



Safety in Custody Statistics, England and Wales: Deaths in Prison Custody to March 2023 Assaults and Self-harm to December 2022

Main Points

Number of deaths increased from the previous 12-month period



In the 12 months to March 2023, there were 322 deaths in prison custody, an **increase** of 12% from 287 deaths in the previous 12 months. Of these, 82 deaths were self-inflicted, a 4% **increase** from the 79 self-inflicted deaths in the previous 12 months.

In the most recent quarter there were 90 deaths, a 15% **increase** from 78 deaths in the previous quarter.

The rate of self-harm incidents increased in female establishments but decreased in male establishments from the previous 12-month period



There were 55,264 self-harm incidents in the 12 months to December 2022, **up** 3% from the previous 12 months, comprising of a 6% **decrease** in male establishments and a 37% **increase** in female establishments.

Over the same period, the *rate* of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners, which takes account of the increase in the prison population between this and the previous year, **decreased** 9% in male establishments but **increased** 36% in female establishments.



In the most recent quarter, there were 14,730 self-harm incidents, **down** 3% on the previous quarter, comprising a 7% **decrease** in male establishments and a 5% **increase** in female establishments.

The number of individuals who self-harmed decreased



There were 10,910 individuals who self-harmed in the 12 months to December 2022, **down** 2% from the previous 12 months. The number of self-harm incidents per individual **increased** from 4.8 in the 12 months to December 2021 to 5.1 in the 12 months to December 2022.

Assaults increased from the previous 12-month period



There were 20,933 assault incidents in the 12 months to December 2022, **up** 7% from the 12 months to December 2021. In the most recent quarter, assaults were **down** 3% to 5,397 incidents.

Assaults on staff decreased from the previous 12-month period



There were 7,229 assaults on staff in the 12 months to December 2022, **down** 4% from the 12 months to December 2021. In the latest quarter the number of assaults on staff **decreased** by 4% to 1,830 incidents.

The number of serious assaults increased
12 % of all assaults were serious



In the 12 months to December 2022, there were 2,417 serious assault incidents, an **increase** of 19% from the previous 12 months. Serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults **increased** by 28% to 1,745, and serious assaults on staff **increased** 2% to 709 in the 12 months to December 2022.

Statistician's comment

In the 12 months to December 2022, we have seen increases in the number of assault incidents (7% increase) and self-harm incidents (3% increase) compared with the previous year, however both remain lower than pre-pandemic levels. In male establishments, self-harm incidents decreased 6% and assault incidents increased 6%. In female establishments, both self-harm and assault incidents increased, by 37% and 21% respectively, with self-harm incidents reaching their highest level in the time series¹. In the 12 months to March 2023, we have seen an increase in the number of deaths (12% increase). Comparisons of these statistics with earlier periods will reflect the impact of Covid-19 as well as underlying trends.

Deaths have increased by 12% to 322 deaths in the 12 months to March 2023. There were 90 deaths in the latest quarter, up from 78 the previous quarter but much lower than the peak of 153 in the January to March 2021 quarter. There were 82 self-inflicted deaths in the latest year, an increase from 79 in the previous year. In the latest quarter (January to March 2023) there were no deaths within 28 days of having a positive Covid-19 test or where there was a clinical assessment that Covid-19 was a contributory factor.

The rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners remained almost unchanged (0.3% increase) in the 12 months to December 2022, comprising a 9% decrease in male establishments and a 36% increase in female establishments. The rate reflected a 3% increase in the number of self-harm incidents in the 12 months to December 2022, and a small increase in the prison population over the same period (as set out in *Offender Management Statistics Quarterly*²).

There continues to be considerable differences in self-harm trends by gender, with the differences increasing substantially in the latest 12 months. The rate in female establishments has increased by 36% (5,035 per 1,000 prisoners), whereas it has decreased 9% in male establishments (507 per 1,000 prisoners), meaning the rate is now almost ten times higher in female establishments. This was driven by an increase in the average number of incidents among those who self-harmed in female establishments, from 10.6 to 14.7, continuing a trend seen for the last nine years. By comparison, the average number of incidents among those who self-harmed in male establishments remained broadly stable, decreasing slightly from 4.1 to 4.0. This is evidenced further by the proportion of individuals committing a large number of self-harm incidents. In 2022, 6% of self-harming females committed 50 or more incidents, compared to less than 1% in the male estate.

The rate of assault incidents per 1,000 prisoners increased 4% in the 12 months to December 2022, and the rate of serious assaults increased 15% over the same period. The rate of assaults was 65% higher in female establishments than in male establishments and saw a greater increase in the latest 12 months. In female establishments the rate increased by 21% to a peak of 419 per 1,000 prisoners, compared to an increase of 3% in male establishments (255 per 1,000 prisoners). However, the proportion of assaults in female establishments that were serious was lower, at 6% compared with 12% in male establishments.

The rate of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults increased 9% in the 12 months to December 2022, and the rate of serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults increased 24%. The rate of assaults on staff decreased 7% and the rate of serious assaults on staff decreased 1%. This is influenced by the reduced contact included in prison regimes to reduce the risk of Covid-19 infection at different periods since March 2020, and an exit from the National Framework in May 2022 (see Further Information at the end of this bulletin).

Background

¹ The time series for assault incidents starts in 2000, and self-harm incidents starts in 2004.

² Data on population statistics are published in the *Offender Management Statistics Quarterly* publication <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly>.

Safety in custody statistics cover deaths, self-harm and assaults in prison custody in England and Wales, with figures in the summary tables in the quarterly publications presented on a 12-month rolling basis over an 11-year time series³. This release provides statistics on deaths of prisoners to the end of March 2023.

The release also provides statistics on assaults and self-harm up to the end of December 2022. The latest 12-month data reflects a second full year of Covid-19 restrictions being implemented within prisons to limit and control the spread of the virus, and an exit from the National Framework in May 2022. These restrictions included the implementation of effective isolation of prisoners to reduce the spread of Covid-19, reverse cohorting of new entrants to custody, and shielding of vulnerable prisoners. During this period, we have seen progression of establishments to different levels of the National Framework for managing Covid with most establishments reaching Stage 2 or 1 before the Omicron outbreak in December 2021. See Further Information at the end of this bulletin on the managing and running of prisons during the pandemic.

The total prison population fell since the first quarter of 2020, more so for certain population groups, but as at 31 March 2023 is now higher than pre-Covid levels⁴. As at 31 March 2023, the total prison population was around 1,400 or 2% higher than at the end of March 2020. The female population has reduced by 9%, whereas the male population has increased by 2%.

These changes in population should be borne in mind when interpreting changes in the numbers of incidents over the past year. In the context of substantial population change, rates per 1,000 prisoners more accurately describe changes in the likelihood of incidents occurring⁵. Data on deaths, self-harm and assaults are routinely presented as rates of incidents per 1,000 prisoners (as well as numbers) for all prisoners and the male and female estates. Additional commentary is offered where these rates indicate different trends to the numbers of incidents.

Supplementary annual tables, providing more in-depth statistics on a calendar year basis, underlying data files with pivot tables providing lower-level granularity, and a technical guidance document are also available alongside this bulletin, at www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics.

Youth estate and changes in methodology in Safety in Custody

These statistics exclude incidents that occurred in the youth estate that were previously included within this publication. Readers should be aware of the '**Safety in the children and young people secure estate**' statistics bulletin which is published simultaneously to this Safety in Custody quarterly bulletin. This provides quarterly statistics on assault and self-harm incidents for children and young people in the secure estate, and is published at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements/safety-in-the-youth-secure-estate-bulletin>

Figures for the number of self-harm and assault incidents occurring within the youth estate were removed from the published Safety in Custody statistics from the July 2022 release, please see that publication for more details. **The figures in this publication exclude incidents occurring within the youth estate from April 2018 onwards for assaults, and from April 2019 onwards for self-harm.** It has not been possible to identify such incidents occurring in the youth estate before these dates and so create a longer consistent time-series. This is because figures for incidents occurring within the youth estate for assaults up to March 2018 and for self-harm up to

³ Data on deaths is published three months ahead of self-harm and assaults. Therefore, the deaths annual publication and tables are published alongside the Safety in Custody quarterly update to September publication.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly>. Quarterly population data to March 2023 is published in Offender Management Statistics Quarterly Bulletin, England and Wales Quarterly.

⁵ The comparability over the year of other measures that are based on self-harming individuals (such as the number of incidents per self-harming individual, or the proportion of incidents requiring hospital attendance) are not affected by changes in population size.

March 2019 were collected via manual returns. This has led to a discontinuity in the time series for assaults and self-harm. The Safety in Custody time series includes deaths in the youth estate, with the last recorded death being in 2019.

1 Deaths: 12 months ending March 2023

Number of deaths increased from the previous 12-month period

In the 12 months to March 2023, there were 322 deaths in prison custody, an **increase** of 12% from 287 deaths in the previous 12 months. There were 82 self-inflicted deaths, an **increase** of 4% from 79 in the previous 12 months.

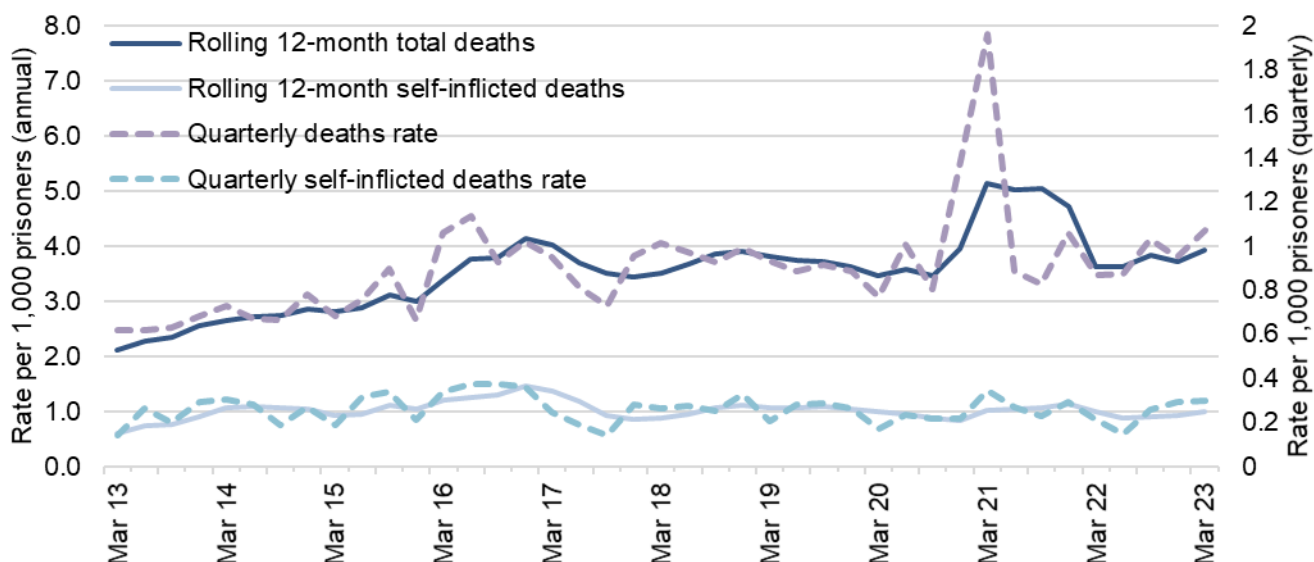
In the most recent quarter there were 90 deaths, a 15% **increase** from 78 deaths in the previous quarter. There were 25 self-inflicted deaths in the most recent quarter, up from 24 in the previous quarter.

There were no Covid-19 deaths in the latest quarter

In the most recent quarter (January to March 2023), there were no deaths that were suspected to be due to Covid-19, a **decrease** from 2 deaths (6% of total deaths) in the previous quarter.

In the same period, there were no deaths within 28 days of having a positive Covid-19 test or where there was a clinical assessment that Covid-19 was a contributory factor, a **decrease** from 7 deaths (9% of all deaths) in the previous quarter.

Figure 1: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of deaths per 1,000 prisoners, 12 months ending March 2013 to 12 months ending March 2023, with quarterly rates



In the 12 months to March 2023, there were 322 deaths in prison custody (a rate of 3.9 per 1,000 prisoners), an increase from 287 deaths in the previous 12 months (a rate of 3.6 per 1,000 prisoners). Long-term trends and more detail are presented in the annual tables⁶.

Over the same period, there were 195 deaths due to natural causes (a rate of 2.4 per 1,000 prisoners), a 3% increase from 190 deaths (a rate of 2.4 per 1,000 prisoners) in the previous 12 months.

There were 82 apparent self-inflicted deaths in the 12 months to March 2023 (a rate of 1.0 per 1,000 prisoners), an increase of 4% from 79 self-inflicted deaths in the previous 12 months (a rate of 1.0 per 1,000 prisoners).

⁶ Data on deaths are published three months ahead of assaults and self-harm, therefore, the annual publication Deaths in prison custody for 1978 to 2022 is published in the Safety in Custody quarterly update to September 2022

There were 43 deaths recorded as 'Other' in the 12 months to March 2023, 34 of which are 'awaiting further information' prior to being classified. In some cases, the results of the toxicology and post-mortem tests are inconclusive, meaning classification cannot be arrived at until inquest (which can be a considerable time after the death). As a result, the number and rate of deaths in the individual categories is not directly comparable with earlier years: it is likely that numbers in some categories will be revised upwards once classifications have been finalised.

In the most recent quarter there were 90 deaths, a 15% increase from 78 deaths in the previous quarter. There were 25 self-inflicted deaths in the latest quarter, a slight increase from 24 in the previous quarter. However, quarterly death figures should be considered with caution due to greater volatility and the potential for seasonal effects.

Deaths from Covid-19

From the start of the pandemic in March 2020 to the end of March 2023, 215 prisoners have died within 28 days of having a positive Covid-19 test or where there was a clinical assessment that Covid-19 was a contributory factor in their deaths regardless of the cause of death. Of these 215 deaths, 159 are suspected to be due to Covid-19⁷. The remaining 56 deaths are believed to be due to other causes although the prisoner had tested positive for Covid-19.

In the latest quarter (January to March 2023) there were no deaths suspected to be due to Covid-19, and only 2 in the October to December 2022 quarter (3% of total deaths). There were also no deaths within 28 days of having a positive Covid-19 test or where there was a clinical assessment that Covid-19 was a contributory factor in the latest quarter, and only 7 deaths in the previous quarter (9% of total deaths).

As with all deaths in prison custody, each case will be investigated by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman and subject to an inquest to determine the official cause of death and where necessary this data will be updated.

The most up to date data on deaths suspected to be due to Covid-19 can be found in the following link. This collection has now been discontinued, so this will be the last Safety in Custody release with an additional section on Covid-19 deaths:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hm-prison-and-probation-service-covid-19-statistics-monthly>.

⁷ Data on the number of COVID-19 deaths are occasionally revised due to updated coroners data

2 Self-harm: 12 months to December 2022

The rate of self-harm incidents decreased in the male estate from the previous 12-month period but increased in the female estate

There were 55,264 self-harm incidents in the 12 months to December 2022, a 3% **increase** from the previous 12 months (a 6% **decrease** in male establishments and a 37% **increase** in female establishments). Over the same period the rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners **decreased** by 9% in male establishments and **increased** by 36% in female establishments.

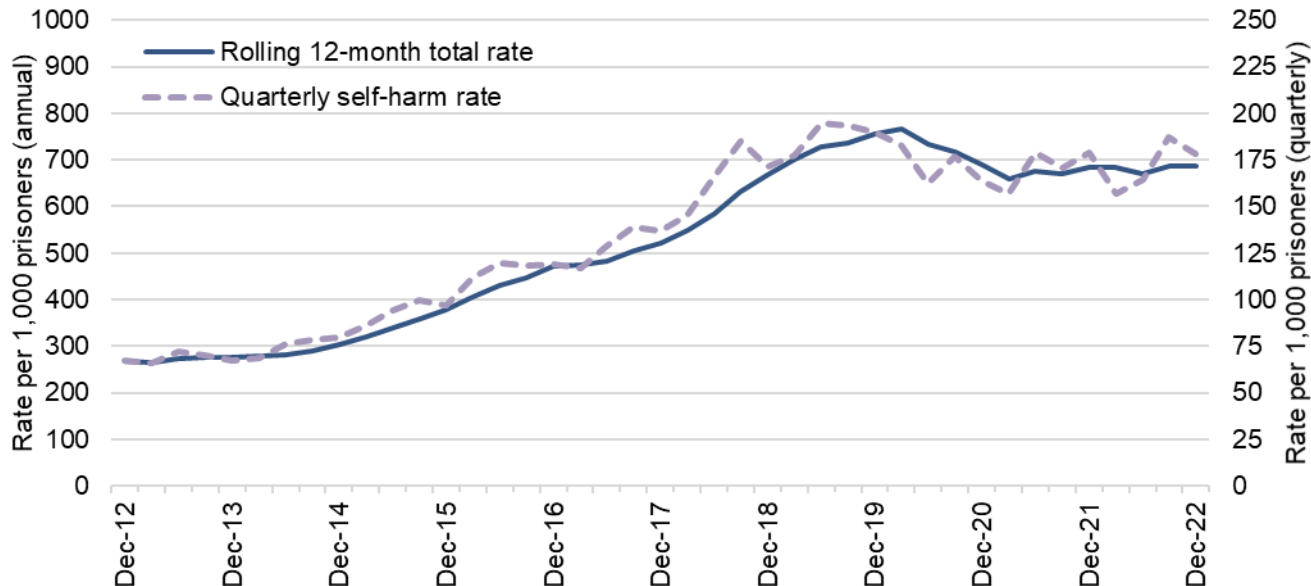
In the most recent quarter, there were 14,730 self-harm incidents, **down** 3% on the previous quarter (a 7% **decrease** in male establishments and a 5% **increase** in female establishments).

The number of individuals who self-harmed decreased 2% in the latest year.

There were 10,910 individuals who self-harmed in the 12 months to December 2022, a 2% **decrease** from 11,181 in the previous 12 months. The number of self-harm incidents per individual **increased** from 4.8 in the 12 months to December 2021 to 5.1 in the 12 months to December 2022.

Statistics for the 12 months to December 2022 relate to the second full 12-month period since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 and the restricted regimes prisons put in place in order to safely manage the risks of infection during the pandemic. We have also seen an exit from the National Framework in May 2022, so some of the figures within the latest 12 months cover the period since the exit (see Further Information at the end of this bulletin). This affects the comparability of the statistics with earlier periods.

Figure 2: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners, 12 months ending December 2012 to 12 months ending December 2022, with quarterly rates



In the 12 months to December 2022, there were 55,264 reported incidents of self-harm (a rate of 687 per 1,000 prisoners), an increase of 3% from 53,504 in the previous 12 months. The rate of incidents in the latest 12 months was almost unchanged (a 0.3% increase) from the previous 12 months.

On a quarterly basis, the number of incidents in the three months to December 2022 decreased by 3% from the previous quarter, from 15,230 to 14,730 incidents.

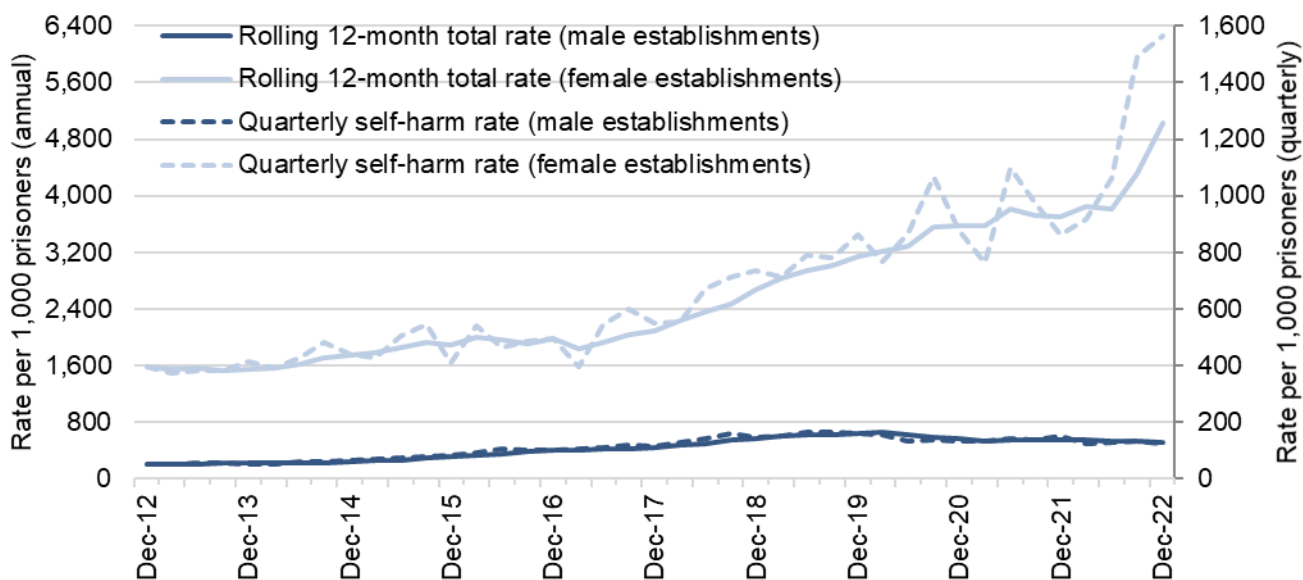
The number of individuals who self-harmed decreased by 2% to 10,910 in the latest 12 months (a rate of 136 individuals per 1,000 prisoners), from 11,181 in the previous 12 months. The rate, or proportion, of prisoners self-harming in the latest 12 months was 5% lower than in the previous 12 months. The number of incidents per self-harming individual in the latest 12 months was 5.1, an increase from 4.8 in the previous year. A small number of individuals who prolifically self-harm have a disproportionate impact on this figure: just over a half (51%) of prisoners who self-harmed in 2022 did so more than once.

The number of self-harm incidents requiring hospital attendance increased by 2% to 2,705 in the 12 months to December 2022 but decreased by 15% in the latest quarter to 618 incidents. The proportion of incidents that required hospital attendance was decreasing in the years before the pandemic, but has remained broadly stable since, with 4.9% of incidents in the latest 12 months requiring hospital attendance.

Self-harm levels differ considerably by gender. Although the number of incidents in the female estate is smaller than in the male estate, the rate of self-harm per 1,000 prisoners is much higher. In the 12 months to December 2022, there were 39,124 incidents in the male estate compared with 16,140 in the female estate. However, the rate of self-harm was almost ten times higher in the female estate, with 5,035 incidents per 1,000 female prisoners and 507 incidents per 1,000 male prisoners.

The number of incidents per individual who self-harmed in female establishments was over three times that in male establishments: in the 12 months to December 2022 there were 14.7 incidents of self-harm per self-harming female compared with 4.0 incidents per self-harming male. The proportion of incidents that required hospital attendance was higher in male establishments (6.2%, compared to 1.7% in female establishments in the latest year).

Figure 3: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners by gender of establishment, 12 months ending December 2012 to 12 months ending December 2022



The number of self-harm incidents decreased by 6% in the latest year in male establishments, but increased by 37% in the female estate. The rate of incidents, which takes population size into account, decreased by 9% in the male estate, but increased by 36% in female establishments.

On a quarterly basis, the number of incidents in the three months to December 2022 decreased by 7% in male establishments but increased 5% in female establishments compared with the

previous three months. The number of incidents peaked at 5,033 in female establishments in the latest quarter.

As Figure 3 shows, over the last decade there has been more variation in the quarterly rate of self-harm in the female estate than in the male estate. This may in part reflect the impact of the small number of individuals who engage in prolific self-harming being greater in the female estate. Fluctuations in the quarterly rates of self-harm in the female estate have been wider since the start of the pandemic, with the peak in the most recent quarter.

There also continues to be considerable differences in self-harm trends by gender. In the 12 months to December 2022, there were 14.7 incidents of self-harm per self-harming female, a considerable increase from 10.6 in the previous 12 months. The proportion of females self-harming in the latest 12 months was 2% lower than in the previous 12 months, at 342 individuals per 1,000 prisoners; the increase in self-harm in the female estate has been driven by the increase in incidents per self-harming individual. In the male estate, there were 4.0 incidents per self-harming individual, slightly lower than 4.1 in the previous 12 months. Over the same period, the proportion of prisoners self-harming in male establishments decreased by 5%, to 127 individuals per 1,000 prisoners.

Self-harm incidents requiring hospital attendance increased in male establishments by 2%, to 2,438 in the 12 months to December 2022, and the proportion of incidents requiring hospital attendance increased from 5.7% in the previous 12 months to 6.2% in the latest 12 months. In the female estate 267 self-harm incidents required hospital attendance, almost unchanged from 266 incidents the previous year. The proportion of incidents in the female estate requiring hospital attendance was 1.7% in the 12 months to December 2022, down from 2.3% in the previous 12 months, reflecting that the considerable increase in self-harm incidents in the female estate has been in incidents not requiring hospital treatment.

Key findings from the additional self-harm tables for 2022

Custody type

In the 12 months to December 2022, in the male estate, the rate of self-harm was lower among remand prisoners than among sentenced prisoners (390 incidents per 1,000 prisoners on remand and 494 incidents per 1,000 sentenced prisoners). However, in the female estate, the rate of self-harm was higher among remand prisoners than among sentenced prisoners (5,863 incidents per 1,000 prisoners on remand and 4,599 incidents per 1,000 sentenced prisoners).

In the male estate, the number of self-harm incidents for prisoners on remand increased by 41%, from 3,615 in 2021 to 5,101 in 2022, with the rate increasing 31%, and the number of self-harm incidents for sentenced prisoners decreased by 13%, from 36,206 to 31,526, with the rate decreasing 15%⁸.

In the female estate, the number of self-harm incidents for prisoners on remand increased by 33%, from 2,790 in 2021 to 3,717 in 2022, with the rate increasing 30%, and the number of incidents for sentenced prisoners increased by 35%, from 8,661 to 11,714, with the rate increasing 35%.

Method

The most common **method for self-harm** in prison was cutting/scratching: 59% of incidents of self-harm involved cutting/scratching in 2022, down from 66% in 2021, while 17% of self-harm incidents involved self-strangulation in 2022, up from 13% in 2021.

Cutting/scratching represented 68% of self-harm incidents in the male estate in 2022, down from 70% in 2021, and 38% of self-harm incidents in the female estate in 2022, down from 50% in 2021. Self-strangulation represented 41% of self-harm incidents in the female estate in 2022, the first time cutting/scratching was not the most common method in both the male and female estate⁹.

Location

The most common **location for self-harm** in prison was in cells and common areas. For males, 71% of self-harm incidents were in cells and common areas in 2022, compared to 69% of self-harm incidents by females.

Males were more likely than females to self-harm in segregation units (9% of incidents by males compared to 5% of incidents by females) and in vulnerable prisoner units (9% of incidents by males compared to 1% of incidents by females), whereas females were more likely to self-harm in health care locations (22% of incidents by females compared to 4% of incidents by males) in 2022. The number of self-harm incidents in health care locations increased by 184% in female establishments, from 1,226 in 2021 to 3,479 in 2022.

Time in current prison

22% of self-harm incidents occurred within the first 30 days in custody, for both male and female prisoners.

Frequency

Just over a half of individuals (51%) who self-harmed in 2022 did so **more than once** during the year. 50% of males and 58% of females who self-harmed during 2022 did so more than once

⁸ See *Guide to Safety in Custody Statistics* for a summary of how rates are calculated.

⁹ There was a change in the definition of Self-strangulation that saw noose making removed from self-harm reporting from April 2020. Please see the *Guide to Safety in Custody statistics* for further information.

during the calendar year.

11% of self-harming females self-harmed more than 20 times in 2022 (up from 10% in 2021), 6% self-harmed 50 or more times (up from 5%), and 4% self-harmed 100 or more times (up from 2%).

3% of self-harming males self-harmed more than 20 times, 0.5% self-harmed 50 or more times, and 0.1% self-harmed 100 or more times in 2022, this is consistent with 2021.

Age

The highest rates of self-harm incidents and individuals self-harming were in the younger age groups in 2022, continuing trends in recent years.

The highest rates of self-harm incidents were in the 18-20 (1,206 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) and 21-24 (1,189 per 1,000 prisoners) age groups at the time of the incident. In male establishments, the highest rate was in the 25-29 age group (733 per 1,000 prisoners). In female establishments, the rate was highest in the 18-20 age group (29,429 per 1,000 prisoners).

The highest rate of individuals self-harming was in the 18-20 age group (207 individuals who self-harmed per 1,000 prisoners).

Ethnicity

The rate of self-harm per 1,000 prisoners was highest for white prisoners (845 per 1,000 prisoners) followed by prisoners from the mixed ethnic group (400) in 2022. The rates were lowest for black prisoners (179 per 1,000 prisoners) and Asian prisoners (206) in 2022. This is consistent with recent years.

Hospital attendance

The proportion of incidents that required hospital attendance was decreasing in the years before the pandemic, but has remained broadly stable since, with 4.9% of incidents in the latest 12 months requiring hospital attendance.

97% of self-harm incidents that resulted in hospital attendance were for a visit to A&E and did not require staying as an inpatient in 2022. This is consistent with recent years.

3 Assaults: 12 months to December 2022

Assaults and serious assaults increased from the previous 12-month period.

In the 12 months to December 2022, there were 20,993 assault incidents, a 7% **increase** from the previous 12 months. Of these, 2,417 were serious assaults, **up** 19%. Rates of assault and serious assault per 1,000 prisoners **increased** 4% and 15% respectively in the latest 12 months.

Assaults **decreased** 3% in the latest quarter to 5,397 incidents while the number of serious assaults **decreased** by 4% to 625 incidents.

The rate of assault per 1,000 prisoners was higher in female than male establishments.

The rate of assault in male establishments **increased** by 3% from the previous 12 months, while the rate in female establishments **increased** by 21%. Assault rates for the 12 months to December 2022 were higher in female establishments (419 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) than in male establishments (255 incidents per 1,000 prisoners).

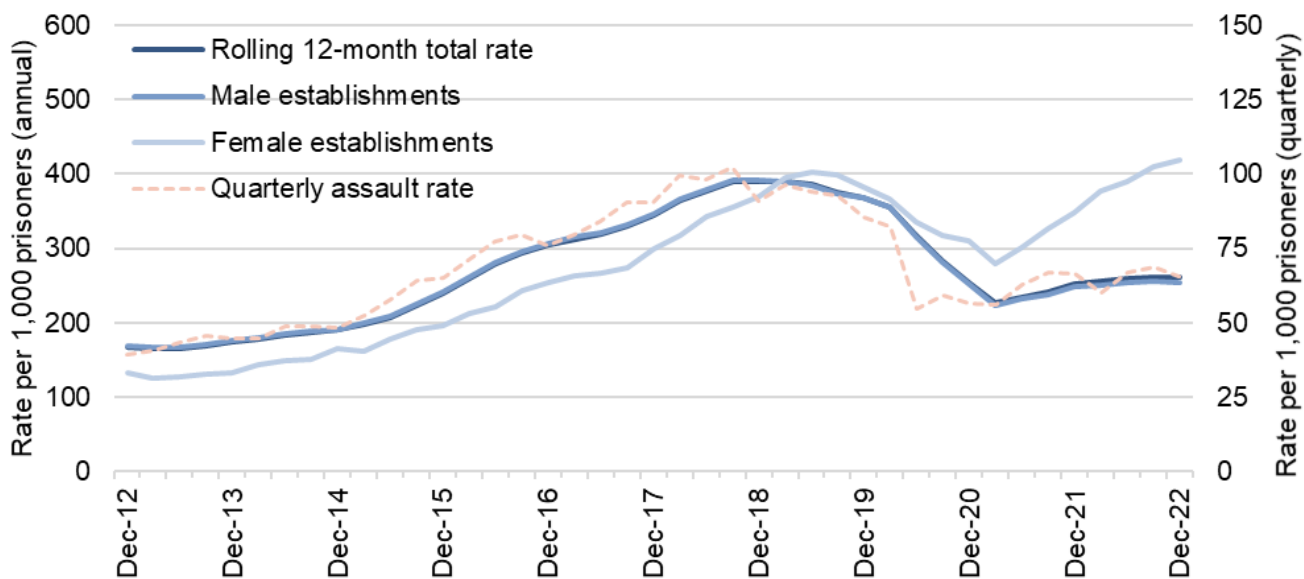
Assaults on staff decreased from the previous 12-month period.

There were 7,229 assaults on staff in the 12 months to December 2022, a 4% **decrease** from the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter the number of assaults on staff **decreased** by 4% to 1,830 incidents.

The rate of assaults on staff per 1,000 prisoners **decreased** by 7%, comprising a decrease of 8% in male establishments and an increase of 12% in female establishments compared with the previous 12 months.

Statistics for the 12 months to December 2022 relate to the second full 12-month period since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and the restricted regimes prisons put in place in order to safely manage the risks of infection during the pandemic. We have also seen an exit from the National Framework in May 2022 (see Further Information at the end of this bulletin). This affects the comparability of the statistics with earlier periods.

Figure 4: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of total assaults by gender of establishment, 12 months ending December 2012 to 12 months ending December 2022, with quarterly rates



In the 12 months to December 2022, assault incidents increased by 7% to 20,993 (a rate of 261 incidents per 1,000 prisoners). The rate of assaults in the latest 12 months was 4% higher than in the previous 12 months.

In the latest quarter there were 5,397 assaults, down 3% from the previous quarter. The number of assaults and the quarterly rate remain lower than their peak in the July to September 2018 quarter. This reflects that quarterly numbers and rates of assaults were already falling before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the considerable decrease in the early stages of the pandemic (April to June 2020) associated with changes in prison regimes and activity in the criminal justice system.

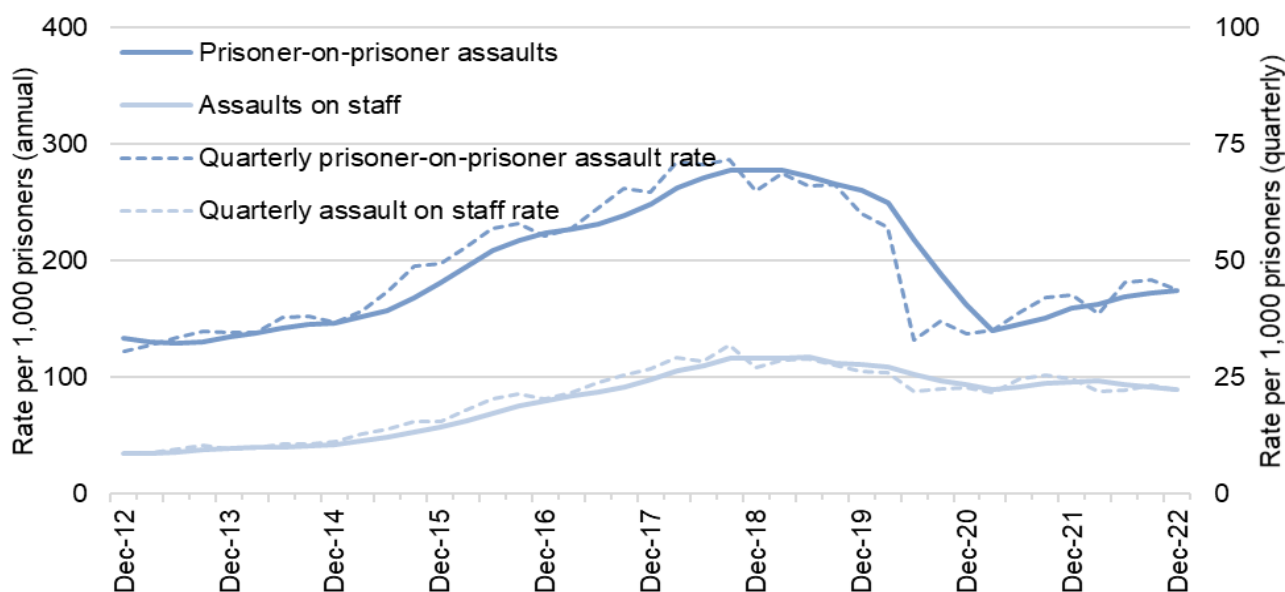
The number of incidents in male establishments increased by 6% from 18,575 to 19,650 in the 12 months to December 2022 (a rate of 255 per 1,000 prisoners). The rate of assaults in male establishments in the latest 12 months was 3% higher than in the previous 12 months.

The number of incidents in female establishments increased by 21% from 1,106 to 1,343 incidents in the 12 months to December 2022 (a rate of 419 per 1,000 prisoners). The rate of assaults in female establishments in the latest 12 months was 21% higher than in the previous 12 months, and is now at its highest level in the time series¹⁰.

Assault rates have been higher in female establishments than in male establishments since the 12 months to December 2018, with the difference extending each year, after previously being higher in male establishments.

In the latest quarter, the number of assaults in male establishments decreased 3% from 5,211 to 5,042, and the number of assaults in female establishments decreased 6% from 379 to 355.

Figure 5: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and assaults on staff, 12 months ending December 2012 to 12 months ending December 2022, with quarterly rates



There were 14,004 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults¹¹ in the 12 months to December 2022 (a rate of 174 per 1,000 prisoners), an increase of 13% from the 12,433 assaults in the previous 12 months. The rate of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults in the latest 12 months was 9% higher than in

¹⁰ The time series for assault incidents starts in 2000, and self-harm incidents starts in 2004.

¹¹ This figure includes any prisoner-on-prisoner assaults where there may also have been an assault on staff.

the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter, there were 3,619 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, a 3% decrease from 3,750 in the previous quarter.

There were 7,229 assaults on staff¹² in the 12 months to December 2022 (a rate of 90 per 1,000 prisoners), a decrease of 4% from the 7,539 assaults in the previous 12 months. The rate of assaults on staff in the latest 12 months was 7% lower than in the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter, there were 1,830 assaults on staff, a 4% decrease from 1,900 incidents in the previous quarter.

The proportion of assaults on staff¹³ decreased to 34% of all incidents in the 12 months to December 2022, from 38% in the previous 12 months, having steadily increased prior to that from 21% in the 12 months to December 2012.

In male establishments, prisoner-on-prisoner assaults increased by 12% to 13,312 incidents (172 incidents per 1,000 male prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2022, and the rate increased 9%. Assaults on staff decreased 6% to 6,572 incidents (85 incidents per 1,000 male prisoners), with the rate decreasing 8%.

In female establishments, prisoner-on-prisoner assaults increased by 30% to 692 incidents (with the rate also increasing by 29% to 216 incidents per 1,000 female prisoners) and assaults on staff increased 13% to 657 incidents (the rate increasing by 12% to 205 incidents per 1,000 female prisoners), compared to the previous 12 months. The rate of assaults on staff has been steadily increasing from a rate of 42 incidents per 1,000 female prisoners in the 12 months to December 2013.

In the 12 months to December 2022, the proportion of assaults that were on staff remained higher in female establishments (49%) than in male establishments (33%).

¹² There was a change in how staff assaults have been recorded from April 2017, this has simplified how incidents involving staff are identified, however it is possible this has increased the recording of incidents. Please see the Guide to Safety in Custody statistics for further information

¹³ Some assault incidents may be recorded as both a prisoner-on-prisoner assault and an assault on staff, so the sum of the two categories may exceed the total number of assaults

Serious assaults

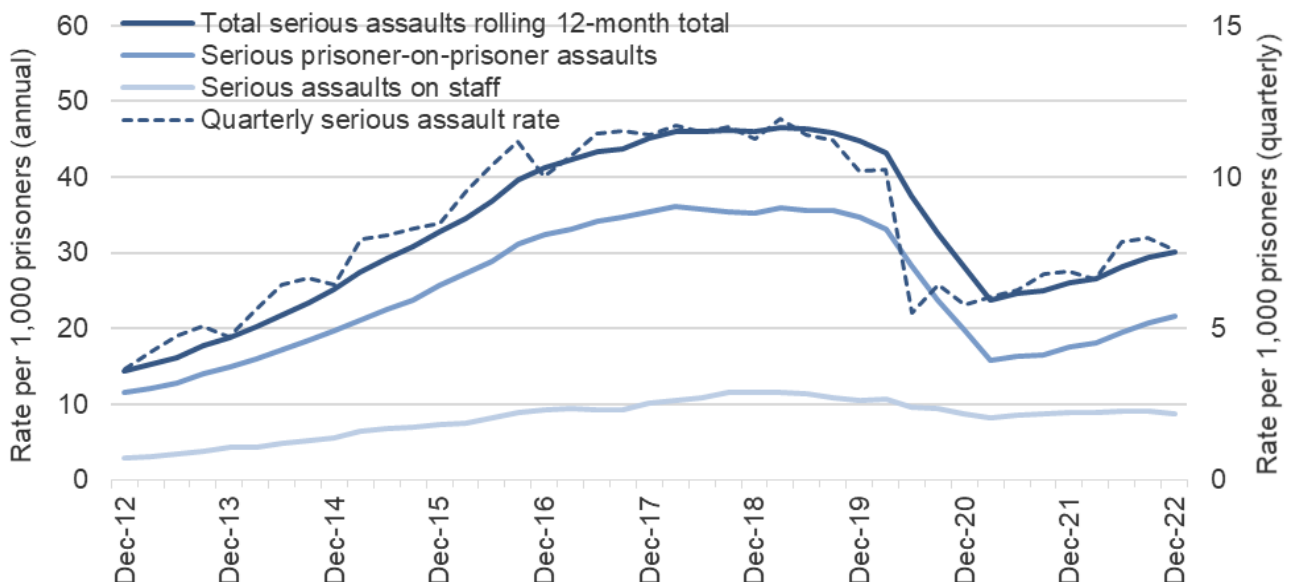
Of the 20,993 assault incidents, 2,417 (12%) were serious.

In the 12 months to December 2022, there were 2,417 serious assault incidents, a 19% **increase** from the previous 12 months. The rate of serious assault **increased** by 15% over the period.

Serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults **increased** by 28% to 1,745, and serious assaults on staff increased by 2% to 709 in the 12 months to December 2022.

Serious assaults are those which fall into one or more of the following categories: a sexual assault; requires detention in outside hospital as an in-patient; requires medical treatment for concussion or internal injuries; or incurs any of the following injuries: a fracture, scald or burn, stabbing, crushing, extensive or multiple bruising, black eye, broken nose, lost or broken tooth, cuts requiring suturing, bites, temporary or permanent blindness.

Figure 6: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of total serious assaults, serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, and serious assaults on staff, 12 months ending December 2012 to 12 months ending December 2022



In the latest 12 months, 12% of assaults were serious assaults. The proportion of all assaults that were serious was higher in male establishments (12%) than in female establishments (6%).

In the 12 months to December 2022, there were 2,417 serious assaults (a rate of 30 per 1,000 prisoners), a 19% increase from the previous 12 months. The rate of serious assaults in the latest 12 months was 15% higher than in the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter, there were 625 serious assaults, a 4% decrease from the previous quarter.

There were 1,745 serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults (a rate of 22 per 1,000 prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2022, a 28% increase from the previous 12 months. The rate of serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults in the latest 12 months was 24% higher than in the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter, there were 467 serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, almost unchanged (a 0.6% increase) from 464 incidents in the previous quarter.

There were 709 serious assaults on staff (a rate of 9 per 1,000 prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2022, a 2% increase from the previous 12 months. The rate of serious assaults on

staff in the latest 12 months was almost unchanged (0.8% lower) than in the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter, the number of serious assaults on staff decreased by 19% to 160 incidents.

Key findings from additional assaults tables for 2022

The annual assaults tables include a further breakdown of the assaults figures, often including a breakdown by prisoner role within each incident. A definition of each of the roles is shown below:

- **Assailant:** This refers to assault incidents in which there is a clear aggressor (assailant) and victim. Such incidents arise from offences of GBH and ABH.
- **Fighter:** This refers to assault incidents in which there is no clear aggressor or victim. Such cases arise from offences of affray.
- **Victim:** This refers to assault incidents in which there is a clear aggressor (assailant) and victim. Such incidents arise from offences of GBH and ABH.

Age

Prisoners in the 18-20 year **age-group** had the highest rates of incidents where they were involved as assailants (827 per 1,000 prisoners), fighters (874 per 1,000 prisoners) and victims (378 per 1,000 prisoners).

In general, the rate of incidents are higher where those involved are from the younger age-groups.

Custody type

Prisoners on **remand** had higher rates of assailants, fighters and victims than sentenced prisoners in 2022. The rates increased for prisoners on remand but decreased or stayed relatively stable for sentenced prisoners from 2021.

For assailants the rates per 1,000 prisoners increased 41% for prisoners on remand, from 187 in 2021 to 264 in 2022, and decreased 4% for sentenced prisoners from 174 in 2021 to 167 in 2022.

For fighters the rates per 1,000 prisoners increased 65% for prisoners on remand, from 122 in 2021 to 201 in 2022, and decreased by less than 1% for sentenced prisoners from 128 in 2021 to 127 in 2022.

For victims the rates per 1,000 prisoners increased 67% for prisoners on remand, from 82 in 2021 to 137 in 2022, and by less than 1% for sentenced prisoners from 89 in 2021 to 90 in 2022.

Ethnicity

Prisoners from the black and mixed **ethnic groups** had the highest rates of assailants, fighters and victims. For black prisoners there were 356 assailants per 1,000 prisoners, 299 fighters and 122 victims. For prisoners from the mixed ethnic group there were 322 assailants per 1,000 prisoners, 259 fighters and 134 victims.

The rates for white prisoners were lower than other ethnic groups, at 158 assailants per 1,000 prisoners, 113 fighters and 96 victims.

Sexual assaults

There were 337 **sexual assaults**¹⁴ recorded in custody in 2022, a 48% increase from 228 sexual assaults in custody in 2021. Over the same period the rate of sexual assaults incidents per 1,000 prisoners increased 44%, from 2.9 in 2021 to 4.2 in 2022.

For females, sexual assaults in custody doubled, from 13 in 2021 to 26 in 2022, with the rate increasing from 4.1 to 8.1. For males, there was a 45% increase, from 215 in 2021 to 311 in 2022, with the rate increasing 40% from 2.9 to 4.0.

¹⁴ Sexual assaults are any assault where the victim believes it to have been of a sexual nature, and where all of the following occur – they intentionally touch another person, the touching is sexual, the victim does not consent to the touching, they do not reasonably believe the other person consents, and the touching can be with any part of the body or with anything else.

Weapons

There were 5,087 **assaults where weapons were recorded** in 2022, 24% of total assaults, which is broadly stable since 2018.

Of those assaults that involved a weapon, 31% involved spitting (down from 34% in 2021), and 11% involved a blunt instrument (down from 12% in 2021).

Injuries

There were 2,214 **serious injuries** as a result of assaults in prison in 2022, a 19% increase from 1,866 serious injuries in 2021.

Of those serious injuries, 21% resulted in a black eye (up from 19% in 2021), 21% were cuts requiring sutures in 2022 (down from 22% in 2021), 14% resulted in extensive or multiple bruising (up from 12% in 2021), 12% resulted in a fracture (up from 11% in 2021), and 11% were bites (down from 15% in 2021).

There were also 10,521 minor injuries as a result of assaults in prison in 2022, a 9% increase from 9,668 minor injuries in 2021.

Hospital attendance

0.2% of assault incidents required attendance at hospital as an inpatient. 2.3% required treatment for concussion or internal injuries.

Further Information

Covid-19

Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been keen public and Parliamentary interest in how the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and Her Majesty's Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) are managing the running of prisons and the probation system to limit the spread of the virus while maintaining the core functions of these vital parts of the justice system. The core tenets of HMPPS's prison strategy, building on Public Health England (PHE) and Public Health Wales (PHW) advice and learning developed in managing an early outbreak of the virus, included the implementation of effective isolation, reverse cohorting of new entrants to custody, and shielding of vulnerable prisoners. During this period, we have seen progression of establishments to different levels of the National Framework for managing Covid with most establishments reaching Stage 2 or 1 before the Omicron outbreak in December 2021. We have also seen an exiting of the framework in May 2022 and a move to Living with Covid: [Living with Covid-19: prisons and youth custody settings - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/living-with-covid-19-prisons-and-youth-custody-settings).

The latest Covid-19 figures are published monthly on the MOJ website via the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hm-prison-and-probation-service-covid-19-statistics-monthly>

Accompanying files

As well as this bulletin, the following products are published as part of this release:

- A technical guide providing further information on how the data are collected and processed, as well as information on the revisions policy and legislation relevant to sentencing trends and background on the functioning of the criminal justice system.
- A set of summary tables for the latest quarter, and annual tables up to the latest calendar year.
- Underlying data files with pivot tables, giving lower level granularity.

National Statistics status

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority's (UKSA) regulatory arm. The UKSA considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.



It is the Ministry of Justice's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected for National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the UKSA promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

Our statisticians regularly review the content of publications. Development of new and improved statistical outputs is usually dependent on reallocating existing resources. As part of our continual review and prioritisation, we welcome user feedback on existing outputs including content, breadth, frequency and methodology. Please send any comments you have on this publication including suggestions for further developments or reductions in content.

Future publications

Our statisticians regularly review the content of publications. Development of new and improved statistical outputs is usually dependent on reallocating existing resources. As part of our continual review and prioritisation, we welcome user feedback on existing outputs including content, breadth, frequency and methodology. Please send any comments you have on this publication including suggestions for further developments or reductions in content.

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Next update: July 2023

URL: www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics

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