Local jails in the United States experienced a large decline (down 185,400 inmates) in their inmate populations from June 30, 2019 to June 30, 2020, which can be attributed mainly to the COVID-19 pandemic. This had a notable effect on the number of inmates held for a misdemeanor, which fell about 45% from midyear 2019 to midyear 2020 and outpaced the 18% decline in inmates held for a felony. The number of female inmates also changed dramatically, decreasing 37% during this period while the male population dropped 23%.

**Pandemic-driven effects on jails**

With fewer inmates during the pandemic due to declining admissions and 208,500 expedited releases from jails between March and June 2020, jail facilities became less crowded. About 81% of jail beds were occupied at midyear 2019, while 60% were occupied at midyear 2020. Jails located in counties that had the highest confirmed COVID-19 infection rates (with 1% or more residents infected) were the least crowded, with about 54% of jail beds occupied at midyear 2020 compared to 73% at midyear 2019.

**COVID-19 testing in jails**

Jails nationwide administered 215,360 COVID-19 tests to inmates between March and June 2020, which was equivalent to testing 9% of the 2.4 million persons admitted to jails during that time. More than 11% of these tests were positive. Jails in counties with the highest infection rates (1% or more residents infected with COVID-19) tested nearly 21% of persons admitted to their jails. About 14% of these tests were positive.

As for jail staff, nearly 5% (10,850 of 233,220 employees) tested positive for COVID-19 during the 4-month period. About 8% of jail staff working in counties with the highest infection rates tested positive for COVID-19. By comparison, 1% of jail staff in counties with the lowest infection rates tested positive.

**COVID-related deaths**

Among the jails that reported on COVID-19-related inmate and staff deaths (89% of sampled jails), a total of 43 inmates in 22 jails died of COVID-19 between March and June 2020. Thirty-three of those deaths were reported as confirmed deaths from COVID-19 or where COVID was a significant contributor to the death. The other 10 deaths were reported as suspected deaths from COVID-19.

A total of 40 staff from 30 jails also died of COVID-19 between March and June 2020. Thirty-two of the deaths were reported as confirmed deaths from COVID-19. The other eight deaths were reported as suspected deaths from COVID-19.