

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/nearly-1800-alabama-prisoners-and-staff-infected-with-covid-19/>

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12.14.20

Nearly 1,800 prisoners and staff in Alabama's prison system have tested positive for infection with Covid-19 in the past 10 months, according to the latest data published by the Alabama Department of Corrections. Because of limited access to testing for prisoners, it is believed that the actual infection numbers are dramatically higher.

According to ADOC's Covid [dashboard](#), at last count on December 9, 1,034 prisoners and 747 staff had tested positive for the virus, with 43 inmate and two staff deaths. Twenty-three percent of the cases among prisoners and nine deaths have been recorded in the past two weeks.

The Covid-19 mortality rate among Alabama prisoners is nearly three times higher than that for the state as a whole, and is the fourth highest reported for any state prison system, according to [data](#) compiled by The Marshall Project. At St. Clair Correctional Facility, where the first cases of Covid-19 in the state's prison system were recorded in March, more than 1 out of every 6 prisoners who has tested positive has died.

These infection and mortality rates are likely an underestimate, as the level of testing within Alabama prisons remains low, and incarcerated people—even those who may be symptomatic or have been in close contact with others who show symptoms—are unable to get tests in most situations. The corrections department has offered voluntary Covid-19 testing at staggered groups of facilities since September, but at several facilities—including Bullock, Elmore, and Fountain—only staff, and not inmates, have been eligible to request tests.

Understaffing at Alabama prisons and management issues have exacerbated the Covid-19 crisis. Since the start of the pandemic, EJI has received reports from multiple facilities of symptomatic prisoners being denied tests and forced to remain in the same housing areas as asymptomatic prisoners, officers moving between quarantined and non-quarantined housing units without masks, and supervisors requiring Covid-positive staff to return to work before their quarantine period has ended due to short staffing.

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