

Restore Justice Foundation

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://restorejustice.org/people-are-being-denied-testing-treatment-in-some-idoc-facilities/>

Newsletters

Incarcerated people are dying because some facilities within the Illinois Department of Corrections seem to be denying testing or treatment for COVID-19.

While we welcome Illinois recent announcement that people who are incarcerated in three facilities will be [regularly tested](#), were disturbed it took so many months to make this decision. Restore Justice started asking for widespread testing in prisons as soon as such testing became available to all Illinoisans.

We call on the State to immediately implement this new testing program in every Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) facility. While prison employees at each facility will be regularly tested, the State has not announced plans to regularly test incarcerated people at the vast majority of its facilities. COVID-19 has killed 50 incarcerated people since March, **with nearly half of those deaths occurring since mid-October**, according to the Chicago Tribune. The State does not regularly report COVID-19 deaths and hospitalizations among incarcerated people.

Every day, Restore Justice hears from incarcerated people with COVID-like symptoms who have been denied tests, from people with sick cellmates denied tests despite extremely close proximity, and from people who have tested positive for COVID-19 but are not receiving adequate medical care. The reports point to a disturbing trend: It appears some IDOC employees are actively discouraging both testing and treatment.

We have received consistent, frequent reports from a handful of facilities that staff have threatened to terminate the employment of incarcerated people who ask to be tested because of symptoms or exposure, allowed symptomatic people to remain in the general population, and failed to ensure sick people receive proper treatment.

Restore Justice receives reports because, for more than a decade, our staff and board members have built relationships with a significant number of incarcerated people and their family members. In March 2020, we created a tracker to monitor prison conditions during the pandemic. We have received more than 500 reports in the last nine months. While we have received reports from almost every facility, the most frequent and alarming incidents in November and December have been reported at Hill, Dixon, Illinois River, Lawrence, Pontiac, and Stateville correctional centers.

We do not have access to data that could tell a more complete story, and so we will share three anecdotes that are typical of recent reports in the hope that more dramatic action can be taken to save lives. Most of the people we have spoken with fear retaliation, and so we have only shared names in cases where the incarcerated individual is deceased.

Its important to note, Tyryn died at Pontiac Correctional Center, and incarcerated people at Pontiac are not part of the [States new testing program](#). Only those at Dixon, Vandalia, and Logan correctional centers are.

When they finally agreed to test the man incarcerated at Dixon, results confirmed he had COVID-19. Staff did not quarantine him.

The person who originally tested positive handled food and identification cards for at least 100 other incarcerated people.

These men also told Restore Justice people are not being tested even when their cellmates become seriously ill, matching reports we've heard from many facilities.

COVID-19 CASES ARE RISING AT IDOC FACILITIES

COVID-19 cases are spiking at Dixon, Taylorville, Jacksonville, Robinson, and East Moline correctional centers. IDOC has confirmed 468 COVID-19 cases among incarcerated people in Dixon; there are 358 current active cases. The prisons population is 1,952 people, **meaning the positivity rate is currently 24 percent.**

Corrections staff confirmed that at Taylorville, there have been 409 confirmed cases and 273 active cases of COVID-19 cases among incarcerated people. With 959 people incarcerated there, the **positivity rate is 43 percent.**

All other IDOC correctional facilities are close behind Dixon and Taylorville. There are 24 facilities under administrative quarantine, and 21 facilities under full lockdowns. This is extremely concerning because we haven't yet seen a likely rise in cases after Thanksgiving. We are worried numbers will keep rising.

FLAWS IN IDOC'S COVID-19 RESPONSE

Both recent reports of denial of adequate care and rising case numbers highlight the flaws in IDOC's COVID-19 response. Early in the pandemic, IDOC failed to make testing and contact tracing a priority; they relied on two other pillars, administrative lockdown and

distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE), both of which are important but not an adequate replacement for testing and contact tracing. Regular, widespread testing of incarcerated people and staff could help identify asymptomatic individuals so they are both separated from people without the virus and put in places where they can be well cared for should they become symptomatic. This testing would also provide data to better control the spread of the virus. IDOC must implement such testing at every facility, not just the Dixon, Vandalia, and Logan.

In the early days of the pandemic, Illinois did not report the number of tests administered to incarcerated people. While we applaud IDOC for beginning to report testing numbers as of December 4, the department continues to lag behind peer states in the number of incarcerated people tested and in the frequency of testing. There are [30,888](#) people incarcerated in IDOC facilities, and the State has reported administering [22,448 tests](#), as of December 4. **This means there are still people incarcerated who have not even once received a COVID-19 test**; only 72.6 percent or fewer (if people have had multiple tests) of those incarcerated in IDOC facilities have been tested for COVID-19.

Texas has more incarcerated people than Illinois does. Despite its large prison population, Texas has still prioritized testing every person in custody. In May, [Texas spent \\$45 million on oral swab testing](#) for prisons with COVID-19 outbreaks.

Illinois population is comparable to Michigan's, yet Illinois is far behind our Midwestern peer in administering COVID-19 tests in prison. Michigan tested [every incarcerated person](#) in its state prison system in fewer than 15 days.

I have a family member that has been locked down since March due to Coronavirus in Dixon. Only 30 minutes out of his cell per day in the last 9 months. Now over the last month he has been in quarantine due to people in his cell block testing positive. Meaning now he only gets out for 30 minutes a day every other day. It blows my mind that these men are forced to live as in they are in a Maximum security prison and the system isn't offering any extra kind of good time or anything for this, along with the rising numbers. In my opinion it would make sense to offer extra good time due to these circumstances in order to help clear out the population in the prisons. Otherwise they should offer these non-violent offenders the option to be placed on an ankle monitor at home. To where they can still be monitored but they also have the option to return to work to pay for their monitors, in turn which would benefit the state as far as expenses.

What is he doing about the clemencies from 2019 and the emergency clemency this is getting horrible these inmates are humans not animals

Hi Elizabeth, We don't work on clemencies so I don't know the percentage of people who have received clemency and/or the speed at which clemencies are moving. We do know from news reports that the Governor has granted some clemencies. I wish I had more information for you.

This virus is very scary, and, in addition to early releases, Illinois needs to test more incarcerated people and provide better medical care.

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