



HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) COVID-19 Experimental Statistics for staff

Data to 31 October 2020

Ministry of Justice

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Introduction

This statistics release provides data on COVID-19 amongst staff in HMPPS in England and Wales.

It provides information on:

- Deaths where HMPPS staff have died having tested positive for COVID-19 or where there was a clinical assessment that COVID-19 was a contributory factor in their death.
- Confirmed COVID-19 cases in HMPPS staff (i.e. positive tests).
- HMPPS staff absent due to COVID-19 sickness.

Tables 1 and 2 in this release cover the period from the beginning of March 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 outbreak to 31 October 2020. Table 3 provides a picture of COVID-19 sickness over time as at seven snapshot dates from 30 April 2020 to 30 October 2020. These are experimental statistics aimed at providing an idea of the level of COVID-19 sickness absence, this data is currently under review and once complete we will include this COVID-19 sickness in our core publication Average Working Days Lost reporting.

Key findings

The key findings in this release are:

- **21** HMPPS staff have died having tested positive for COVID-19 or where there was a clinical assessment that COVID-19 was a contributory factor in their deaths. Of whom **11** staff members were directly employed and **10** were non-directly employed. **Four** deaths of staff occurred in October 2020, the first deaths of staff since May 2020.
- **3,189** HMPPS staff have tested positive for COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic. Of which, **2,339** are directly employed staff from Prisons and Youth Custody Service. The number of new confirmed cases has increased by **1,722** since 30 September 2020.
- **1,007** staff were absent due to COVID-19 sickness on 30 October 2020.

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 impact of the virus on HMPPS service users and staff.

A separate bulletin containing service user data related to COVID-19 has been published in the official statistics report '[HM Prison and Probation Service COVID-19 statistics](#)'. This contains data on COVID-19 suspected deaths, confirmed cases and early releases among service users.

1. Deaths

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

Since the August publication, the counting of deaths in prisons and probation have been revised to align to the Public Health England definition. The publication now reports on deaths where the member of staff had tested positive for COVID-19 or where there was a clinical assessment that COVID-19 was a contributory factor in their death. This consists of:

- Deaths suspected or confirmed to be due to COVID-19.
- Deaths believed to be due to other causes, but where the staff member had tested positive for COVID-19.

From March 2020 to the end of October 2020, 21 HMPPS staff died having tested positive for COVID-19 or where there was a clinical assessment that COVID-19 was a contributory factor in their deaths. This includes 11 directly employed staff and 10 non-directly employed staff. Of the directly employed staff, 8 of these were staff from Prisons and Youth Custody Service and 3 were members of the National Probation Service. Staff members have been identified as directly employed if they have been flagged as directly employed within the dataset and the staff member worked in a prison, an Approved Premises, or was part of the National Probation Service.

These numbers are too small to make an inference regarding ethnicity disparity.

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](#), and non-COVID related staff deaths have been previously published in the [HMPPS Workforce Statistics](#).

2. Positive cases

Since March there has been antigen testing (swab tests) for both service users and staff (or members of their households) who are symptomatic, which can confirm if they currently have COVID-19.

This data is self-reported with staff members notifying their manager of a positive test result.

The methodology used to calculate when a positive test was taken has been updated from the last publication. Rather than using the data at the end of each month to record the number of positive cases, we have used the most recent data available and categorised the tests based on the result date. This allows for cases added a few days after the month end but with a test result date in the previous month to be captured correctly.

In the period up to 31 October 2020, 3,189 staff have tested positive for COVID-19. Of these positive test results, 595 were for non-directly employed staff and 2,594 were directly employed. In the month ending 31 October 2020 there were 1,722 new confirmed cases.

Staff members are recorded as directly employed in this table if they are included in the HQ, National Probation Service or Approved Premises data collection. Staff members recorded in the data collection from both public and private prisons are recorded as directly employed if they have been flagged as directly employed within the dataset.

Recognising the unique environment in prisons, we are routinely testing frontline staff to bolster our defences against the virus – meaning we can identify and isolate cases earlier and move quickly to contain outbreaks and protect the NHS. This, alongside the measures we have put in place since March, will help continue to limit the spread of the virus and save lives.

HMPPS has been working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care, the NHS, and public health bodies in England and Wales for a number of months to provide COVID-19 tests in prisons. Initially, this involved the testing of symptomatic staff and service users; then during the summer we commenced testing of all consenting prisoners, HMPPS employees and non-directly-employed staff across 28 prisons in England.

Since the autumn we began the roll-out of routine testing of frontline staff in prisons to help identify the asymptomatic and break chains of transmission. Any staff who test positive through this programme are included in the data presented here.

3. Sickness absences

These figures refer to the total number of staff recorded as not working due to sickness absence for suspected COVID-19 on the last working day of the month. This does not necessarily reflect the number of symptomatic staff members; if a symptomatic staff member was able to work from home they would not be captured in these figures. Staff sickness is reported by the manager and the reliability of this data depends on this information being reported accurately.

Of the seven dates published from April to October, the highest number of staff absent due to COVID-19 sickness was recorded on 30 October 2020, where 1,007 staff were absent. Of these staff absence cases, 864 were for directly employed staff and of these, 815 were staff from Prisons and Youth Custody Service (including both public and private establishments). Staff absent due to COVID-19 sickness rose (by 313 cases) for the first time on 30th September, when compared to the previous month, and increased again (by 553) on 30th October. This trend reflects the broader rise in COVID-19 cases seen in the country.

These figures include all members of staff who are not marked as working from home and where the absence category selected is '1. Sickness Absence - Respiratory System Epidemic/Pandemic'. If an invalid absence option has been assigned to a staff member then that individual has not been included in these figures. We are working to identify how many

of these invalid data points should be included within the sickness absence category, we do not believe that many records are affected.

As in table 2, staff members are recorded as directly employed if they are included in the HQ, National Probation Service or Approved Premises data collection. Staff members recorded in the data collection from both public and private prisons are recorded as directly employed if they have been flagged as directly employed within the dataset.

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.

Data on ethnicity of staff for the confirmed cases and staff absences was not directly collected. Employee number was used to link the data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic to our internal records on ethnicity. Therefore, there may be some inaccuracies in this data as it relies on the manual input of employee number. We do not hold ethnicity data on staff working in private establishments.

For transparency we are providing an ethnicity breakdown for each of the three tables. However, investigation into underlying drivers will happen once the information has been fully assured. For example, analysis has not been conducted into whether geographical location of prisons is driving any disparities we are experiencing.

Data is not reported over the weekends and was only reported on Tuesday's and Friday's from 17th August until 29th September, hence data from the last available day in the month has been used in some cases in table 3, rather than the last day of the month.

The staff members recorded under 'HMPPS HQ and Area Services' in tables 2 and 3 (and hence totals) likely do not include all HQ and area staff. We are currently working to understand the size of the undercount; however, this is likely to be small, with only 10% of workforce staff being HQ and Area Services.

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