



Safety in Custody Statistics, England and Wales: Deaths in Prison Custody to March 2021 Assaults and Self-harm to December 2020

Main Points

Number of deaths increased from the previous 12-month period



In the 12 months to March 2021, there were 408 deaths in prison custody, an increase of 42% from 287 deaths the previous 12 months. Of these, 79 deaths were self-inflicted, a 4% decrease from the 82 self-inflicted deaths in the previous 12 months.

In the most recent quarter there were 154 deaths, 45 more than in the previous quarter, and a record high quarterly total. A higher proportion of deaths in the latest quarter were from COVID-19.

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



There were 55,542 self-harm incidents in the 12 months to December 2020, down 13% from the previous 12 months, comprising a 16% decrease in male establishments and a 0.5% increase in female establishments.



Over the same period, the *rate* of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners, which takes account of the reduction in the prison population between this and the previous year, decreased 13% in male establishments but increased 13% in female establishments.

In the most recent quarter, there were 12,969 self-harm incidents, down 8% on the previous quarter, comprising a 5% decrease in male establishments and a 19% decrease in female establishments.

The number of individuals self-harming decreased



There were 11,843 individuals self-harming in the 12 months to December 2020, down 9% from the previous 12 months. The number of self-harm incidents per individual decreased from 4.9 in 2019 to 4.7 in 2020.

Assaults decreased from the previous 12-month period



There were 21,489 assault incidents in the 12 months to December 2020, down 34% from the 12 months to December 2019. In the most recent quarter, assaults decreased by 4% to 4,738 incidents.

Assaults on staff have decreased



There were 7,979 assaults on staff in the 12 months to December 2020, down 20% from the previous 12 months. In the latest quarter the number of assaults remained steady at 1,896 incidents.

**The number of serious assaults decreased
11% of all assaults were serious**



In the 12 months to December 2020, there were 2,328 serious assault incidents, a decrease of 39% from the previous 12 months. Serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults decreased by 45% to 1,616 in the 12 months to December 2020. Serious assaults on staff also decreased, by 22% to 748.

Statistician's comment

In 2020 we have seen falls in the number of self-harm and assault incidents, and an increase in deaths in the year to March 2021. Statistics for these periods, and particularly for April 2020 onwards, relate to the exceptional period since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, including reduced activity within the Criminal Justice System and the restricted regimes prisons put in place in order to safely manage the risks of infection during the pandemic (see Further Information at the end of this bulletin). Comparisons of these statistics with earlier periods will reflect the impact of Covid-19 as well as underlying trends.

Deaths have increased by 42% in the year to March 2021, with a record quarterly total of 154 in the latest quarter. This has been driven by deaths related to Covid-19.

The number of self-harm incidents has fallen in 2020, by 13%, comprising a decrease of 16% in male establishments and a 0.5% increase in female establishments. This partially reflects a fall in the prison population over the same period, with fewer receptions of sentenced offenders following reduced court activity in response to Covid-19 (as set out in Offender management statistics quarterly: July to September 2020). With the fall in the prison population taken into account, the rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners decreased by 13% in male establishments but increased by 13% in female establishments in 2020. Although the number of self-harm incidents while on remand increased in 2020, there was a decrease in rates of self-harm among both remand and sentenced prisoners in male establishments, and an increase in rates among both remand and sentenced prisoners in the female establishments.

The number of assault incidents fell by 34% in 2020, including a 39% fall in serious assaults. In addition to reflecting the reduced prison population, this is expected to be influenced by the reduced contact included in prison regimes to reduce the risk of Covid-19 infection. Taking the fall in the population into account, assault rates decreased in both male and female establishments, by 33% and 19%. Assault rates were higher in female establishments than male establishments for the first time in the time series. While the rate of assault on prisoners decreased in both male and female establishments, and the rate of assault on staff also decreased in male establishments, the rate of assault on staff in female establishments increased in 2020.

Background

Safety in custody statistics cover deaths, self-harm and assaults in prison custody and HMPPS Immigration Removal Centres 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 series.¹ This release provides statistics on deaths of prisoners to the end of March 2021, and deaths from COVID-19 have been presented in the section below. The latest 12-month data reflects a full year since the outbreak of COVID-19.

The release also provides statistics on assaults and self-harm up to the end of December 2020. This includes the period from March 2020 when COVID-19 restrictions were introduced in prisons to limit and control the spread of the virus. These restrictions included the implementation of effective isolation of prisoners, reverse cohorting of new entrants to custody, and shielding of vulnerable prisoners. See Further Information at the end of this bulletin on the managing and running of prisons during the pandemic.

The total prison population has fallen over the two annual periods used in this bulletin (to end December 2020, and to end March 2021), falling more so for certain population groups². As at 31 December 2020, the total prison population was around 4,700 or 6% smaller than at the same

¹ 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.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly>. Latest data for the year to March 2021 is published in Offender Management Statistics Bulletin, England and Wales Quarterly: October to December 2020.

point in the previous year³. The female population was reduced by 15%, whereas the male population has reduced by 5%. Whilst the total population has reduced, the remand population has increased during the pandemic, mostly due to the challenges in holding Crown Court trials during this period. As at end December 2020, the remand population (those held in prison awaiting trial, and those held in prison between trial and sentencing) had increased by 24% over the past year, while the sentenced prison population had fallen by 10%.

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 occurring⁴. 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. This year, rates have also been calculated for self-harm incidents in the remand and sentenced populations.

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 guidance technical document are also available alongside this bulletin, at www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics.

Youth estate

These statistics include incidents that occurred in the youth estate. However, readers should be aware of a new experimental statistics bulletin, '**Safety in the children and young people secure estate**'. This provides quarterly statistics on assault and self-harm incidents, and deaths for children and young people in the secure estate. It is being published simultaneously to this Safety in Custody quarterly bulletin at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements/safety-in-the-youth-secure-estate-bulletin>

For continuity in the Safety in Custody data series, incidents in the youth estate and associated tables are included in this Safety in Custody bulletin, but readers are referred to 'Safety in the children and young people secure estate' for commentary.

Historically Safety in Custody statistics for the youth estate use an age-based definition for youth incidents, whereas the 'Safety in the children and young people secure estate' statistics are based on the accommodation type. Both methodologies include all incidents occurring in dedicated under-18 Young Offender Institutions (even if they're aged over 17)⁵. However, Safety in Custody statistics also includes all incidents in other establishments involving young people aged 15 to 17. Furthermore, 'Safety in the children and young people secure estate' statistics also includes all incidents within the youth estate at Parc Young People's Unit and the under 18 part of Feltham as well as other custody settings holding under 18s previously not covered by Safety in Custody. For continuity and to align with the definition of the youth estate used in 'Safety in the children and young people secure estate', tables in this publication present data for the latest year(s) using both the historic methodology of Safety in Custody and also the methodology of the youth publication⁶.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/956103/Offender_Management_Statistics_Quarterly_Q3_2020.pdf

⁴ 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 the reduction in population.

⁵ These are Cookham Wood, Werrington and Wetherby.

⁶ Assaults are presented based on both methodologies from April 2018 and self-harm incidents are presented based on both methodologies from April 2019.

1 Deaths: 12 months ending March 2021

Number of deaths increased from the previous 12-month period

In the 12 months to March 2021, there were 408 deaths in prison custody, an increase of 42% from 287 deaths in the previous 12 months which corresponds with deaths related to COVID-19. There were 79 self-inflicted deaths, a decrease of 4% from 82 in the previous 12 months.

In the most recent quarter there were 154 deaths, an increase of 45 on the previous quarter, and a record high quarterly total. This reflected an increase in deaths related to COVID-19, and a smaller increase in self-inflicted deaths.

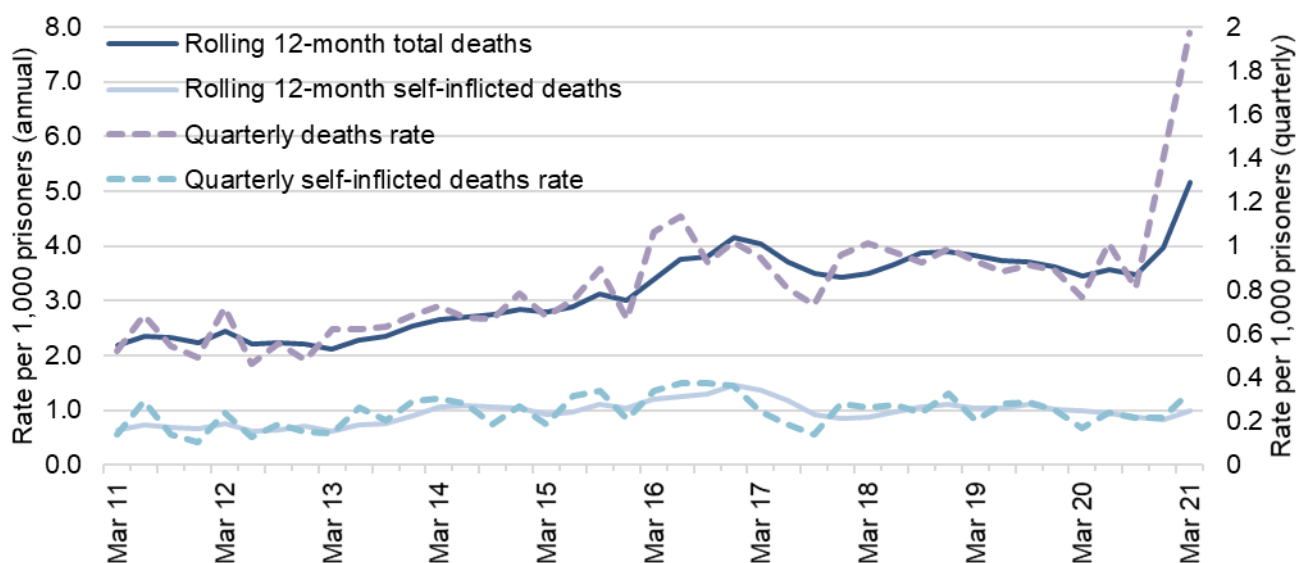
The number of deaths related to COVID-19 increased in the most recent quarter

In the most recent quarter (January to March 2021), the number of deaths that were suspected to be due to Covid-19 increased by 36 to 65. These accounted for 42% of all deaths in the most recent quarter, up from 27% the previous quarter.

In the same period, the number of 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 increased by 29 to 72. These accounted for 47% of all deaths in the most recent quarter, up from 40% the previous quarter.

There were 26 self-inflicted deaths in the most recent quarter, 9 more than in the previous quarter, and 12 more than in the same quarter of 2019.

Figure 1: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of deaths per 1,000 prisoners, 12 months ending March 2011 to 12 months ending March 2021, with quarterly rates



In the 12 months to March 2021, there were 408 deaths in prison custody (a rate of 5.2 per 1,000 prisoners), an increase from 287 deaths in the previous 12 months (a rate of 3.5 per 1,000 prisoners). Long-term trends and more detail are presented in the annual tables⁷.

Over the same period, there were 283 deaths due to natural causes (a rate of 3.6 per 1,000 prisoners), a 65% increase from 172 deaths (a rate of 2.1 per 1,000 prisoners) in the previous 12

⁷ Data on deaths are published three months ahead of assaults and self-harm, therefore, the annual publication Deaths in prison custody for 1978 to 2020 is published in the Safety in Custody quarterly update to September 2020 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/956262/deaths-prison-custody-1978-2020.ods

months. This increase of 111 in deaths due to natural causes in the 12 months to March 2021 reflects deaths from COVID-19 (with further information on these below).

There were 79 apparent self-inflicted deaths in the 12 months to March 2021, a decrease of 4% from 82 self-inflicted deaths in the previous 12 months. The rate of self-inflicted deaths remained unchanged over this period at 1.0 per 1,000 prisoners).

There were 45 deaths recorded as 'Other' in the 12 months to March 2021, 33 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 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.

The most recent quarter saw the number of deaths increase by 45 to a record high total of 154 (an increase of 41%) in the three months to March 2021. This reflected a large increase in deaths from COVID-19 (further information below) and a smaller increase in self-inflicted deaths. There were 26 self-inflicted deaths in the first quarter of 2021, which was 9 more than in the previous quarter and 12 more than in the same quarter of 2020. 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 2021, 143 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 143 deaths, 116 are suspected to be due to COVID-19.

The remaining 27 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 2021), a higher proportion of deaths were related to COVID-19 than in previous quarters of 2020/21. In this quarter, 47% of all deaths were of prisoners who had died within 28 days of a positive test for COVID-19, up from 40% of all deaths in the previous quarter (that is 72 deaths, an increase of 28 from the previous quarter). Similarly, deaths suspected to have been due to COVID-19 made up 42% of all deaths in the latest quarter, up from 27% in the previous quarter (that is 65 deaths, an increase of 36 deaths on the previous quarter).

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

2 Self-harm: 12 months to December 2020

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 55,542 self-harm incidents in the 12 months to December 2020, down 13% from the previous 12 months (a 16% decrease in male establishments and a 0.5% increase in female establishments). Taking into account of the fall in the prison average population in 2020, the rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners decreased 13% in male establishments but increased 13% in female establishments in 2020.

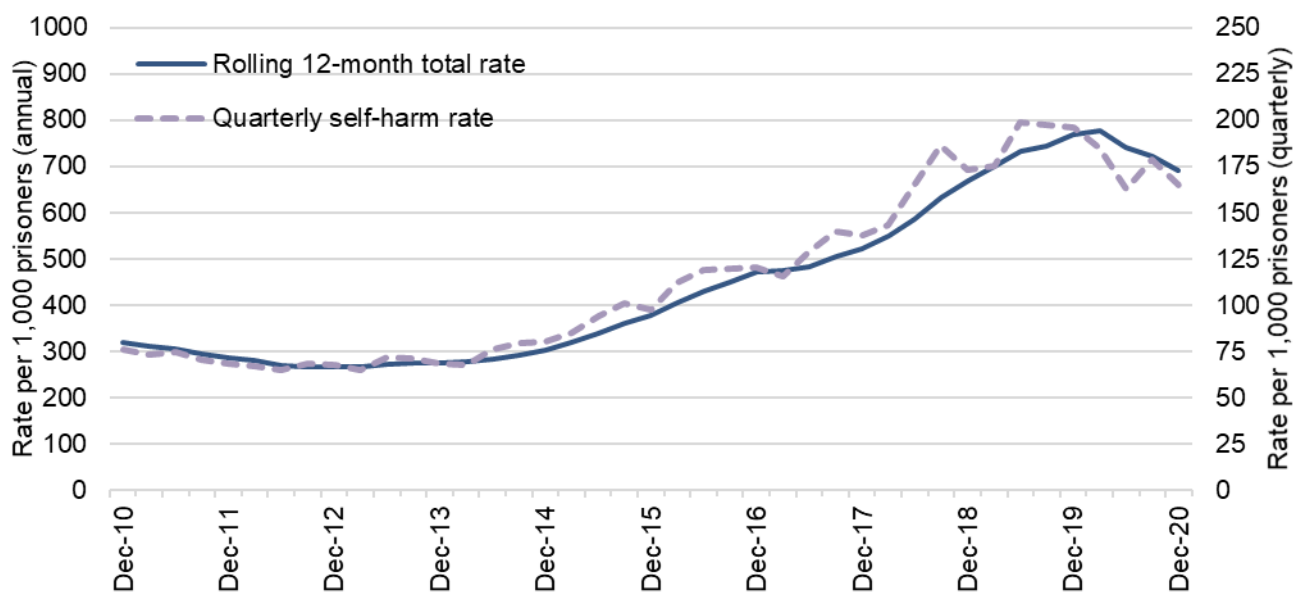
In the most recent quarter there were 12,969 self-harm incidents, down 8% on the previous quarter (a 5% decrease in male establishments and a 19% decrease in female establishments).

The number of individuals self-harming decreased 9% in the latest year.

There were 11,843 individuals self-harming in the 12 months to December 2020, a 9% decrease from 13,057 in the previous 12 months. The number of self-harm incidents per individual decreased to 4.7 in the 12 months to December 2020, from 4.9 in the previous year.

Statistics for the 12 months to December, and particularly those for the April to December quarters, relate to the exceptional 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 (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 2010 to 12 months ending December 2020, with quarterly rates



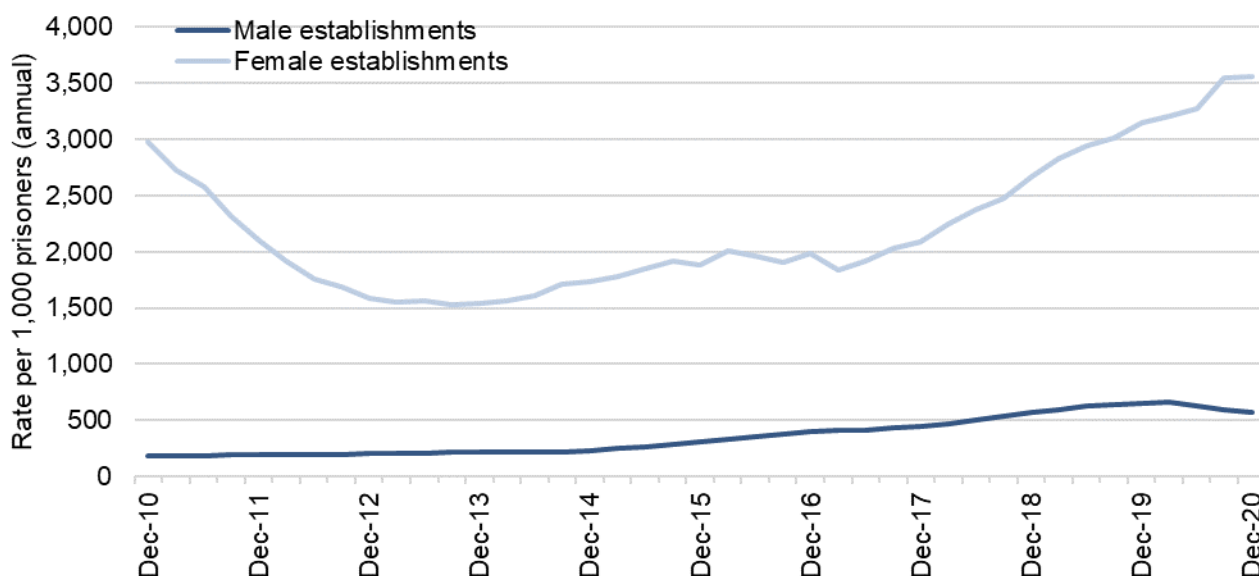
In the 12 months to December 2020, there were 55,542 reported incidents of self-harm (a rate of 691 per 1,000 prisoners), down 13% from the previous 12 months. On a quarterly basis, the number of incidents in the three months to December 2020 decreased by 8% from the previous quarter, from 14,166 to 12,969 incidents.

The number of individuals self-harming decreased by 9% to 11,843 in the latest 12 months (a rate of 147 individuals per 1,000 prisoners), from 13,057 in the previous 12 months. The number of incidents per self-harming individual decreased from 4.9 in the previous year to 4.7 in the latest

12 months, although a small number of prolific self-harmers have a disproportionate impact on this figure. Just over a half (52%) of prisoners who self-harmed in 2020 did so more than once.

The number of self-harm incidents requiring hospital attendance decreased by 24% to 2,657 in the 12 months to December 2020 and decreased by 8% in the latest quarter to 668 incidents. The proportion of incidents that required hospital attendance decreased from 5.5% in the 12 months to December 2019 to 4.8% in the latest 12 months.

Figure 3: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners by gender of establishment, 12 months ending December 2010 to 12 months ending December 2020



Self-harm trends differ considerably by gender. The number of incidents in male establishments decreased by 16% from 51,691 in the 12 months to December 2019 to 43,554 in the 12 months to December 2020. The number of incidents in the female estate increased 0.5% from 11,931 in the previous 12 months to 11,988. On a quarterly basis, the number of incidents in the three months to December 2020 decreased by 5% in male establishments compared with the previous three months and decreased by 19% in female establishments.

The rate of incidents, which takes population size into account, was 566 incidents per 1,000 prisoners in the male estate in the 12 months to December 2020, down 13% from 653 incidents per 1,000 prisoners in the 12 months to December 2019. The rate of incidents per 1,000 prisoners in female establishments was far higher, and increased by 13%, from 3,144 in the previous 12 months to 3,566 in the latest 12 months.

The number of incidents per individual who self-harmed in female establishments was more than twice that in male establishments and increased in the latest year. In the 12 months to December 2020, there were 9.9 incidents of self-harm per self-harming female compared with 9.3 the previous 12 months, while for males it decreased to 4.1 incidents per self-harming individual from 4.4 the previous 12 months.

The proportion of incidents that required hospitalisation was higher in male establishments (5.4% compared to 2.7% in female establishments). Self-harm incidents requiring hospital attendance decreased in male establishments by 27%, from 3,216 in the 12 months to December 2019 to 2,337 in the 12 months to December 2020, and increased by 16% to 320 in female establishments in the latest 12 months.

Key findings from the additional self-harm tables for 2020

The decrease in self-harm rates in the male estate overall in 2020 was observed in both **remand and sentenced** male prisoners. Similarly, the increase in self-harm rates in the female estate overall in 2020 was observed in both remand and sentenced female prisoners.

These rates take into account the increase in the size of the remand population and reduction in the sentenced population in both male and female estates over this period

In the male estate, the number of self-harm incidents by prisoners on remand increased by 4% from 4,276 in 2019 to 4,435 in 2020. For sentenced prisoners, the number of self-harm incidents decreased by 17% from 42,676 in 2019 to 35,544 in 2020. However, rates of self-harm decreased among both remand and sentenced prisoners. The rate of self-harm per 1,000 male prisoners on remand reduced by 15%, and the rate per 1,000 sentenced male prisoners decreased by 12%. The rate of self-harm was lower among remand prisoners than among sentenced prisoners (415 incidents per 1,000 prisoners on remand and 542 incidents per 1,000 sentenced prisoners).

In the female estate, the number of self-harm incidents by prisoners on remand increased by 28% from 1,564 in 2019 to 2,004 in 2020. For sentenced prisoners, the number of self-harm incidents decreased by 2% from 9,263 in 2019 to 9,048 in 2020. However, rates of self-harm increased for both remand and sentenced females: the rate of self-harm per 1,000 female prisoners on remand increased by 18%, and the rate per 1,000 sentenced female prisoners increased by 15%. The rate of self-harm among remand prisoners was similar to that of sentenced prisoners (3,393 incidents per 1,000 prisoners on remand and 3,287 incidents per 1,000 sentenced prisoners).

The most common **method for self-harm** in prison was cutting/scratching, 52% of females and 71% of males self-harmed by cutting/scratching in 2020.

The percentage of self-harm incidents that were caused by cutting/scratching decreased by 13% in male establishments and increased by 4% in female establishments in the most recent year. Hanging decreased by 30% for males and 23% for females. Self-strangulation decreased by 23% for males and 1% for females⁸. Overdose, self-poisoning or swallowing decreased by 16% for males, but increased by 14% for females.

The most common **location for self-harm** in prison was in cells and common areas.

For females, 87% of self-harm incidents were in cells and common areas in 2020, compared to 72% of self-harm incidents by males. In comparison, males were more likely than females to self-harm in segregation units (8% of incidents by males compared to 3% of incidents by females) and in vulnerable prisoners units (9% of incidents by males compared to 0.5% of incidents by females) in 2020.

The highest percentage of individuals self-harming were in the **30 to 39 years** age group.

For females, 38% of individuals who self-harmed in 2020 were aged between 30 and 39 years at the time of the incident, as were 35% of males. For males, 23% of individuals who self-harmed were aged 24 or under, compared to 20% of females.

Just over a half of individuals who self-harmed in 2020 did so **more than once** during the year.

51% of males and 57% of females who self-harmed during 2020 did so more than once during the calendar year, and 3% of self-harming males and 9% of self-harming females self-harmed more than 20 times that year.

49% of self-harming males and 43% of self-harming females self-harmed only once during the year.

⁸ Self-strangulation decreased due to a change in definition that saw noose making removed from self-harm reporting from April 2020. Please see the Guide to Safety in Custody statistics for further information.

3 Assaults: 12 months to December 2020

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

In the 12 months to December 2020, there were 21,489 assault incidents, a 34% decrease from the previous 12 months. Of these 2,328 were serious assaults, down by 39%. Rates of assault and serious assault per 1,000 prisoners decreased to a similar extent, by 32% and 37% respectively.

Assaults decreased by 4% in the latest quarter to 4,738 incidents, and the number of serious assaults decreased by 10% to 475 incidents.

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

There were 7,391 assaults on staff in male establishments and 588 assaults on staff in female establishments in the 12 months to December 2020. The rate of assault in male establishments decreased by 33% from the previous 12 months, while the rate in female establishments decreased by 19%. This resulted in assault rates for the 12 months to December 2020 being higher in female establishments (310 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) than in male establishments (266 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) for the first time.

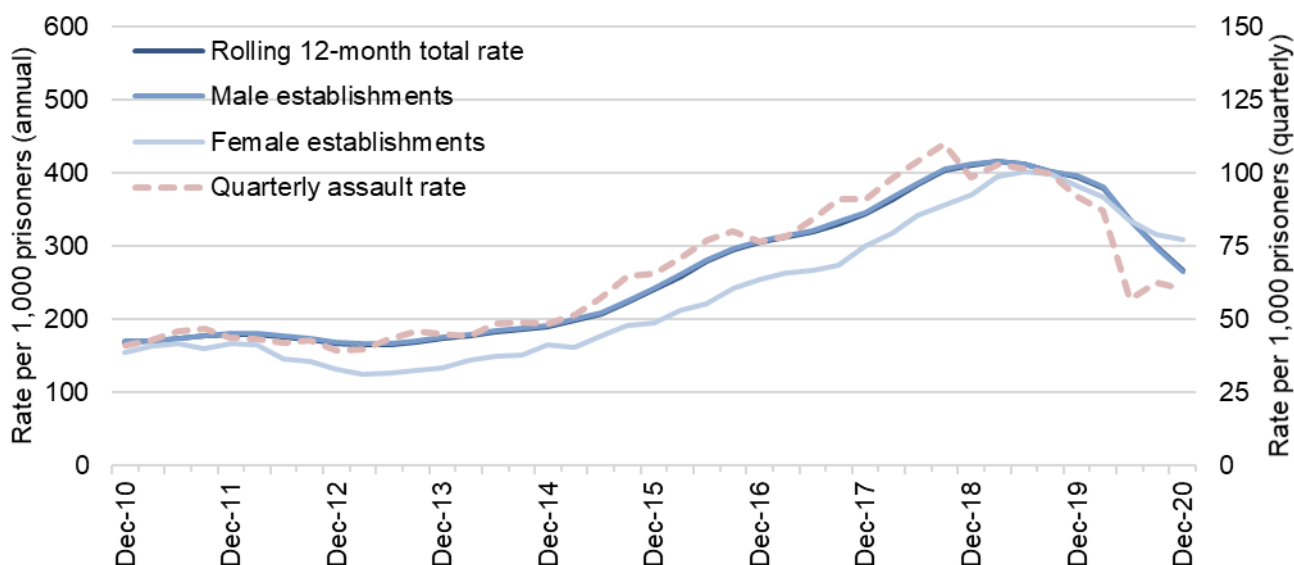
Assaults on staff decreased from the previous 12-month period

There were 7,979 assaults on staff in the 12 months to December 2020, a 20% decrease from the previous 12 months. The rate of assaults on staff per 1,000 prisoners decreased to a similar extent, by 18%. In the latest quarter the number of assaults on staff remained steady at 1,896 incidents.

The number of assaults on staff decreased in both male and female establishments, by 22% and 4% respectively. The rate of assault on staff also decreased in male establishments by 19% but increased by 9% in female establishments.

Statistics for the 12 months to December, and particularly those for the April to December quarters, relate to the exceptional 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 (see Further Information). 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 2010 to 12 months ending December 2020, with quarterly rates



In the 12 months to December 2020, assault incidents decreased by 34% to 21,489, a rate of 267 incidents per 1,000 prisoners. This represents a decrease in the rate of assault per 1,000 prisoners (which takes into account the decrease in the prison population over the period) of a similar extent, 32%. In the latest quarter, there were 4,738 assaults, a decrease of 4% from the previous quarter. The quarterly figure reached a peak of 9,111 in the July to September 2018 quarter. It has continued on a downward trend since then.

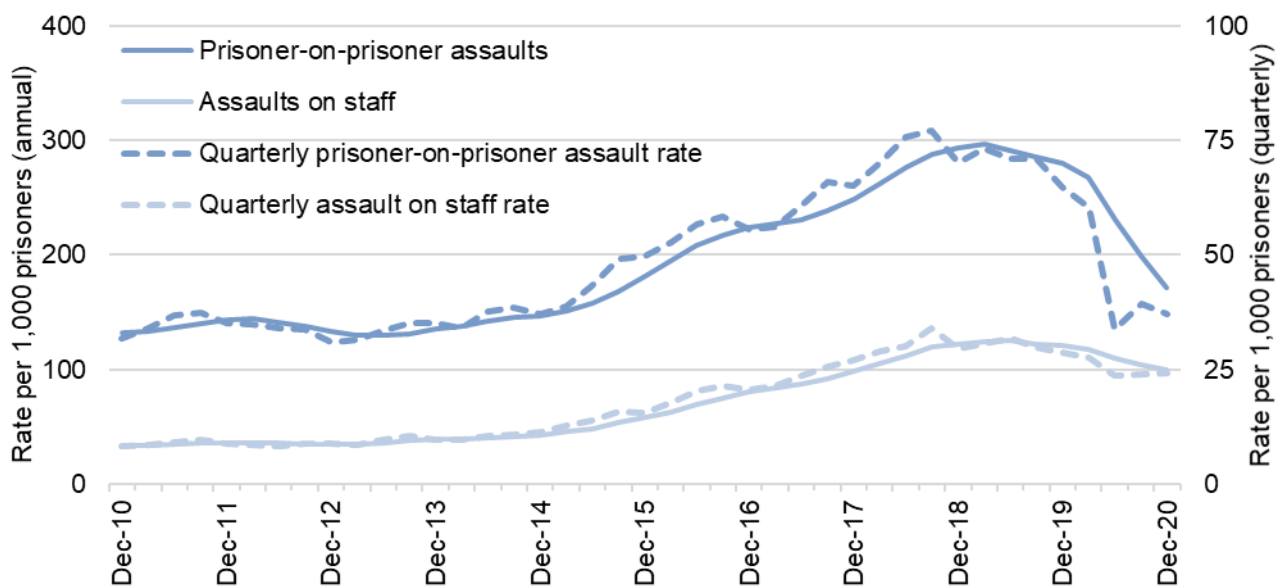
The number of incidents in male establishments decreased by 35% from 31,348 to 20,448 in the 12 months to December 2020. The rate of assaults decreased to a similar extent over this period, by 33% to 266 per 1,000 prisoners.

The number of incidents in female establishments decreased by 28% from 1,452 to 1,041 incidents in the 12 months to December 2020. The rate of assault also decreased over this period but to a lesser extent, by 19% to 310 per 1,000 prisoners.

With rates of assault decreasing to a greater extent in male establishments than in female establishments in the latest 12 months, for the first time in the time series, assault rates were higher in female establishments (310 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) than in male establishments (266 incidents per 1,000 prisoners).

In the latest quarter, the number of assaults in male establishments decreased by 5% to 4,476, and the number of assaults in female establishments increased by 11% to 262.

Figure 5: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and assaults on staff, 12 months ending December 2010 to 12 months ending December 2020, with quarterly rates



There were 13,784 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults⁹ in the 12 months to December 2020 (a rate of 172 per 1,000 prisoners). This is a decrease of 41% from the 23,217 assaults in the previous 12 months. The rate of prisoner-on-prisoner assault per 1,000 prisoners decreased to a similar extent, 39%. In the latest quarter, there were 2,915 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, a 7% decrease from 3,126 in the previous quarter.

⁹ This figure includes any prisoner-on-prisoner assaults where there may also have been an assault on staff.

There were 7,979 assaults on staff¹⁰ in the 12 months to December 2020 (a rate of 99 per 1,000 prisoners). This is a 20% decrease from the 10,033 in the previous 12 months. The rate of prisoner-on-staff assault per 1,000 prisoners decreased to a similar extent, by 18%. In the latest quarter assaults on staff remained in line with the previous quarter at 1,896 incidents.

The proportion of assaults on staff increased to 37% of all incidents in the 12 months to December 2020, from 31% in the previous 12 months, having steadily increased from 20% in the 12 months to December 2011.

In male establishments, prisoner-on-prisoner assaults decreased by 40% to 13,324 incidents (173 incidents per 1,000 male prisoners), and assaults on staff decreased by 22% to 7,391 incidents (96 incidents per 1,000 male prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2020 compared to the previous 12 months. Rates of assault on prisoners and on staff decreased to a similar extent to the numbers of incidents, by 39% and 19% respectively.

In female establishments, prisoner-on-prisoner assaults decreased by 46% to 460 incidents (137 incidents per 1,000 female prisoners), and the rate decreased to a lesser extent, by 39%. Assaults on staff decreased by 4% to 588 incidents (175 incidents per 1,000 female prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2020 compared to the previous 12 months. However, the rate of assaults on staff in female establishments was 9% higher than in the previous 12 months.

In the 12 months to December 2020, the proportion of assaults that were on staff was 56% in female establishments, which was higher than in male establishments (36%).

¹⁰ 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

Serious assaults

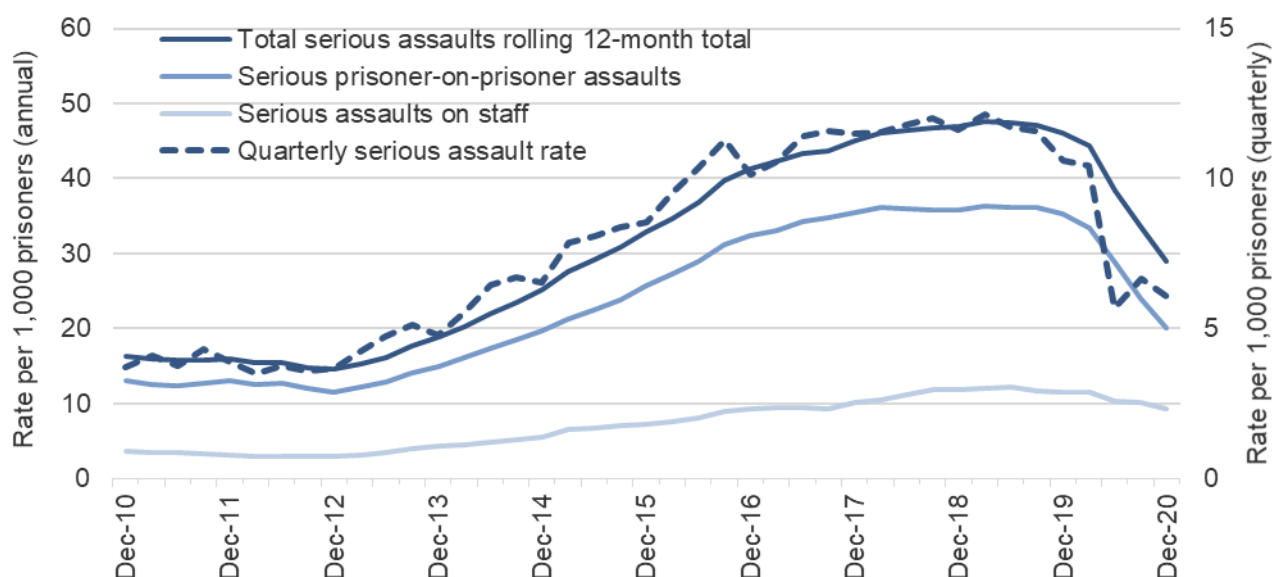
Of the 21,489 assault incidents, 2,328 (11%) were serious.

In the 12 months to December 2020, there were 2,328 serious assault incidents, a 39% decrease from the previous 12 months. The rate of serious assault decreased to a similar extent, by 37% (taking account of decreases in population size over the period).

Serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults decreased by 45% to 1,616 in the 12 months to December 2020, and serious assaults on staff decreased by 22% to 748.

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 2010 to 12 months ending December 2020



In the 12 months to December 2020, there were 2,328 serious assaults (a rate of 29 per 1,000 prisoners), a 39% decrease from the previous 12 months. The rate of serious assault decreased to a similar extent, by 37%. In the latest quarter, there were 475 serious assaults, a 10% decrease from the previous quarter. In the latest 12 months, 11% of assaults were serious assaults.

There were 1,616 serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults (a rate of 20 per 1,000 prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2020, a decrease of 45% from the previous 12 months. The rate of serious prisoner-on-prisoner assault decreased to a similar extent, by 43%. In the latest quarter, there were 313 serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, a 9% decrease from 344 incidents in the previous quarter.

There were 748 serious assaults on staff (a rate of 9 per 1,000 prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2020, a decrease of 22% from the previous 12 months. The rate of serious prisoner-on-staff assault also decreased, by 18%. In the latest quarter, the number of serious prisoner-on-staff assaults decreased by 16% to 166 incidents.

Key findings from additional assaults tables for 2020

Prisoners in the **30-39 year age-group** made up the highest proportion of assailants (25%), fighters (22%) and victims (27%) in 2020.

Assailants (42%) and fighters (49%) were more likely to be aged 24 or under than victims (35%) in 2020.

There were 256 **sexual assaults** in custody in 2020, a 34% decrease from 389 sexual assaults in custody in 2019

For females, there was a 32% decrease in sexual assaults in custody, from 25 in 2019 to 17 in 2020. For males, there was a 34% decrease, from 364 in 2019 to 239 in 2020.

There were 5,472 **assaults involving weapons** in 2020, 25% of total assaults.

Of those assaults that involved a weapon, 31% involved spitting (up from 28% in 2019), and 15% involved a blunt instrument (slightly down from 16% in 2019).

There were 2,180 serious **injuries** as a result of assaults in prison in 2020, a 40% decrease from 3,641 serious injuries in 2019.

Of those serious injuries, 24% were cuts requiring sutures in 2020 (the same percentage as in 2019), 17% resulted in a black eye (up from 16% in 2019), 14% were bites (up from 11% in 2019), 13% resulted in a fracture (down from 14% in 2019), and 12% resulted in extensive or multiple bruising (down from 14% in 2019).

There were also 10,760 minor injuries as a result of assaults in prison in 2020, a 39% decrease from 17,658 minor injuries in 2019.

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 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.

The latest COVID 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.

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

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