons of the past year to work to build a more humane future. We continue to encourage IDOC to increase both internal and public communications and to plan for resuming visitation and volunteer-facilitated programming with appropriate protections in place and while anticipating that things will continue to look different for quite some time into the future. JHA is heartened that IDOC administrators have started work on plans to safely resume visits in the not-too-distant future. We look forward to IDOC providing more detailed information soon.

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For more information about the John Howard Association please visit our website, www.thejha.org. Please direct media inquiries to Jennifer Vollen-Katz at jvollen@thejha.org.