

COVID-19: STRATEGIES TO SLOW THE SPREAD IN PRISONS

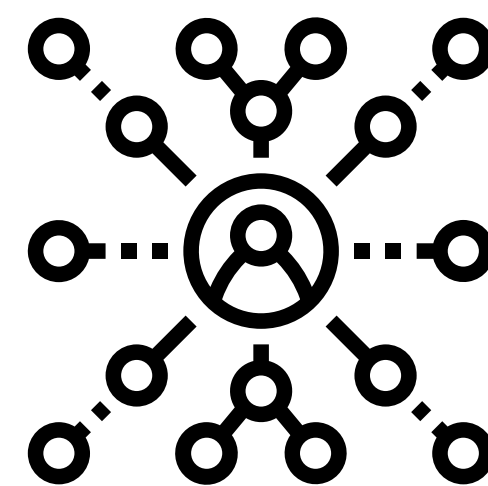
WHY MUST PRISONS BE A PRIORITY ISSUE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Prison populations are extremely vulnerable in this pandemic. Efforts to address COVID-19 in prisons must afford all individuals the rights, including access to healthcare, that they are guaranteed under international law.

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COVID-19 is likely to spread quickly in prisons and the community at large so is a serious threat to incarcerated individuals, prison staff and the public.



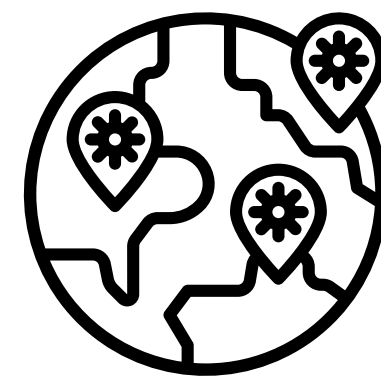
International law guarantees people in prison the same human rights, including healthcare, as are afforded to the general community.



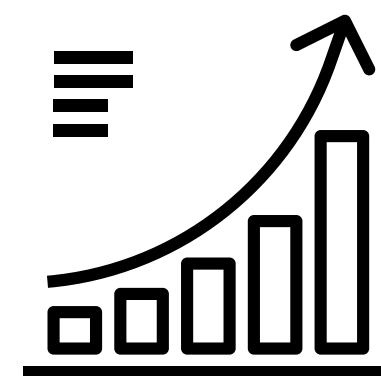
Community healthcare systems will be severely stressed if the virus spreads from prisons to the surrounding communities.

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WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF COVID-19 IN PRISONS?



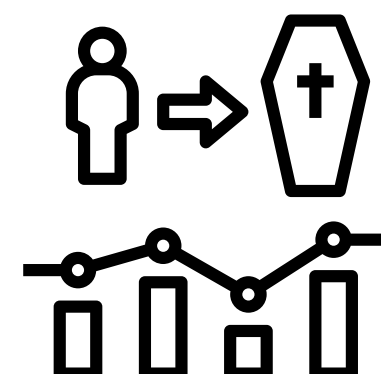
There are growing outbreaks in prisons around the world (e.g. in Syria, Pakistan and South Africa).



Due to the lack of testing, it is likely that reporting grossly underestimates the actual numbers of infections. Where available, data have shown very high infection rates, with 80-90% in some prisons.



Prison guards and staff are showing high infection rates – over 50 workers in South African prisons were diagnosed with the virus earlier this year.



High infection rates in prisons will lead to high death rates, which may be as much as 50% higher than in the community.

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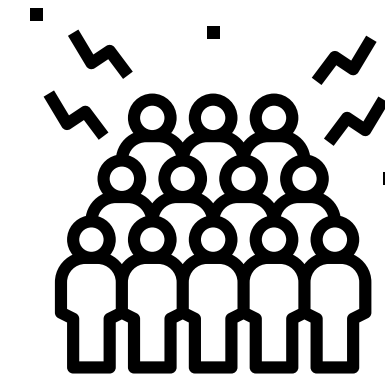
WHY ARE PRISONS PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO COVID-19?

Overcrowded facilities with high concentrations of vulnerable people and inadequate access to healthcare and basic hygiene are the perfect environment for an uncontrolled outbreak.

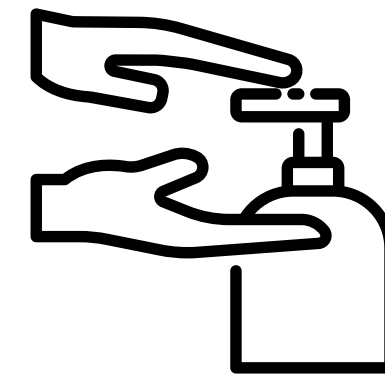
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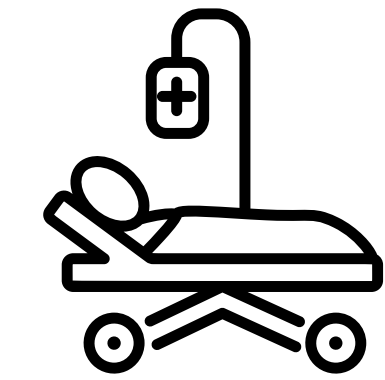
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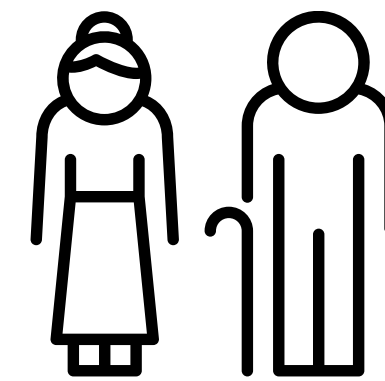
Many prisons have several times the number of prisoners they are designed for, making disease spread more likely and recommended physical distancing measures practically impossible.



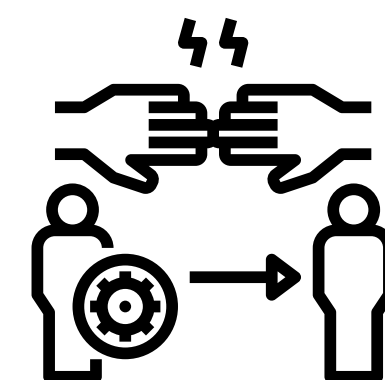
Inadequate access to healthcare and basic hygiene in prisons is commonplace. During this pandemic, there are widespread reports of limited access to water, soap and sanitising gels.



Underlying chronic health conditions (e.g. diabetes, heart disease) disproportionately affect people in prison, and these conditions make people more susceptible to COVID-19.



Older people are more vulnerable to COVID-19, and prison populations are getting older and sicker. A 50-year-old in prison is likely to have the health problems of an average 60-year-old.



Staff are in a vulnerable position due to frequent contact with potentially infected individuals; this is made worse by a severe global shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE).

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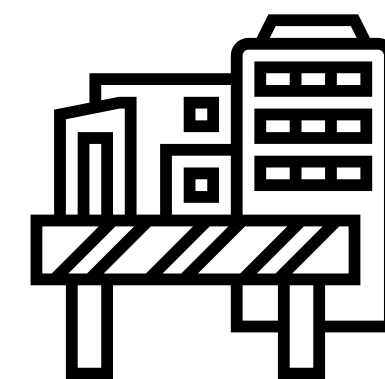
WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL WAYS TO CONTAIN AN OUTBREAK?

Several measures may be considered to mitigate outbreaks in prisons, including release and limits on physical contact. However, visitor restrictions cannot circumvent human rights monitoring, and isolation and quarantine should not resemble punitive solitary confinement.

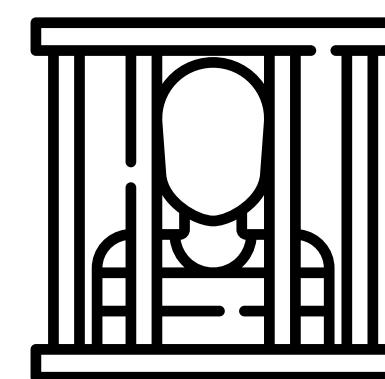
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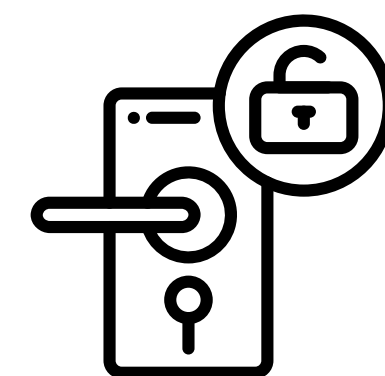
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Visitor restrictions may be necessary, but people must be provided ways to connect with the outside world and given the psychosocial support and resources (e.g. food) usually provided by visitors.



Isolation/quarantine of people in prisons is open to abuse so must be time-limited, and the conditions must conform to international guidelines for the treatment of people in prisons.



Certain groups should be considered for release, including the elderly, those convicted of low-level offences, those with underlying health issues and those who have nearly completed their sentences.



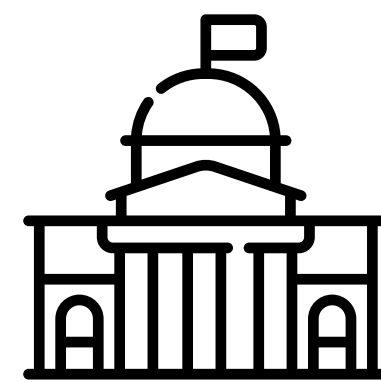
New admissions may be reduced by limiting arrests and/or pre-trial detention for less serious crimes and especially those concerning violations of quarantine or curfew measures.



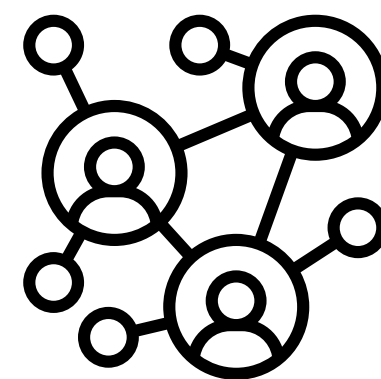
Staff are vulnerable to infection due to frequent contact with potentially infected individuals. Hygiene resources should be provided, including access to water, soap, disinfectants, and PPE.

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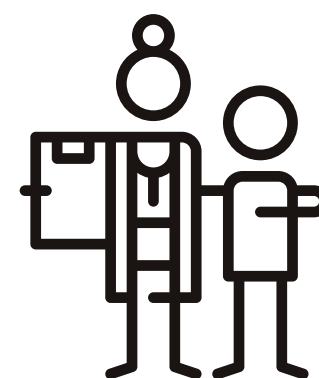
HOW CAN PRISON RELEASES BE SUPPORTED?



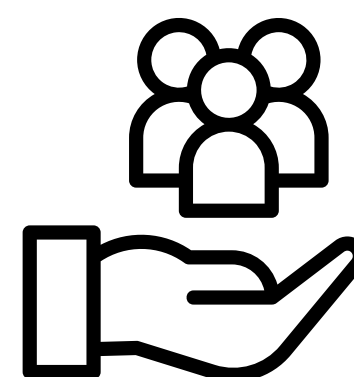
Governments may worry about public response to releasing prisoners; data should be made public about the low risk of re-offence and the low risk of community infection with releases.



Communities should be informed of prison release plans and measures to monitor released individuals.



Individuals should be screened for illness before release from prison; after release they should be provided with necessary support, including healthcare and housing.



Support should be considered for victims and those who may be affected by gender-based violence as a result of release programmes.