

# COVID-19 and the Justice System

NCCD is monitoring how COVID-19 is affecting the nation's juvenile and criminal justice systems—both people who are incarcerated or on supervision as well as these systems' staff. Visit [our website](#) often for new information.

## Survey: How Is Your Agency Responding to the Challenges of COVID-19?

If you work for a corrections agency or other justice-oriented agency, we invite you to complete a [brief survey](#) about how your agency is identifying and responding to challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. We will compile and share the survey results with the field in the coming days.

## Reductions in Incarcerated Populations

By decreasing arrests for some offenses and releasing some people from institutions, a number of jurisdictions are seeing noticeable reductions in incarcerated populations.

- In [Alameda County, California](#), nearly 250 people, most of whom had 45 days or fewer left on their sentence, were released from jail.
- In [Los Angeles County](#), the jail population dropped by 6% in recent weeks.
- Efforts in [Harris County, Texas](#), have decreased the jail population by about 6.5%, and the sheriff hopes to release pre-trial detainees who are ages 50 and over and have a non-violent charge.
- [New Jersey](#) ordered temporary release of people held in county jails, affecting up to



1,000 people who were jailed for probation violations or sentenced for low-level offenses.

- [Police in Philadelphia](#) have been directed to stop making arrests for low-level offenses including drug charges.

Despite these reductions, thousands of individuals remain in facilities. Across the nation, in order to limit the risk of infection to facility residents and staff, in-person visitation has temporarily stopped at many [youth](#) and [adult](#) facilities; some facilities still allow in-person legal visits. In the wake of this policy change, jurisdictions are helping residents connect with loved ones through free or increased phone calls and [video visits](#).

## How Do “Shelter in Place” Orders Impact System Involvement?

Many locales have put “shelter in place” and “stay at home” orders in place. Enforcement of these orders varies and will continue to unfold. In some communities, including [Orange and Osceola](#)

counties in Florida and [Cameron County, Texas](#), overnight curfews have been implemented with exceptions such as going to work at an essential function or getting medication or groceries. While sanctions vary by locale, non-compliance with COVID-19 curfew orders may lead to citation, arrest, incarceration, and/or fines.

NCCD's recommendations:

### **Provide Case Management and Support for People Released From Institutions**

Youth and adults released from institutions should be supported as they transition back into the community. This includes case management support to address needs such as housing, food access, health care, and emotional support. Agencies can consider housing options listed on this [housing tip sheet](#).

### **Decrease the Impact of Social Isolation**

For those who remain in institutions, policy considerations should be made to protect against the use of isolation or seclusion due to staff shortages. On March 17, the National Juvenile Justice Network and Coalition on Juvenile Justice hosted a webinar where states and justice organizations discussed alternatives to seclusion. Recommendations and examples from the field include the following.

- Ensure everyone can interact with each other throughout the course of the day.
- Maintain access to games, reading materials, and other resources.
- Provide alternative access to families through [video conferencing](#) and extended and/or free phone call options.
- For youth, coordinate with local school districts for virtual classrooms and course work.

## **Successful Video Visits With Young Children**

An unprecedented amount of business typically done in person is now happening in the realm of video conferencing—including children visiting with incarcerated parents. Video visits with young children pose special challenges due to their developmental needs. This [tip sheet](#) offers some ideas for parents, caregivers, and agency staff.

### **Further Resources**

[Coronavirus tracker](#) shows justice system responses in each state

[Guidelines](#) from the National Commission on Correctional Health Care for preventing the spread of COVID-19 in correctional settings

Series of publications from NCCD and the Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center on girls in detention, including [recommendations for reducing the use of detention](#)

[Webinar](#) presented by the National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement Strategies on prisons, jails, and oversight bodies during the COVID-19 crisis

[Statement](#) from community supervision executives on the importance of using best practices during the COVID-19 crisis

List of [state restrictions](#) related to COVID-19 from the Interstate Commission on Juveniles

Ideas for remote learning from [The New York Times Learning Network](#)

Parent resource for [talking to children about COVID-19](#) from the National Association of School Psychologists

National Association of Counsel for Children COVID-19 [Resource Hub](#)

## **Learn More**

For more information or to share your thoughts, please contact us at [info@nccdglobal.org](mailto:info@nccdglobal.org) or (800) 306-6223.