



Ministry
of Justice

HM Prison and Probation Service COVID-19 Official Statistics

Data to 17 July 2020

Ministry of Justice

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Introduction

This official statistics release provides weekly data on the spread of COVID-19 in the prison and probation service in England and Wales and mitigating actions being taken to limit the spread of the virus and save lives. This release covers the period from Monday 16 March 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 outbreak to Friday 17 July 2020.

It provides information on:

- Deaths among prisoners, children in custody and probation service users where COVID-19 is the suspected cause.
- Prisoners released early from custody under COVID-19 temporary release schemes.
- Confirmed COVID-19 cases in prisoners and children in custody (i.e. positive tests).
- Narrative on capacity management data for prisons.

In this edition of the publication gender, age and ethnicity information has also been provided for service users.

Key Findings

The key findings in this release are:

- **44** deaths since the start of the pandemic among HMPPS service users where COVID-19 was the suspected cause, of whom **23** were prisoners and **21** were probation service users. There have been no COVID-19 suspected deaths of service users since the week ending 29 May 2020.
- **530** prisoners or children tested positive for COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic, across **84** establishments, almost all of whom were adults. The number of new confirmed cases has increased by fewer than **10** each week since 19 June 2020.

- **242** prisoners have been released under COVID-19 temporary release schemes, **15** of these occurred in the latest week.

Included in this release is a protected characteristics breakdown for each area. This data is reported to the earlier date of **10 July 2020**. The key findings from the protected characteristics section are:

- All deaths of prisoners occurred in people aged 40 or above, with **61%** aged 60 and over. Of the **21** probation service user deaths, **2** were aged 39 or under.
- **20** deaths (**87%**) were among those of white ethnicity, higher than the proportion of white offenders in the prison population.
- Of the prisoners or children who tested positive, **78%** were white compared to **72%** of the overall prison population. Black and Black British prisoners represented **6%** of all those who tested positive compared to **13%** in the overall prison population.
- The data shows younger age groups are less likely to test positive for COVID-19 with older prisoners more likely relative to their representation in the prison population.
- **10%** of those who tested positive in prisons were female, compared to **4%** in the prison population

Background

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 Prison 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. Publishing this data aims to bring transparency to the strategies HMPPS is employing to manage the prison and probation systems, as well as the impact of the virus on service users and staff.

The core tenet 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, is the implementation of effective isolation, reverse cohorting of new entrants to custody, and shielding of vulnerable prisoners. In addition, HMPPS have reduced the movement of prisoners and staff between prisons to prevent the "seeding and feeding" of infection, and have restricted regimes to prevent social contact in custody.

Using the latest modelling from PHE, HMPPS estimate that creating a headroom across the prison estate of 5,500 (5,000 in the adult male estate) would allow them to fully implement this strategy, and could be effective in limiting the spread of the virus. The model on transmission of COVID-19 in prisons can be [found here](#)¹. HMPPS is seeking to achieve that headroom through a combination of reductions in operational capacity, new prison accommodation, releases from prison, and reduced receptions into prison. The management of HMPPS' actions has been informed by the advice of experts from public health authorities, and will be kept under constant review.

1. Capacity management

As of 17 July 2020, the prison population is 79,600, showing a reduction of over 4,400 since 13 March 2020². This has primarily been driven by a reduction in inflows from the courts due to COVID-19 disruption, whilst outflows have continued as usual as prisoners reach their release dates. As at 17 July 2020, the useable operational capacity of the prison system had been reduced by around 3,800 places to support implementation of the compartmentalisation strategy described below.

Further measures were introduced in April 2020 to ease pressure on prisons in the short-term. This saw the early release of some low-risk offenders near to the end of their custodial sentence and some other risk-assessed vulnerable prisoners, including pregnant women and mothers with babies on compassionate grounds. As of 17 July 2020, the number of early releases under COVID-19 temporary release schemes to date is 242, of whom 50 were compassionate releases of vulnerable prisoners, pregnant women and mothers with babies. 15 prisoners were released under COVID-19 temporary release schemes in the latest week.

HMPPS have also adopted a capacity management approach known as 'compartmentalisation'. This involves the isolation of all prisoners with symptoms, the shielding of vulnerable prisoners in the system and all new arrivals being quarantined for 14 days.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-population-management-strategy-for-prisons>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-population-figures-2020>

2. Deaths

The service has taken the above measures to limit the spread of the virus and to protect staff and service users. However, prisons and probation, like all other sectors in the England in Wales have experienced deaths due to COVID-19.

Deaths reported are those where COVID-19 is suspected to be the cause. Each case will be investigated by the Prison and Probation Ombudsman to determine the official cause of death. In the period to 17 July 2020, there had been a total of 44 deaths among HMPPS service users suspected to be due to COVID-19. This includes 23 prisoner deaths, with no deaths of children in custody. Amongst the probation caseload, there were 21 deaths suspected to be due to COVID-19. Of these, 14 were under supervision of the National Probation Service and 7 in Community Rehabilitation Companies. There have been no COVID-19 suspected deaths of service users since the week ending 29 May 2020. Figure 1 shows the cumulative weekly deaths to 17 July 2020.

Data relating to the deaths of prison and probation officers can be found in the Office for National Statistics release, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) related deaths by occupation](#)³, and will be subsequently released in [HMPPS Workforce Statistics](#)⁴ release in August alongside COVID-19 related staff sickness data.

Data relating to the deaths of service users will be published in the National Statistics report '[Safety in Custody](#)' and official statistics report '[Deaths of Offenders in the Community](#)'.

Figure 1: Cumulative number of HMPPS service user deaths where COVID-19 is the suspected cause, by service provider, England and Wales, weekly from week ending 3 April 2020*



* denotes that the 3 April 2020 includes all COVID-19 suspected deaths up to this point.

³<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/causesofdeath/bulletins/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbyoccupationenglandandwales/deathsregistereduptoandincluing20april2020>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-offender-management-service-workforce-statistics>

3. Testing

Testing practices in prisons and Youth Custody Service sites have been determined locally. Initially, once a small sample of prisoners or children had tested positive in an establishment, no further tests were carried out on symptomatic individuals to preserve testing kits and on the assumption all further tests would be positive. This policy was changed on 15 April 2020 due to the increased availability of testing supplies meaning all symptomatic prisoners or children are now tested.

So far, in the period to 17 July 2020, a cumulative total of 530 prisoners or children have tested positive for COVID-19 across 84 establishments. 520 of these positive test results were for prisoners and 10 were children⁵. The number of new confirmed cases has increased by fewer than 10 each week since 19 June 2020.

4. Protected Characteristics

Included in this release are further breakdowns of the data looking at age, ethnicity and gender. Data in this section is reported to the earlier date of **Friday 10 July 2020**. These tables are provided as a one-off report to provide further insight. The protected characteristics tables will not be included in future releases of the HMPPS COVID-19 publication.

4a: COVID-19 temporary release schemes

In the period to 10 July 2020, the number of early releases under COVID-19 temporary release schemes were 227, of whom 36 (16%) were female and 191 (84%) were male. The age group 29 and under saw the most releases at 69 (30%) followed by 30 to 39 at 62 (27%). 13 prisoners (6%) aged 60 or over have been released.

148 (65%) of offenders released under the scheme were of White ethnicity, 30 (13%) were Asian or Asian British, 32 (14%) were Black or Black British and 17 (7%) were Mixed, other or unknown ethnicity.

4b: Deaths of service users where COVID-19 is the suspected cause

In the period to the 10 July 2020, 20 of the 23 (87%) COVID-19 suspected deaths among prisoners were of White ethnicity. The remaining were of Asian or Asian British ethnicity with 2 (9%) deaths and Black or Black British ethnicity with 1 (4%) death. Of the total probation service user deaths, 16 (76%) were of White ethnicity, 2 (10%) were Black or Black British ethnicity and 3 (14%) were mixed, other or unknown ethnicity.

All prisoners who have died where COVID-19 is the suspected cause were over 40 years old. The majority of deaths, 14 (61%), were among offenders aged 60 and over, 4 were aged between 40 and 49 and 5 aged between 50 and 59. There was 1 death of a probation service user aged 29 and under where COVID-19 is the suspected cause, 1 aged between 30 and 39, 1 aged between 40 and 49, 6 aged between 50 and 59 and 12 aged 60 and over.

⁵ Figures have been rounded to reflect data quality, therefore sub-categories may not sum to the aggregated data shown.

Among the COVID-19 prison deaths, 2 (9%) were female and 21 (91%) were male. For probation, 3 (14%) deaths were female service users and 18 were male (86%).

While the low number of deaths in prison from COVID-19 makes statistical inference unreliable, those that did occur were more likely in the older population consistent with trends seen in the general population. 61% of the prison deaths occurred in those aged 60 and over while this group makes up just 6% of the prison population. However, Black or Black British offenders accounted for a lower proportion of the deaths (4%) than they do in the general prison population (13%).

4c: HMPPS service users who have tested positive for COVID-19

Of the prisoners or children who have tested positive for COVID-19 to 10 July 2020, 410 (78%) were of White ethnicity, 40 (8%) were Asian or Asian British, 30 (6%) were Black or Black British and 40 (8%) had mixed, other or unknown ethnicity. This compares to 72% of the overall prison population who are white. Black and Black British prisoners represented 6% of all those who tested positive, as with deaths notably lower than their representation in the wider prison population. This may in part be explained by the age distribution of Black and Black British offenders being skewed towards younger age groups.

Of prisoners and children who tested positive for COVID-19, 23% were aged 29 and under while 16% of those who tested positive were aged 60 or over. This compares with 34% of the overall prison population aged 29 and under and 6% aged 60 and over. The data shows younger age groups in prisons have been less likely to test positive for COVID-19 while older prisoners have been more likely.

470 prisoners or children who tested positive were male (90%) and 50 (10%) were female. In contrast, just 4% of the prison population are female showing an over-representation of females who have tested positive for COVID-19 in prisons.

Data Quality

Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large-scale recording system. Much of the data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic has been done at pace, with recording practices evolving as we understand more about the requirements and conditions we are facing. In order to present the timeliest information, the data presented in this report have not been subjected to the usual standard of quality assurance associated with official statistics.

To address potential inaccuracies, data are generally rounded to two significant figures to reflect the level of confidence. As such, sub-categories may not sum to the aggregated data shown.

Much of the data will undergo additional assurance in due course and be reported as official statistics in the following releases:

- [Safety in Custody](#)
- [Deaths of Offenders in the Community](#)

All deaths are phoned into MOJ headquarters on a daily basis. The cause of deaths in prison are classified as *apparent* until a police investigation and coroner's inquest have been concluded and the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman's office publish a detailed 'Fatal Incident Report'. Recording practices for COVID-19 related deaths have been updated since the start of the pandemic, meaning the exact cause is not always available or known. Furthermore, the cause of many deaths will be uncertain and awaiting an inquest; we have taken steps to reflect this uncertainty by reporting all cases in which COVID-19 was suspected to be a factor.

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