

HM Prison and Probation Service COVID-19 Official Statistics

Data to 31 August 2022

Ministry of Justice

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Introduction

This official statistics release provides monthly data on the spread of COVID-19 in the prison and probation service in England and Wales and mitigating actions being taken to limit the spread of the virus and save lives. This release covers the period from Monday 16 March 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 outbreak to 31 August 2022.

It provides information on:

- Deaths where prisoners, children in custody or supervised individuals have died having tested positive within 60 days, in England or Wales, of the death or where there was a clinical assessment COVID-19 was a contributory factor in their death regardless of cause of death.
- Confirmed COVID-19 cases in prisoners and children in custody (i.e. positive tests).
- Narrative on capacity management data for prisons.

Key Findings

The key findings in this release are:

- **294** prisoners and supervised individuals have died having tested positive within 60 days of death or where there was a clinical assessment COVID-19 was a contributory factor in their death. Of whom **206** were prisoners and **88** were individuals supervised by the probation service. There were **4** deaths in August 2022.
- Of the **294** deaths, **238** were suspected or confirmed to be caused by COVID-19, of whom **156** were prisoners and **82** were supervised individuals. Of the **21** deaths since February 2022, **5** are suspected or confirmed to be due to COVID-19.

- **47,023** prisoners or children in custody have tested positive for COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic, across **130** establishments, almost all of whom were adults.
- There were **591** new confirmed cases in August 2022, this is **2,311** less than in July 2022.
- **65** establishments had prisoners or children testing positive in August 2022, a decrease of **33** compared with July 2022.

Background

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been keen public and Parliamentary interest in how the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) are managing the running of prisons and the probation system to limit the spread of the virus while maintaining the core functions of these vital parts of the justice system. Publishing this data aims to bring transparency to the strategies HMPPS is employing to manage the prison and probation systems, as well as the impact of the virus on the individuals in the care of HMPPS and staff.

The core tenet of HMPPS's prison strategy, building on UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) advice and learning developed in managing an early outbreak of the virus, had been the implementation of effective isolation, reverse cohorting of new entrants to custody, and shielding of vulnerable prisoners. In May 2022, as part of the 'Living with COVID' strategy, many of these controls shifted from centrally directed to local decision making in response to remaining COVID risk. Prisoners who would have previously shielded or previously classed as clinically extremely vulnerable have been invited to complete Personal Management Plans as a more permanent response to their ongoing risk. As part of these changes, HMPPS now provides residual testing as opposed to reverse cohorting and contact isolations, testing for staff and prisoners in specific high-risk areas to enable early identification of cases, and symptomatic testing. HMPPS continue to support the rollout of vaccination by Healthcare Teams to the prison population. A weekly operational report is distributed from the Health Liaison Team to support local work and ensure they have the information to make local covid risk decisions, with the support of their Outbreak Control Team / Incident Management Team.

1. Capacity management

As at 26 August 2022, the prison population was 80,300, showing a reduction of 2,400 since 13 March 2020¹. Whilst 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.

HMPPS have adopted a capacity management approach known as 'compartmentalisation'. This involves the isolation of all prisoners with either a positive test result, or symptoms, personal management plans for clinically vulnerable prisoners and all new arrivals being required to test on day 0 or 1 and advised to test on day 5 or 6. These measures minimise the risk of infection spreading throughout prisons.

The strategy is being kept under ongoing review and regularly adapted in response to operational learning as well as evolving pandemic risks in the community. There is a balance between effective infection control and maintaining a commitment to support prisoners through their custodial sentence and help them access appropriate services.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-population-figures-2022>

2. Deaths

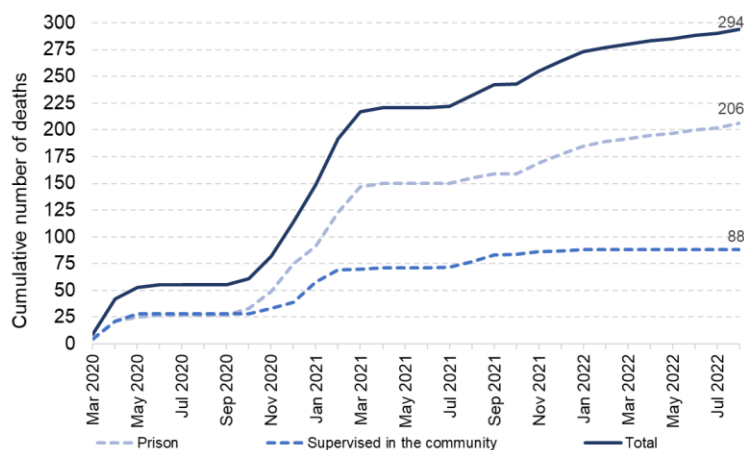
The service has taken the measures outlined to limit the spread of the virus and to protect staff and individuals in the care of HMPPS. However, prisons and probation, like all other sectors in the England in Wales have experienced deaths due to COVID-19.

The counting of deaths in prisons and probation are aligned to the UK Health Security Agency definition, and reports on deaths where the individual 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 individual had tested positive for COVID-19.

From March 2020 to the end of August 2022, 294 individuals in the care of HMPPS died having tested positive for COVID-19 within 60 days of death or where it was confirmed post-mortem as a contributing factor. 206 were prisoners. There were no deaths of children in custody. 88 of the 294 individuals were being supervised in the community². There have been no deaths of individuals supervised in the community since January 2022. Figure 1 shows the cumulative numbers of prisoner and supervised individual deaths since March 2020.

Figure 1: Cumulative numbers of individuals in the care of HMPPS, in prison and supervised in the community, who have died testing positive within 60 days of the death or where it was confirmed post-mortem. England and Wales, monthly from March 2020 (Source: Summary Tables, Table 1)



55 deaths occurred before July 2020, 166 deaths between October 2020 and April 2021 and 73 deaths since July 2021. A historic death in the community from December 2020 has recently been removed as it was not related to COVID-19. There were 4 deaths in August 2022.

Of the 206 prisoner deaths, 156 are suspected or confirmed to be due to COVID-19. The remaining 50 deaths are believed to be due to other causes, although the individuals had

² On the 26 June 2021 the National Probation Service was renamed the Probation Service and took on responsibility for supervising low and medium risk offenders previously managed by Community Rehabilitation Companies.

tested positive for COVID-19. Of the 88 individuals under probation supervision who have died, 82 are suspected or confirmed to be due to COVID-19 with the remaining 6 believed to be due to other causes, but where the individual has tested positive for COVID-19. Of the 4 deaths in August 2022, 3 are suspected or confirmed to be due to COVID-19.

The cause of death in each case is provisional until the official cause of death has been determined by the coroner. As such revisions may be made to the data as part of this process.

Data relating to COVID-19 related deaths of prison and probation officers to 31 July 2022 have been published in the [HMPPS Workforce Statistics](#)³. Data relating to the deaths of service users have also been published in the National Statistics report [Safety in Custody](#)⁴ and in the official statistics report [Deaths of Offenders in the Community](#)⁵.

3. Testing

Testing practices in prisons and Youth Custody Service (YCS) sites have been determined locally. Initially, once a small sample of prisoners or children had tested positive in an establishment, no further tests were carried out on symptomatic individuals to preserve testing kits and on the assumption all further tests would be positive. This policy was changed on 15 April 2020 due to the increased availability of testing supplies meaning all symptomatic prisoners or children are now tested. As such data trends should be considered with caution and do not represent true like-for-like comparisons.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to 30 August 2022⁶, a cumulative total of 47,023 prisoners or children in custody tested positive for COVID-19 across 130 establishments. Less than 1% (431) of these positive tests were children. There were 591 new confirmed cases in August 2022, this is 2,311 less cases than in July 2022. Figure 2 shows the cumulative monthly individuals testing positive for COVID-19 to the end of August 2022.

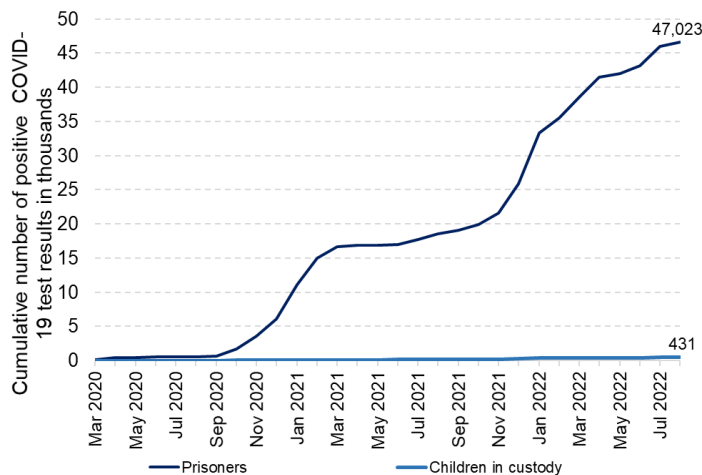
³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-offender-management-service-workforce-statistics>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/death-of-offenders-in-the-community>

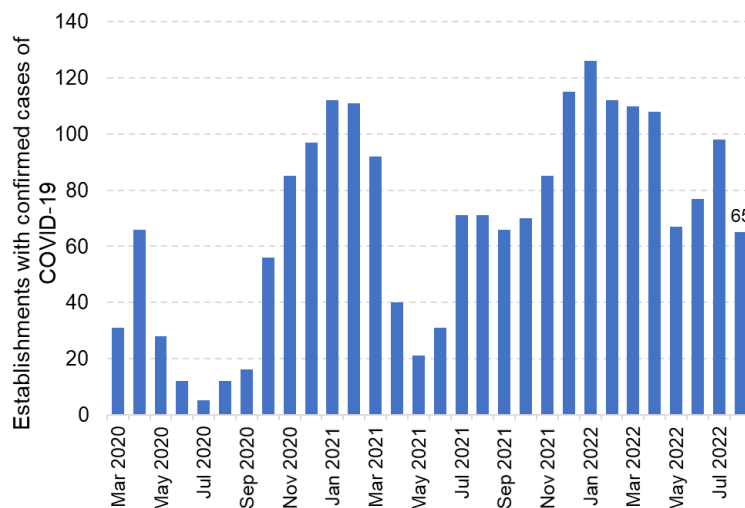
⁶ Testing data is only up to 30 August 2022 as that was the last working day in the month the testing data was collected centrally.

Figure 2: Cumulative number of prisoners and children in custody testing positive for COVID-19, England and Wales, monthly from March 2020 (Source: Summary Tables, Table 2)



65 establishments had prisoners or children testing positive during August 2022, a decrease of 33 compared with July 2022. This is the fewest establishments with prisoners or children testing positive since June 2021. Figure 3 shows the number of establishments with prisoners or children testing positive each month since March 2020.

Figure 3: Number of Prison or Youth Custody Service establishments with prisoners or children in custody testing positive for COVID-19, England and Wales, monthly from March 2020 (Source: Summary Tables, Table 2)



Recognising the unique environment in prisons, HMPPS now routinely test staff and offenders to bolster defences against the virus: to identify and isolate cases earlier and move quickly to contain outbreaks, protect local NHS and save lives.

Throughout the pandemic HMPPS has been working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care, the NHS, and health authority colleagues in England and Wales in determining the appropriate COVID testing regime and providing access to test kits.

Initially this involved the testing of symptomatic prisoners; then from the start of summer 2020 this was extended to commence asymptomatic testing of prisoners and people who work in prisons. The testing regime has varied as testing capacity has increased and in

response to the risks presented by prevalence. This has included regular asymptomatic testing of staff and the testing of prisoners at the points at transition (new reception, transfer, discharge). Mass testing of prisoners and staff has also been undertaken at sites in Outbreak following the recommendations of the health led Outbreak Control Teams.

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. Any inaccuracies may result in revisions of previously published information in future releases. 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.

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

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

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

Contact points

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