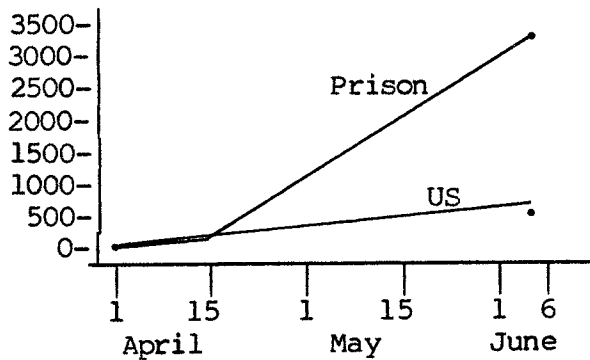


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August 17, 2020 Update from MCI-Norfolk

A recent article in JAMA (Journal of the American Medical Society) analyzes COVID-19 case rates in federal plus state prison and US populations. (See Saloner B, Parish K, Ward JA, DiLaura G, and Dolovich S. "Covid-19 Cases and Deaths in Federal and State Prisons". JAMA, 324(6):602-603 (2020)). As of June 6, 2020, this report documents 42,107 cases among 1,295,285 federal and state prisoners, for a case rate of confirmed infections at 3251/100,000. This prisoner case rate is 5.5 times higher than that in the overall US population (587/100,000). See Figure.

Figure: Trends in Cumulative COVID-19 Confirmed Case Rate/100,000 People for Prison and US Population



[Figure adapted from Saloner et al.]

As of June 6, 2020, 510 prisoners and 95,608 people in the US had died of Covid-19. The June 6 crude death rate for prisoners was 39/100,000 as compared with 29/100,000 for the overall US population. However, the proportion of prisoners over 65, the age most susceptible to dying, is much lower than in the general population. Also, prisoners are predominately male. The 510 actual prisoner deaths are 3 times greater than the number of expected prisoner deaths (173) when adjusted for age and gender. This is not surprising because of prison crowding, making social distancing impossible. Prisoners are also more vulnerable due to frequent underlying health conditions resulting from years of delayed and inadequate prison health care.

Similar data is available for Massachusetts state prisons as mandated by the Supreme Judicial Court (under CPCS v Chief Justice..., SJC-12926). As of June 7, 2020 there were 409 Covid-19 cases reported among 7147 custody prisoners for a case rate of 5723/100,000. This was a rate 1.8 times greater than the national prisoner case rate of 3251/100,000 on that date. By August 12, 2020, the Massachusetts prisoner case rate was 5971/100,000 (418 cases per 7000 prisoners), approximately 4 times the then overall US population rate.

There have been 8 Covid-19 deaths in Massachusetts state prisons, all occurring by June 7, 2020. The crude death rate for MA prisoners was 112/100,000 as of June 7. This rate was 2.9 times higher than the national prisoner crude death rate of 39/100,000 on June 6. Massachusetts prisoners are the oldest in the nation, making them more susceptible to dying from Covid-19, which may partially account for this increased death rate. However, this also means that, going forward, MA prisoners will continue to be at greater risk of dying than the national federal and state prisoner populations.

As of August 12, 2020, the MA prisoner crude death rate remains virtually unchanged, at 114/100,000. It is clear that, with ongoing concerns about the persistence of Covid infection in Massachusetts, the MA prisoner population remains at substantial risk of future infection and death.

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