

The Sentencing Project

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/youth-justice-under-the-coronavirus-linking-public-health-protections-with-the-movement-for-youth-decarceration/>

Policy Issue Resources

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According to data collected by The Sentencing Project, COVID-19 cases have been reported among incarcerated youth in 35 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. In five states, more than 100 incarcerated youth have tested positive. Four staff members working in juvenile facilities have died from the virus.

In congregate care settings, this contagious pathogens spread was inevitable. States and localities have taken steps to mitigate COVID-19s impact, including releasing confined youth, curtailing admissions, limiting visitation and programming, and isolating youth in a manner that mimics solitary confinement. Given the persistent racial and ethnic disparities in juvenile justice, there is little doubt that youth of color are suffering disproportionately from the virus and the changes within facilities that it has brought.

This report summarizes lessons learned through the first months of the pandemic, focusing on system responses, both positive and negative, to slow the viruss spread and to protect the safety and wellbeing of youth in the juvenile justice system while keeping the public informed. Drops in admissions during the pandemic, alongside decisions to release youth at a higher rate than during ordinary times, buttress the long-standing case that youth incarceration is largely unnecessary. Jurisdictions must limit the viruss damage by further reducing the number of incarcerated youth.

Increase in number of women incarcerated in the U.S. since 1980

COVID-19

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