



# Safety in Custody Statistics, England and Wales: Deaths in Prison Custody to March 2022 Assaults and Self-harm to December 2021

## Main Points

**Number of deaths decreased from the previous 12-month period**



In the 12 months to March 2022, there were 287 deaths in prison custody, a **decrease** of 29% from 407 deaths the previous 12 months. Of these, 75 deaths were self-inflicted, a 6% **decrease** from the 80 self-inflicted deaths in the previous 12 months.

In the most recent quarter there were 69 deaths, an 18% **decrease** from 84 deaths in the previous quarter.

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



There were 54,027 self-harm incidents in the 12 months to December 2021, **down** 3% from the previous 12 months, comprising **decreases** of 3% in male establishments and 2% 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** 1% in male establishments but **increased** 4% in female establishments.

In the most recent quarter, there were 14,282 self-harm incidents, **up** 5% on the previous quarter, comprising of a 9% **increase** in male establishments and a 10% **decrease** in female establishments.

**The number of individuals who self-harmed decreased**



There were 11,292 individuals who self-harmed in the 12 months to December 2021, **down** 6% from the previous 12 months. The number of self-harm incidents per individual **increased** from 4.6 in the 12 months to December 2020 to 4.8 in the 12 months to December 2021.

**Assaults decreased from the previous 12-month period**



There were 20,883 assault incidents in the 12 months to December 2021, **down** 3% from the 12 months to December 2020. In the most recent quarter, assaults were **unchanged** at 5,569 incidents.

**Assaults on staff were unchanged from the previous 12-month period**



There were 7,957 assaults on staff in the 12 months to December 2021, **almost unchanged** from the previous 12 months (0.4% decrease). In the latest quarter the number of assaults **decreased** by 2% to 2,069 incidents.

**The number of serious assaults decreased  
10% of all assaults were serious**



In the 12 months to December 2021, there were 2,137 serious assault incidents, a **decrease** of 8% from the previous 12 months. Serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults **decreased** by 12% to 1,430 in the 12 months to December 2021. Serious assaults on staff remained almost unchanged at 740.

## Statistician's comment

In the 12 months to December 2021 we have seen falls in the number of self-harm and assault incidents, and in the 12 months to March 2022 we have seen a decrease in the number of deaths. Statistics for these periods relate to the exceptional period during 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 decreased by 29% to 287 deaths in the year to March 2022. This has been driven by a decrease in the number of deaths related to Covid-19. Deaths in the latest quarter decreased by 18% to 69, and remained much lower than the peak of 154 in the January to March 2021 quarter. Only 8 were suspected to be due to Covid-19, down from 17 in the previous quarter, and lower than 65 in the January to March 2021 quarter. There were 75 self-inflicted deaths in the latest year, a decrease from 80 in the previous year.

The number of self-harm incidents has fallen in the 12 months to December 2021, by 3%, comprising decreases of 3% in male establishments and 2% in female establishments. This partially reflects a fall in the prison population over the same period (as set out in Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2021). With the fall in the prison population taken into account, the rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners decreased by 1% in male establishments but increased by 4% in female establishments in the 12 months to December 2021. Rates of self-harm for prisoners on remand increased in both the male and female estates in the 12 months to December (by 4% and 20% respectively) while rates among sentenced prisoners stayed almost unchanged.

The number of assault incidents fell by 3% in the 12 months to December 2021. Serious assaults decreased by 8% in the 12 months to December 2021. 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 male establishments by 2%, but increased 12% in female establishments.

## Background

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 series.<sup>1</sup> This release provides statistics on deaths of prisoners to the end of March 2022, and deaths from Covid-19 have been presented in the section below.

The release also provides statistics on assaults and self-harm up to the end of December 2021. The latest 12-month data reflects a full year of Covid-19 restrictions being implemented within 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. 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 has fallen since the first quarter of 2020, falling more so for certain population groups<sup>2</sup>. As at 31 December 2021, the total prison population was around 3,900 or 5%

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

smaller than at the end of March 2020<sup>3</sup>. The female population has reduced by 11%, whereas the male population has reduced by 4%.

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 occurring<sup>4</sup>. 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](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics).

### **Youth estate and forthcoming changes in methodology in Safety in Custody**

These statistics include incidents that occurred in the youth estate. However, readers should be aware of the ‘**Safety in the children and young people secure estate**’ statistics bulletin. 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)<sup>5</sup>. 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 currently present data for the latest year(s) using both the historic methodology of Safety in Custody and also the methodology of the youth publication<sup>6</sup>.

**However, incidents within the youth estate will be removed from the Safety in Custody publication from the July 2022 release. This will affect the continuity of the time series for self-harm, assaults and deaths. Although the youth population is small relative to whole prison population, there are notably higher rates of violence and a higher rate of self-harm which will lead to small differences in the series. For transparency on the impact of this**

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2020>

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> These are Cookham Wood, Werrington and Wetherby.

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

**change, the tables in this release present numbers and rates on the basis of the current methodology (including the youth estate) and also the new methodology (without the youth estate). This is done for data on assaults from April 2018 and for data on self-harm from April 2019 <sup>7</sup>. The intention is that future publications will use the new methodology from April 2018 and April 2019 onwards for assaults and self-harm respectively<sup>8</sup>.**

In 2021, 1% of all self-harm incidents occurred in the youth estate, and 1% of self-harming individuals were in the youth estate. Under the methodological change, the volume of incidents and number of self-harming individuals are reduced accordingly. Changes to rates of self-harm in the adult prison population resulting from the removal of this small percentage of incidents and individuals are very small. Importantly, based on the latest two years, the trend is unaffected by the change: the percentage changes in the numbers and rates of both incidents and self-harming individuals between 2020 and 2021 are the same under the current and new methodologies.

The impact of the methodological changes on the data series is greater for assaults, since 6% of all incidents in 2021 occurred in the youth estate (including 6% of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, 5% of assaults on staff, and 5% of all serious assaults). The numbers of incidents are reduced accordingly under the new methodology, with resultant reductions in the rates of assault in the adult prison population. However, based on the latest two years, the trends in numbers and rates of all assaults, prisoner-on-prisoner and staff assaults (including serious assaults) are not meaningfully affected by the change, with differences between the two methodologies in the percentage change from the previous year of less than 1 percentage point (less than 2 percentage points for serious assaults).

<sup>7</sup> The change from the current to the new methodology is not illustrated in tables for deaths since the numbers of deaths are volatile from year to year, with one recorded death in the youth estate in 2019.

<sup>8</sup> This represents the period for each for which sufficiently detailed data is held to enable us to exclude these incidents.

# 1 Deaths: 12 months ending March 2022

## Number of deaths decreased from the previous 12-month period

In the 12 months to March 2022, there were 287 deaths in prison custody, a **decrease** of 29% from 407 deaths in the previous 12 months which reflects a reduction in the number of deaths related to Covid-19. There were 75 self-inflicted deaths, a **decrease** of 6% from 80 in the previous 12 months.

In the most recent quarter there were 69 deaths, an 18% **decrease** from 84 deaths in the previous quarter.

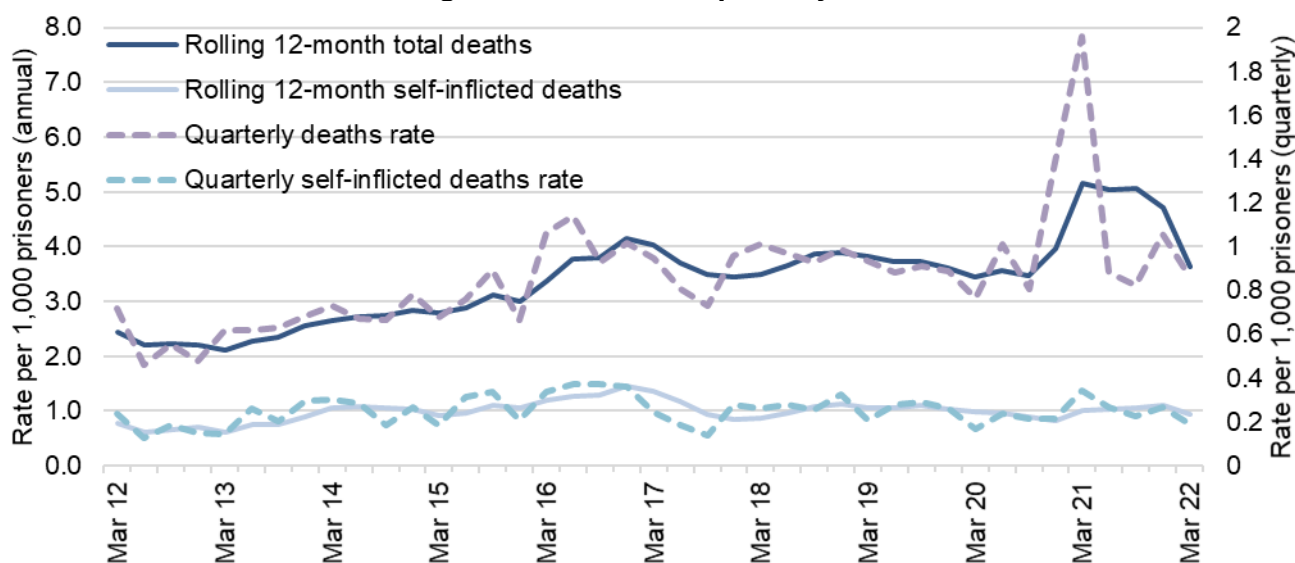
## The number of deaths related to Covid-19 decreased in the most recent quarter

In the most recent quarter (January to March 2022), there were 8 deaths (12% of total deaths) that were suspected to be due to Covid-19, a **decrease** from 17 deaths (20% of total deaths) in the previous quarter.

In the same period, there were 15 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 18 in the previous quarter.

There were 15 self-inflicted deaths in the most recent quarter, down from 21 in the previous quarter.

**Figure 1: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of deaths per 1,000 prisoners, 12 months ending March 2012 to 12 months ending March 2022, with quarterly rates**



In the 12 months to March 2022, there were 287 deaths in prison custody (a rate of 3.6 per 1,000 prisoners), a decrease from 407 deaths in the previous 12 months (a rate of 5.1 per 1,000 prisoners). Long-term trends and more detail are presented in the annual tables that accompany this release<sup>9</sup>.

Over the same period, there were 183 deaths due to natural causes (a rate of 2.3 per 1,000 prisoners), a 38% decrease from 296 deaths (a rate of 3.7 per 1,000 prisoners) in the previous 12 months. This decrease of 113 in deaths due to natural causes in the 12 months to March 2022 reflects the fact that there was a large number of deaths from Covid-19 in the previous year (with further information on these below).

<sup>9</sup> Data on deaths are published three months ahead of assaults and self-harm, therefore, the annual publication Deaths in prison custody for 1978 to 2021 is published in the Safety in Custody quarterly update to September 2021

There were 75 apparent self-inflicted deaths in the 12 months to March 2022, a decrease of 6% from 80 self-inflicted deaths in the previous 12 months. The rate of self-inflicted deaths remained unchanged from the previous year at 1.0 per 1,000 prisoners.

There were 28 deaths recorded as 'Other' in the 12 months to March 2022, 25 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.

In the most recent quarter there were 69 deaths, an 18% decrease from 84 deaths in the previous quarter. There were 15 self-inflicted deaths in the first quarter of 2022, a decrease from 21 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 2022, 192 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 192 deaths, 156 are suspected to be due to Covid-19. The remaining 36 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 2022), a similar proportion of deaths were related to Covid-19 to the previous quarter. In this quarter, 22% of all deaths were of prisoners who had died within 28 days of a positive test for Covid-19, up slightly from 21% of all deaths in the previous quarter, but below a peak of 47% in January to March 2021. Deaths suspected to have been due to Covid-19 made up 12% of all deaths in the latest quarter, down from 20% in the previous quarter, and below a peak of 42% in January to March 2021.

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 2021

### 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 54,027 self-harm incidents in the 12 months to December 2021, **down** 3% from the previous 12 months (a 3% **decrease** in male establishments and a 2% **decrease** in female establishments). Taking into account of the fall in the prison average population since the start of 2020, the rate of self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners **decreased** 1% in male establishments but **increased** 4% in female establishments in the 12 months to December 2021.

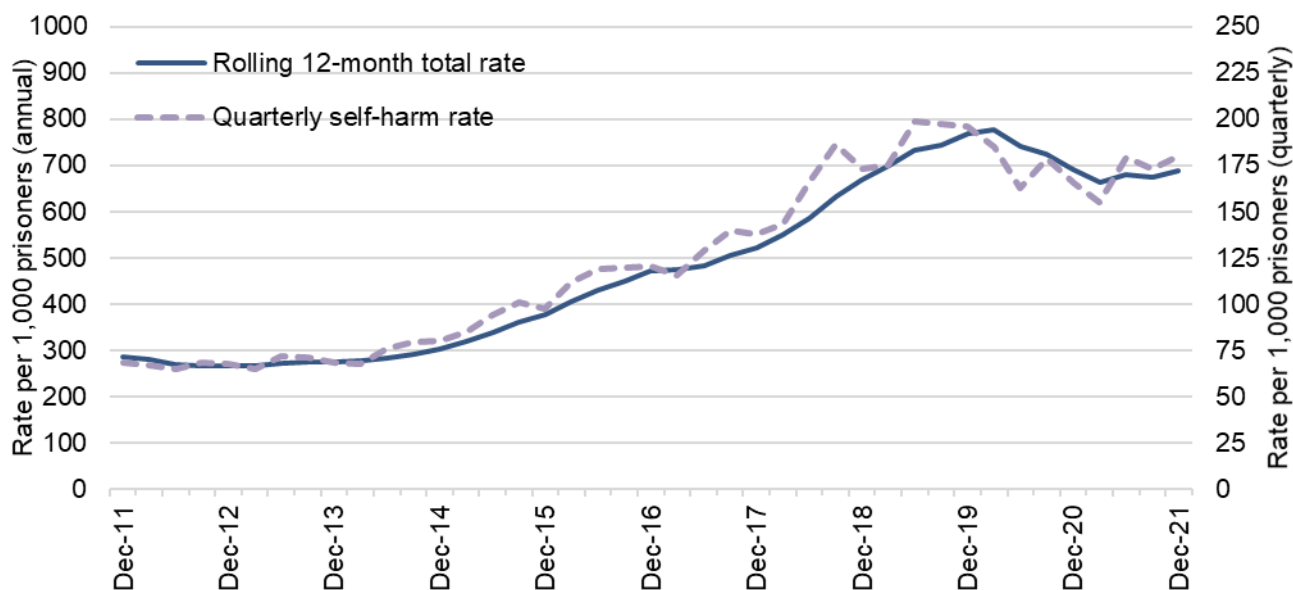
In the most recent quarter there were 14,282 self-harm incidents, **up** 5% on the previous quarter (a 9% **increase** in male establishments and a 10% **decrease** in female establishments).

### The number of individuals who self-harmed decreased 6% in the latest year.

There were 11,292 individuals who self-harmed in the 12 months to December 2021, a 6% **decrease** from 12,075 in the previous 12 months. The number of self-harm incidents per individual **increased** to 4.8 in the 12 months to December 2021, from 4.6 in the previous year.

Statistics for the 12 months to December 2021 relate to the exceptional 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 (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 2011 to 12 months ending December 2021, with quarterly rates**



In the 12 months to December 2021, there were 54,027 reported incidents of self-harm (a rate of 688 per 1,000 prisoners), down 3% from the previous 12 months. On a quarterly basis, the number of incidents in the three months to December 2021 increased by 5% from the previous quarter, from 13,612 to 14,282 incidents.

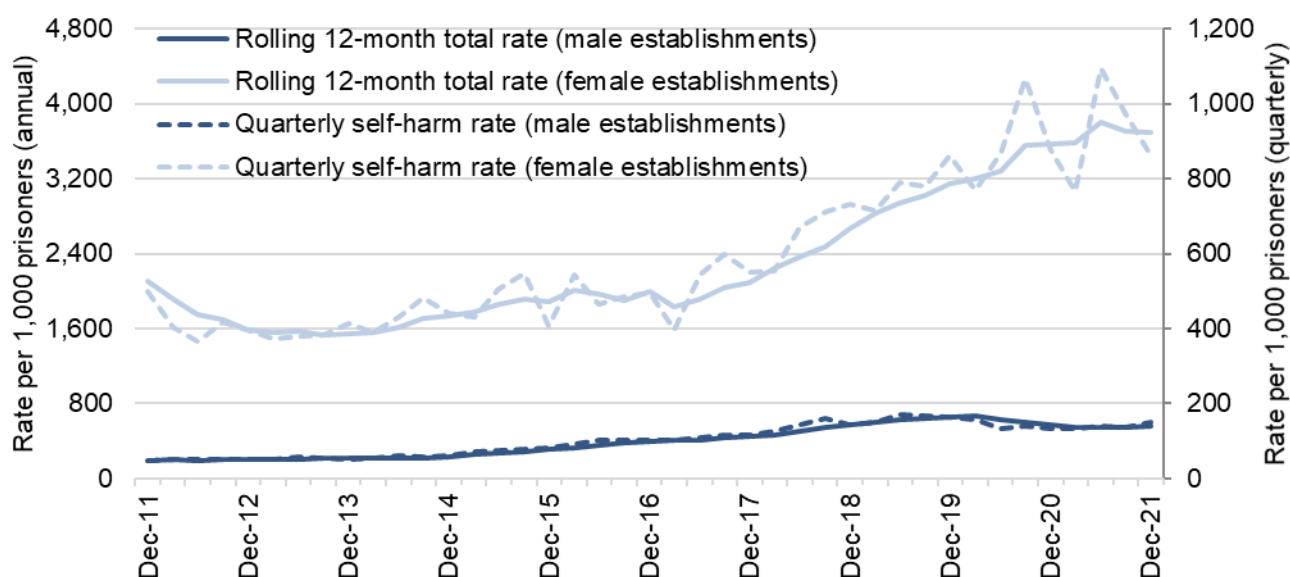
The number of individuals who self-harmed decreased by 6% to 11,292 in the latest 12 months (a rate of 144 individuals per 1,000 prisoners), from 12,075 in the previous 12 months. The number of incidents per self-harming individual increased from 4.6 in the previous year to 4.8 in the latest

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 2021 did so more than once.

The number of self-harm incidents requiring hospital attendance increased by 1% to 2,683 in the 12 months to December 2021 and increased by 3% in the latest quarter to 682 incidents. The proportion of incidents that required hospital attendance increased slightly from 4.8% in the 12 months to December 2020 to 5.0% in the latest 12 months.

Self-harm trends 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 2021, there were 42,257 incidents in the male estate compared with 11,770 in the female estate. However, the rate of self-harm was more than six times higher in the female estate, with 3,697 incidents per 1,000 female prisoners and 561 incidents per 1,000 male prisoners. The number of incidents per individual who self-harmed in female establishments was also more than twice that in male establishments: in the 12 months to December 2021 there were 10.6 incidents of self-harm per self-harming female compared with 4.2 incidents per self-harming male. The proportion of incidents that required hospitalisation was higher in male establishments (5.7%, compared to 2.3% 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 2011 to 12 months ending December 2021**



The number of self-harm incidents decreased by 3% in the latest year in male establishments and by 2% in the female estate. The rate of incidents, which takes population size into account, was down slightly (by 1%) in the male estate, but increased by 4% in female establishments.

On a quarterly basis, the number of incidents in the three months to December 2021 increased by 9% in male establishments compared with the previous three months but decreased by 10% in female establishments.

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 more prolific self-harming 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 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2020 following a period of increased regime restrictions in response to Covid.



The number of incidents per individual who self-harmed increased in the latest year for both the male and female estates. In the 12 months to December 2021, there were 10.6 incidents of self-harm per self-harming female compared with 9.8 in the previous 12 months, while for males there were 4.2 incidents per self-harming individual compared with 4.0 in the previous 12 months. Over the same period, the proportion of prisoners self-harming in both male and female establishments decreased by 4%, to 135 individuals per 1,000 prisoners in the male estate in the latest year, and to 350 individuals per 1,000 prisoners in the female estate.

Self-harm incidents requiring hospital attendance increased in male establishments by 3%, from 2,339 in the 12 months to December 2020 to 2,417 in the 12 months to December 2021, but decreased by 17% to 266 in female establishments in the latest 12 months.

## Key findings from the additional self-harm tables for 2021

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### *Custody type*

In the 12 months to December 2021, in the male estate, the rate of self-harm was lower among remand prisoners than among sentenced prisoners (483 incidents per 1,000 prisoners on remand and 561 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 (4,673 incidents per 1,000 prisoners on remand and 3,315 incidents per 1,000 sentenced prisoners).

In the male estate, the number of self-harm incidents increased for prisoners on remand by 18%, from 4,948 in 2020 to 5,857 in 2021, and decreased over the same period for sentenced prisoners by 5%, from 36,647 to 34,919. The rate of self-harm increased by 4% between 2020 and 2021 for prisoners on remand and stayed almost unchanged (0.3% increase) for sentenced prisoners. These rates take account of the increased size of the remand population and decrease in the sentenced population, though not changes in the turnover of prisoners between years which can also impact comparability.<sup>10</sup>

These changes follow decreases in the rate of self-harm among both remand and sentenced prisoners in the previous year, the first year of the pandemic. Between 2019 and 2020, the rate of self-harm among males on remand decreased by 19% and the rate among sentenced males decreased by 9%. Compared with 2019, the latest rates for 2021 are 16% lower among remand prisoners and 9% lower among sentenced prisoners.

Despite the increase in the rate of self-harm among male prisoners on remand (and slight increase among the sentenced population), there was a 1% decrease in the overall rate of self-harm in male establishments. This reflects a decrease in the number of incidents among prisoners whose sentence type was not recorded or unknown.

In the female estate, the number of self-harm incidents increased by 26% for prisoners on remand, from 2,292 in 2020 to 2,898 in 2021, and decreased over the same period for sentenced prisoners by 8%, from 9,134 to 8,428. The rate of self-harm increased by 20% between 2020 and 2021 for prisoners on remand and stayed almost unchanged (0.1% decrease) for sentenced prisoners. The 4% increase in the overall rate of self-harm in the female estate in 2021 reflects the increase in the rate among female remand prisoners.

These changes in female establishments follow increases in the rate of self-harm in the previous year. Between 2019 and 2020, the rate of self-harm among females on remand increased by 10% and the rate among sentenced females increased by 16%. Compared with 2019, the latest rates for 2021 are 32% higher among remand prisoners and 15% higher among sentenced prisoners.

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### *Method*

The most common **method for self-harm** in prison was cutting/scratching, 65% of incidents of self-harm involved cutting/scratching in 2021 (50% of incidents among females and 70% among males), a decrease from 67% of incidents in 2020.

The number of incidents of self-strangulation increased by 4% in the latest year, driven by increases in male establishments. Self-strangulation represented 7% of all self-harm in male establishments and 34% of all self-harm in female establishments in the latest year<sup>11</sup>.

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### *Location*

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

For females, 80% of self-harm incidents were in cells and common areas in 2021, compared to

<sup>10</sup> See *Guide to Safety in Custody Statistics* for a summary of how rates are calculated.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

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73% 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 5% of incidents by females) and in vulnerable prisoners units (8% of incidents by males compared to 1% of incidents by females) in 2021.

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### *Age*

The highest numbers of self-harm incidents and individuals self-harming were in the **30 to 39 years** age group. For females, 38% of individuals who self-harmed in 2021 were aged between 30 and 39 years at the time of the incident, as were 37% of males.

Prisoners in the 15-17 year age-group had the highest rate of individuals self-harming (354 per 1,000 prisoners) followed by the 18-20 year age group (221 per 1,000 prisoners). In general, younger age-groups had higher rates of self-harm than older age-groups.

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### *Ethnicity*

The rate of self-harm per 1,000 prisoners was highest for white prisoners (852 per 1,000 prisoners) followed by prisoners from the mixed ethnic group (425) in 2021. The rates were lowest for black prisoners (197 per 1,000 prisoners) and Asian prisoners (207) in 2021.

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### *Frequency*

Just over a half of individuals (52%) who self-harmed in 2021 did so **more than once** during the year. 51% of males and 61% of females who self-harmed during 2021 did so more than once during the calendar year.

4% of individuals who self-harmed in 2021 did so more than 20 times that year. 3% of self-harming males and 10% of self-harming females self-harmed more than 20 times that year.

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## Assaults: 12 months to December 2021

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

In the 12 months to December 2021, there were 20,883 assault incidents, a 3% **decrease** from the previous 12 months. Of these 2,137 were serious assaults, **down** by 8%. Rates of assault and serious assault per 1,000 prisoners **decreased** to a lesser extent, by 1% and 7% respectively.

Assaults **remained unchanged** in the latest quarter at 5,569 incidents while the number of serious assaults **increased** by 1% to 568 incidents.

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

The rate of assault in male establishments **decreased** by 2% from the previous 12 months, while the rate in female establishments **increased** by 12%. Assault rates for the 12 months to December 2021 were higher in female establishments (347 incidents per 1,000 prisoners) than in male establishments (262 incidents per 1,000 prisoners).

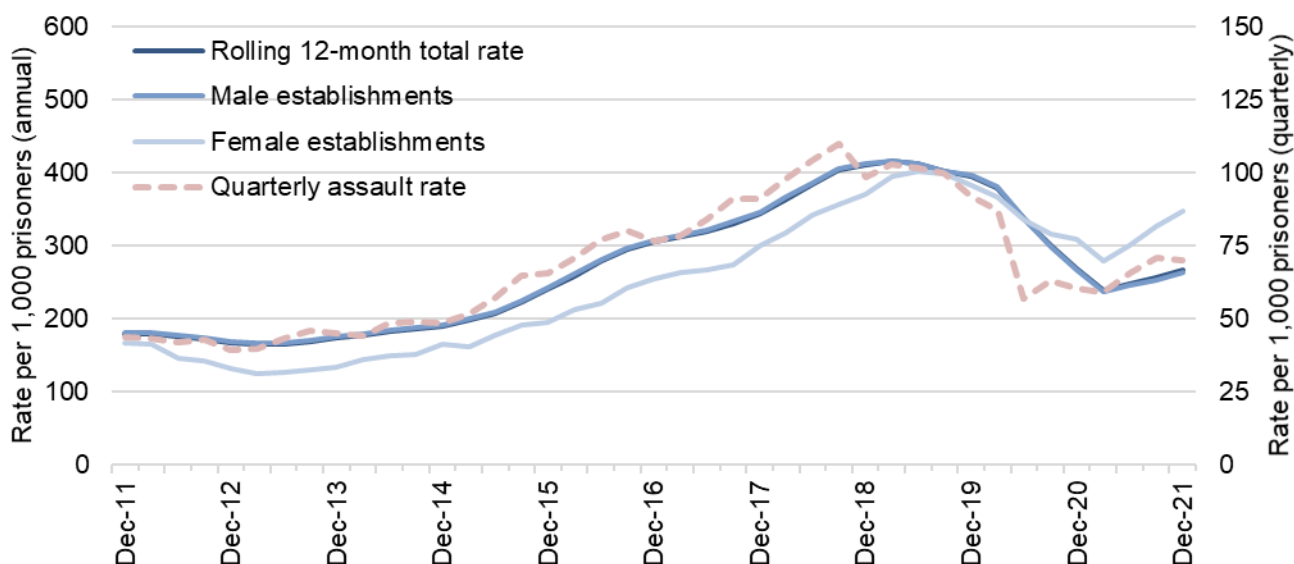
### Assaults on staff decreased from the previous 12-month period

There were 7,957 assaults on staff in the 12 months to December 2021, **almost unchanged** from the previous 12 months (0.4% decrease). In the latest quarter the number of assaults on staff **decreased** by 2% to 2,069 incidents.

The rate of assaults on staff per 1,000 prisoners **increased** by 2%, comprising increases of 2% in male establishments and 5% in female establishments compared with the previous 12 months.

Statistics for the 12 months to December 2021 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 4: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of total assaults by gender of establishment, 12 months ending December 2011 to 12 months ending December 2021, with quarterly rates**



In the 12 months to December 2021, assault incidents decreased by 3% to 20,883, a rate of 266 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 lesser extent, 1%. In the latest quarter, there were 5,569 assaults, unchanged from the previous

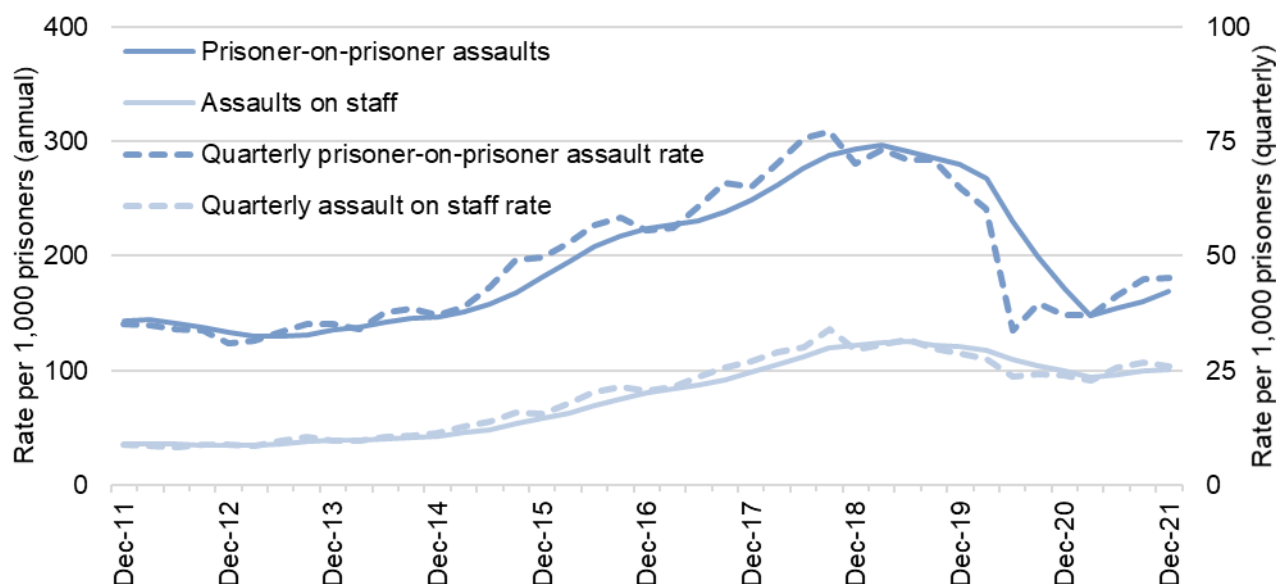
quarter, which remains lower than the peak of 9,111 in the July to September 2018 quarter, influenced by a considerable decrease in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic associated with changes in prison regimes and activity in the criminal justice system.

The number of incidents in male establishments decreased by 3% from 20,482 to 19,777 in the 12 months to December 2021. The rate of assaults decreased to a slightly lesser extent over this period, by 2%, to 262 per 1,000 prisoners.

The number of incidents in female establishments increased by 6% from 1,041 to 1,106 incidents in the 12 months to December 2021. The rate of assault increased by 12%, to 347 per 1,000 prisoners over this period. Assault rates have remained higher in female establishments than in male establishments, extending the difference seen in the 12 months to December 2020, after previously being higher in male establishments up to the 12 months to December 2019.

In the latest quarter, the number of assaults in male establishments stayed almost unchanged (0.3% decrease) at 5,239, while the number of assaults in female establishments increased by 5% to 330.

**Figure 5: Quarterly 12-month rolling rate of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and assaults on staff, 12 months ending December 2011 to 12 months ending December 2021, with quarterly rates**



There were 13,259 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults<sup>12</sup> in the 12 months to December 2021 (a rate of 169 per 1,000 prisoners). This is a decrease of 4% from the 13,805 assaults in the previous 12 months. The rate of prisoner-on-prisoner assault per 1,000 prisoners decreased to a lesser extent, by 2%. In the latest quarter, there were 3,595 prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, a 2% increase from 3,541 in the previous quarter.

There were 7,957 assaults on staff<sup>13</sup> in the 12 months to December 2021 (a rate of 101 per 1,000 prisoners). This is almost unchanged from the 7,991 in the previous 12 months (0.4% decrease). The rate of prisoner-on-staff assault per 1,000 prisoners increased by 2%. In the latest quarter, there were 2,069 assaults on staff, a 2% decrease from 2,110 incidents in the previous quarter.

<sup>12</sup> This figure includes any prisoner-on-prisoner assaults where there may also have been an assault on staff.

<sup>13</sup> 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

The proportion of assaults on staff increased slightly to 38% of all incidents in the 12 months to December 2021, from 37% 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 5% to 12,728 incidents (169 incidents per 1,000 male prisoners), and the rate decreased to a lesser extent, by 2% in the 12 months to December 2021. Assaults on staff stayed almost unchanged (0.4% decrease) at 7,373 incidents, but the rate (98 incidents per 1,000 male prisoners) increased by 2% compared to the previous 12 months.

In female establishments, prisoner-on-prisoner assaults increased by 15% to 531 incidents (167 incidents per 1,000 female prisoners), and the rate increased by 22% in the 12 months to December 2021. Assaults on staff stayed almost unchanged (0.3% decrease) at 584 incidents compared to the previous 12 months, but the rate (183 incidents per 1,000 female prisoners) increased by 5%.

In the 12 months to December 2021, the proportion of assaults that were on staff was higher in female establishments (53%) than in male establishments (37%).

## Serious assaults

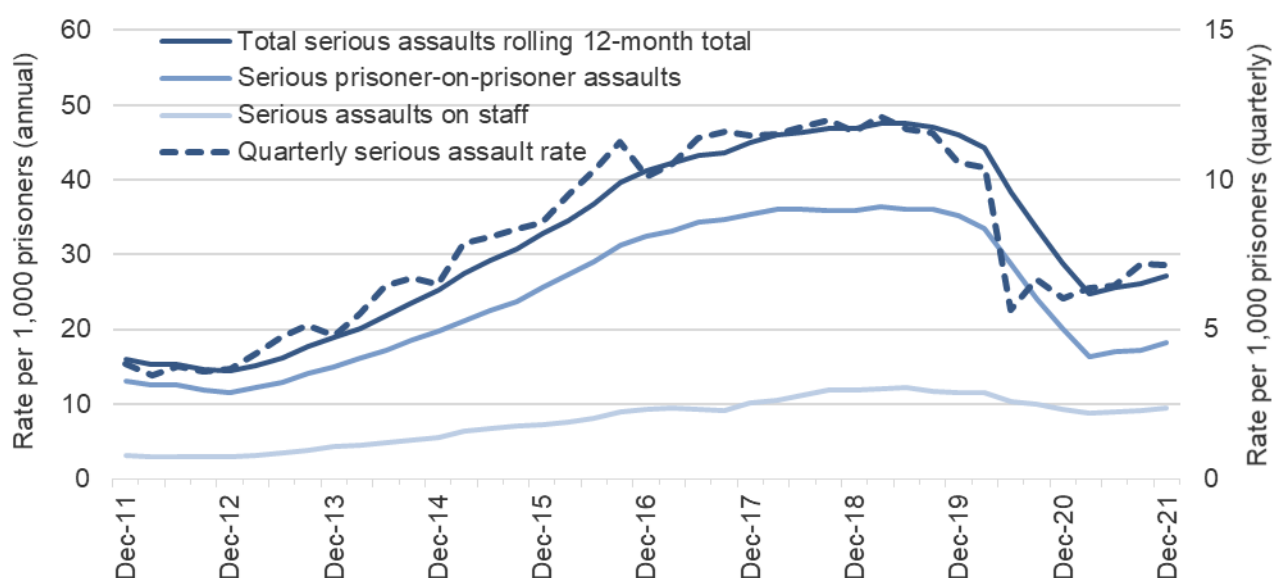
**Of the 20,883 assault incidents, 2,137 (10%) were serious.**

In the 12 months to December 2021, there were 2,137 serious assault incidents, an 8% **decrease** from the previous 12 months. The rate of serious assault **decreased** to a slightly lesser extent, by 7% (taking account of decreases in population size over the period).

Serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults **decreased** by 12% to 1,430 in the 12 months to December 2021, and serious assaults on staff were **almost unchanged** at 740 (0.4% decrease).

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 2011 to 12 months ending December 2021**



In the 12 months to December 2021, there were 2,137 serious assaults (a rate of 27 per 1,000 prisoners), an 8% decrease from the previous 12 months. The rate of serious assault decreased to a slightly lesser extent, by 7%. In the latest quarter, there were 568 serious assaults, a 1% increase from the previous quarter. In the latest 12 months, 10% of assaults were serious assaults.

There were 1,430 serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults (a rate of 18 per 1,000 prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2021, a decrease of 12% from the previous 12 months. The rate of serious prisoner-on-prisoner assault decreased to a slightly lesser extent, by 10%. In the latest quarter, there were 390 serious prisoner-on-prisoner assaults, a 5% increase from 370 incidents in the previous quarter.

There were 740 serious assaults on staff (a rate of 9 per 1,000 prisoners) in the 12 months to December 2021, almost unchanged from the previous 12 months (0.4% decrease). The rate of serious prisoner-on-staff assault remained unchanged. In the latest quarter, the number of serious prisoner-on-staff assaults decreased by 9% to 186 incidents.

## Key findings from additional assaults tables for 2021

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.

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### *Age*

Prisoners in the **30-39 year age-group** made up the highest proportion of assailants (25%) and victims (27%), while the **18-20 year age-group** made up the highest proportion of fighters (23%) in 2021.

Prisoners in the 15-17 year age-group had the highest rate of assailants<sup>14</sup> (3,274 per 1,000 prisoners), fighters (2,526) and victims (1,146) in 2021. In general, younger age-groups have higher rates of assaults than older age-groups.

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### *Custody type*

Prisoners on **remand** had higher rates of assailants, fighters and victims than sentenced prisoners in 2021: there were 318 assailants per 1,000 remand prisoners compared with 173 per 1,000 sentenced prisoners, 234 fighters compared with 124, and 146 victims compared with 85.

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### *Ethnicity*

The rate of assaults per 1,000 prisoners were highest for prisoners from the black 'and mixed ethnic groups. For black prisoners there were 365 assailants per 1,000 prisoners, 287 fighters and 125 victims. For prisoners from the mixed ethnic group there were 364 assailants per 1,000 prisoners, 273 fighters and 128 victims.

The rates for white prisoners were 165 assailants per 1,000 prisoners, 112 fighters and 90 victims.

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### *Sexual assaults*

There were 235 **sexual assaults** recorded in custody in 2021, a 7% decrease from 252 sexual assaults in custody in 2020.

For females, there was a 19% decrease in sexual assaults in custody, from 16 in 2020 to 13 in 2021. For males, there was a 6% decrease, from 236 in 2020 to 222 in 2021.

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### *Weapons*

There were 5,337 **assaults where weapons were recorded** in 2021, 26% of total assaults, an increase from 21% of assaults in 2016.

Of those assaults that involved a weapon, 33% involved spitting (up from 31% in 2020, and continuing an increase from 14% in 2016), and 13% involved a blunt instrument (down from 15% in 2020).

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### *Injuries*

There were 1,956 **serious injuries** as a result of assaults in prison in 2021, a 10% decrease from 2,178 serious injuries in 2020.

<sup>14</sup> See *Guide to Safety in Custody Statistics* for a summary of how rates are calculated.



Of those serious injuries, 21% were cuts requiring sutures in 2021 (down from 24% in 2020), 19% resulted in a black eye (up from 17% in 2020), 15% were bites (up from 14% in 2020), 13% resulted in extensive or multiple bruising (up from 12% in 2020), and 11% resulted in a fracture (down from 13% in 2020).

0.2% of assault incidents required attendance at hospital as an inpatient. 2.1% required treatment for concussion or internal injuries.

There were also 10,151 minor injuries as a result of assaults in prison in 2021, a 6% decrease from 10,764 minor injuries in 2020.

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## 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, 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.

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**

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## **Contact**

Press enquiries should be directed to the Ministry of Justice press office:

Tel: 020 3334 3536

Email: [newsdesk@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:newsdesk@justice.gsi.gov.uk)

Other enquiries about these statistics should be directed to:

### **David Dawson**

Data and Analysis

Ministry of Justice

102 Petty France

London

SW1H 9AJ

Email: [statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk)

## **Next update: July 2022**

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