

COVID-19

FACT SHEET: PRACTICES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

Police should take steps to reduce the churn in and out of jails for people who do not pose a reasonable threat to public safety.

- People are **constantly being booked** into jail and have **massive daily turnover**. On any given day, there are over 600,000 people in jail in this country, but people go to jail **10.6 million** times each year, meaning people circulate quickly through the jail system and out into public.
- More than half of the people in jail are only in there for **two to three days**. So, if there is an outbreak in a jail, there would be people coming in from the outside community, being exposed, and returning to the community— **potentially exposing** many more people.
- Alternatively, people coming into the jail with undetected Coronavirus could easily expose the jail community and return to the outside community before anyone realizes that exposure happened.

Jails, especially overcrowded jails, combine the worst aspects of a **cruise ship** and a large public gathering and, thus, can be the perfect breeding ground for the spread of COVID-19.

- By booking people in custody only when they pose a reasonable threat to public safety, local law enforcement can help stop the spread of COVID-19 inside and outside the jail by limiting overcrowding and freeing up an already overburdened medical staff.
- Enclosed structures like jails can cause COVID-19 to spread like **wildfire** and introducing just one person with it can lead to it impacting not just everyone inside the jail but everyone anyone leaving the jail—whether a person who is release or staff returning back to their homes— interacts with in their communities.
- The risk extends far beyond those who are incarcerated. COVID-19 outbreaks in jails threaten the larger public, as hundreds of thousands of individuals churn through jails on a daily basis and correctional, medical and other staff interact with the incarcerated population and circulate back into communities.
- People in jails live every minute of the day in close proximity to each other. And to complicate matters, jails are often **over-capacity**, making it easier for contagious illnesses to spread faster. It also means isolating someone who might be showing signs of an illness or quarantining those who may have been exposed can be all-but-impossible, especially in **older, dilapidated facilities**.
- Further, inside of jails, medical staff are generally **stretched thin** even in the best of times.

Proper sanitization is a key aspect in preventing the spread of COVID-19 but may be nearly impossible for those we send to our local jails. Practicing even the most simple hygiene, such as washing hands, is not a given in jails.

- Hand sanitizer is often treated as **contraband** because it contains alcohol.
- Even if incarcerated people have access to water, they often have **nothing** to wipe their hands on. To minimize further spread, the **Center for Disease Control and Prevention** suggests things like avoiding close contact with people who are sick, covering your mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and disinfecting frequently-used surfaces. However, in jails, access to toilet paper or tissues is often limited and covering your mouth can be impossible if you're handcuffed, either because of security status or during transport to another facility.
- In jails, medical staff are generally **stretched thin** even in the best of times.

Law enforcement can help protect both themselves, anyone inside of a local jail, and their communities by not placing vulnerable people in custody and can do so without risking public safety.

- People who are elderly or sick, such as suffering with asthma or cardiovascular disease, may be at greatest risk of having COVID-19 and should not be placed into custody unless as a last resort.
- This is a population that generally poses the least threat to public safety, as due to the proven fact that most people—no matter the type of offense—age out of crime, older people simply pose **little to no risk** to public safety.
- For example, over 80% of all violent crime committed in **2018** was by a person under the age of 49 and over 95% by a person under the age of 59.
- Similarly, only 7% of people who are released over the age of 50 are ever returned to prison, which is the lowest rate among any demographic. The number drops to **4 percent** for those over 65.