



Impact of COVID-19 on the Local Jail Population, January-June 2020

SUMMARY | NCJ 255888

MARCH 2021

Local jails in the United States experienced a large decline (down 185,400 inmates) in their inmate populations from June 30, 2019 to June 30, 2020, which can be attributed mainly to the COVID-19 pandemic. This had a notable effect on the number of inmates held for a misdemeanor, which fell about 45% from midyear 2019 to midyear 2020 and outpaced the 18% decline in inmates held for a felony. The number of female inmates also changed dramatically, decreasing 37% during this period while the male population dropped 23%.

Pandemic-driven effects on jails

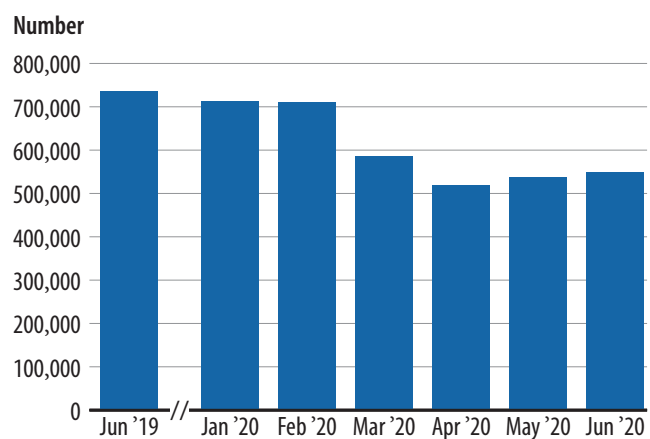
With fewer inmates during the pandemic due to declining admissions and 208,500 expedited releases from jails between March and June 2020, jail facilities became less crowded. About 81% of jails beds were occupied at midyear 2019, while 60% were occupied at midyear 2020. Jails located in counties that had the highest confirmed COVID-19 infection rates (with 1% or more residents infected) were the least crowded, with about 54% of jail beds occupied at midyear 2020 compared to 73% at midyear 2019.

COVID-19 testing in jails

Jails nationwide administered 215,360 COVID-19 tests to inmates between March and June 2020, which was equivalent to testing 9% of the 2.4 million persons admitted to jails during that time. More than 11% of these tests were positive. Jails in counties with the highest infection rates (1% or more residents were infected with COVID-19) tested nearly 21% of persons admitted to their jails. About 14% of these tests were positive.

As for jail staff, nearly 5% (10,850 of 233,220 employees) tested positive for COVID-19 during the 4-month period. About 8% of jail staff working in counties with the highest infection rates tested positive for COVID-19. By comparison, 1% of jail staff in counties with the lowest infection rates tested positive.

Number of inmates confined in local jails on the last weekday in June 2019 and the last weekday of each month from January to June 2020



Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Census of Jails, 2019; and Annual Survey of Jails, 2020.

COVID-related deaths

Among the jails that reported on COVID-19-related inmate and staff deaths (89% of sampled jails), a total of 43 inmates in 22 jails died of COVID-19 between March and June 2020. Thirty-three of those deaths were reported as confirmed deaths from COVID-19 or where COVID was a significant contributor to the death. The other 10 deaths were reported as suspected deaths from COVID-19.

A total of 40 staff from 30 jails also died of COVID-19 between March and June 2020. Thirty-two of the deaths were reported as confirmed deaths from COVID-19. The other eight deaths were reported as suspected deaths from COVID-19.

The full report ([Impact of COVID-19 on the Local Jail Population, January-June 2020](#), NCJ 255888), related documents, and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics are available on the BJS website at www.bjs.gov.