

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/target-2020/responding-to-covid-19-focusing-on-people-in-the-criminal-justice-and-immigration-systems>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

As the number of confirmed cases of coronavirus, or COVID-19, skyrocket in the United States, we are just beginning to see cases in jails, prisons, and immigration detention facilities. These populations are uniquely vulnerable because of the crowding typical inside facilities, the lack of adequate health care and access to soap and hand sanitizer, and the number of people who have [medical conditions](#) that can make them more susceptible to infection. But we have yet to see a national policy or even a proposal to address this brewing crisis from our federal government or any of the presidential campaigns.

People who are incarcerated at the following facilities have already tested positive: the [Rikers Island jail complex](#) and the [Metropolitan Detention Center](#) in New York City; the [Nassau County Correctional Center](#) in East Meadow, New York; the [Larimer County Community Corrections](#) program in Fort Collins, Colorado; the [Massachusetts Treatment Center](#) in Bridgewater; the [California State Prison](#) in Los Angeles County; and the [Federal Correctional Institution](#) in Oakdale, Louisiana. Possible cases of COVID-19 have been reported at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) [detention facility](#) in Aurora, Colorado, and at the [District of Columbia Jail](#). Correctional staff are known to have tested positive in [Alabama](#), [Michigan](#), [New Jersey](#), [New York](#), and [Washington State](#). The numbers will be outdated before this post goes up on our blog. Unless measures are taken soon to decarcerate facilities throughout the country, the numbers will grow exponentially. Inaction will have grave consequences.

To draw attention to concerns about the virus spreading in particularly vulnerable communities, Vera and [Community Oriented Correctional Health Services](#) have published a series of five [fact sheets](#) focusing on the immigration system; jails, prisons, and immigration detention and youth facilities; police and law enforcement; parole, probation, and clemency; and prosecutors, defenders, and courts. The fact sheets provide guidance to help protect anyone who interacts with and works in these systems, and they can serve as a blueprint for national policy. Millions of people have contact with the criminal legal systems every year. Many are at greater risk of contracting the virus and suffering the worst outcomes, and we must change local, state, and federal policies as soon as possible.

Each of the fact sheets provides guidance and policy recommendations, including these:

Prioritize prevention first and foremost.

Reduce the possibility of spread.

Respond swiftly to active coronavirus cases while preserving due process.

Vera will publish additional fact sheets, which you can find on our [COVID-19 Response page](#). Tomorrow we will publish information about smaller cities and rural areas, and about the youth justice system. Each fact sheet lists resources for more information.

PUBLICATION

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