

PANDEMIC 2020

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Federal Correctional Institution
Ashland, Kentucky USA

By now I doubt there is anyone on planet earth who has not been affected by the novel COVID-19, better known as the coronavirus. The virus, which has its origins in China, has very quickly and efficiently spread across the globe to become a deadly world-wide pandemic. COVID-19 is not racist; it isn't selective; it respects no border — every country has confirmed cases among their population. It has no regard for social status — rich, poor, young, old have contracted the virus. Athletes, entertainers, politicians and royalty alike have been infected.

While rumor, conjecture and conspiracy theories abound, I choose to concentrate on the few facts available to us within the American criminal justice system. To date, there have been some 1,783,941 confirmed cases and 109,312 deaths reported world-wide.

Nationally, 530,006 cases and 20,608 deaths have been confirmed and the figure grows hourly with NYC bearing the brunt of the pandemic in the United States. With no end to this invisible killer in sight

these numbers will be grossly out-dated by the time this article is set for publication.

The latest information available regarding the DOJ and BOP is nearly a week old and becoming rapidly out-dated as well as institutional changes in response to the virus are being made daily. Unfortunately, as a nation we seem to be more reactive than we are proactive toward the virus and have rapidly come to eclipse "ground zero" China in both the number of cases and the number of deaths.

We also seem to be in a panic over the pandemic. Much to our shame, National Public Radio has reported that EMT/EMS personnel have been evicted from their homes, kicked off buses, and have even had chemicals thrown on them by people who fear they may contract the virus from our brave front-line medical workers. Is this what America has become? I'll stay in prison where it's safe, thank you.

In Chi-Town, the Cook County Jail has reported 350 cases of COVID-19 among the inmate population in just the last two weeks, while regional and county jails in every state examine the possibility of releasing low-risk, non-violent offenders. Even the feds are looking at releasing a (very) few inmates as well.

Additionally, on the federal level, the TSA has reported some 31 agents to include 24 passenger screening officers have tested positive for the coronavirus while the first ICE detainee confirmed positive for the virus was reported at the Bergen County Jail in Hackensack, NJ. The ACLU and Amnesty International-USA have joined together in calling for the release of all ICE detainees, citing, "the documented inadequacies of medical care and basic hygiene in immigrant detention facilities". Such an argument could be made for virtually every local, state, and federal lock-up in the country (in the Carter County Detention Center (which primarily houses federal inmates awaiting designation) you receive one roll of toilet paper each week but can buy more for \$1.05/roll - limit 2. But you can purchase as many e-cigs as you want for around \$13.00 each and supplied by the vape shop owned by the county jailer and his wife).

The Federal Bureau of Prisons has also reported 50 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among staff members and 91 cases, including 8 deaths among inmates. This has prompted the move from a partial lockdown with restricted movement to be changed to a complete lockdown of all 122 federal facilities in an effort to slow the spread of the killer virus among the very vulnerable federal inmate population which currently stands around 144,000 individuals. The Butner, NC; Elkton, OH; and Oakdale, CT facilities have been among the hardest hit locations.

So far there have been no cases reported among the staff or inmates at the Federal Correctional Institution in Ashland, KY, where I am located. FCI-Ashland is a very old, very vulnerable open dorm style facility which staff members agree would be devastated if hit by COVID-19. So far, the preventive measures, while ~~inconvenient~~^{inconvenient}, are working here.

The national lockdown was implemented on April 8th by order of BOP Director Michael Cavalal and will last 14 days and possible much longer.