

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/denied-vaccines-people-in-alabama-prisons-are-dying-of-covid/>

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03.24.21

Robert Presley, 54, died on March 13 after testing positive for Covid-19 at Easterling Correctional Facility in Clio, Alabama. He was at least the 63rd person incarcerated in Alabama to die from the coronavirus. As of Friday, the Alabama Department of Corrections was offering vaccines only to prison staff, not to people who are incarcerated.

Alabamas prison system has the ninth highest number of Covid-19 deaths per 10,000 incarcerated people in the country, according to [The Marshall Project and The Associated Press](#). Three prison staff have died from the disease.

The American Medical Association has [called for](#) incarcerated people to be prioritized for vaccinations and, as the Alabama Political Reporter [reports](#), the Alabama Department of Corrections has been able to offer vaccinations to people in custody since February 8.

But ADOC is still not offering vaccines to incarcerated people, even as they continue to die from the disease.

On March 17, ADOC announced it had received 4,000 doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Those doses are being offered only to prison staff, who can refuse to take them.

Only 30 prison staff had been vaccinated as of Friday, according to an ADOC [press release](#). The statement [noted](#) that 25 workers at the Hamilton Aged and Infirm Facility and another five staff members at the Hamilton work center have received vaccinations through ADOC.

Twice as many incarcerated people newly tested positive for Covid as staff members, according to Fridays ADOC [report](#). But the department says it is prioritizing staff to receive vaccinations and will not make vaccines available to incarcerated people until all staff who want shots have received them.

The ADOC is in the process of finalizing its plan to provide vaccines to inmates who wish to receive a vaccine when more doses become available and after all staff who wish to participate in this process are inoculated, ADOCs press release [states](#).

People who are incarcerated are extremely vulnerable to Covid-19. According to the Council on Criminal Justices [National Commission on Covid-19 and Criminal Justice](#), prisons had nearly four times as many confirmed coronavirus cases and twice as many deaths per capita as the general public.

Related Resource

The inability to quarantine or practice social distancing, together with overcrowding, imperils the lives of many people incarcerated in jails and prisons.

Incarcerated people are dying from Covid at such higher rates because of overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and the lack of adequate medical care in jails and prisons. People in many facilities have been denied access to hand sanitizer and soap, as well as masks and gloves.

Nationwide, some of the largest Covid-19 outbreaks have been in prisons. The Marshall Project [reports](#) that prison staff accelerated outbreaks by refusing to wear masks, downplaying peoples symptoms, and haphazardly enforcing social distancing and hygiene protocols in confined, poorly ventilated spaces ripe for viral spread. Large numbers of correctional officers are now refusing to be vaccinated, [according](#) to The Marshall Project, raising concerns that this will make it harder to control the pandemic in prisons and jails.

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