

# Racial Disparities in Incarceration and Coronavirus

New data from states and cities around the United States shows that [Black](#) and [Latino](#) people are getting sick and dying from the novel coronavirus at alarming, and heavily disproportionate, rates. In Chicago, Black people account for almost three-quarters of virus-related fatalities, but less than a third of the city's population. In New York City, [Latino and Black residents are dying at twice the rate of white residents when adjusted for age](#). Similar disparities, particularly for Black Americans, are repeated in other states and cities reporting infections or deaths by race, including [Mississippi](#), Michigan, Louisiana, Las Vegas, and North and South Carolina, as well as a [new report on hospitalizations from the Centers for Disease Control](#). Although there is not yet data on the impact on other racial and ethnic minority communities, including Native Americans, [high rates of underlying health conditions could cause similar disparities](#) as infections expand across the country. People of color in the United States are less likely to be insured, more likely to have existing health conditions, more likely to work in jobs that continue to expose them to the virus, and less likely to be tested and treated when ill.

All of these existing disparities are concentrated and compounded in America's system of mass incarceration. High rates of infection and death among people of color are likely to get even higher as the coronavirus spreads through the nation's jails and prisons.

- Black people make up 13% of the U.S. population but 33% of the [prison](#) and [jail](#) population, while Latinos make up 18% of the U.S. population and 23% of the prison population.
- This means that Black people are imprisoned at [6x the rate](#) of white people in the United States while Latinos are imprisoned at 3x the rate.
- One in three Black men born today can expect to be incarcerated in his lifetime, compared to one in six Latino men and one in 17 white men. <sup>1</sup>
- Black people have higher bail set, and are more likely to be detained in jail pretrial, meaning while legally innocent. <sup>2</sup>
- Black defendants tend to be sentenced more severely than comparably situated white defendants for less serious crimes. <sup>3</sup>
- Long sentences have led to massive growth in older, more medically vulnerable populations in prison. In 2013 there were over 84,000 Black people and 36,000 Latino people [50 years or older](#) in state prisons across the nation, up from 13,000 and 6,200 respectively in 1993.
- These disparities within the system lead to similar disparities in the community: Black adults are [50% more likely to have had a family member incarcerated than white people](#), but 3x more likely to have had a family member incarcerated for more than a year. This means that nearly 2 in 3 Black adults has had a family member spend at least a night in jail or prison and nearly 1 in 3 has had a family member spend more than a year in prison.
  - Latino people experience family incarceration at rates slightly higher than white people, but they are nearly twice as likely to have a family member in jail or prison for more than one year.
  - Native Americans also have very high rates of family incarceration—six out of 10 (63 percent) have had an immediate family member spend at least one night in jail or prison.

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<sup>1</sup> The Sentencing Project, Trends in U.S. Corrections (Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project, 2017), 5, <https://perma.cc/G3Y4-JE3L>.

<sup>2</sup> Cynthia E. Jones, "'Give Us Free': Addressing Racial Disparities in Bail Determinations," New York University Journal of Legislation and Public Policy 16, no. 4 (2013), 919-62, 938-39, <https://www.nyuilpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Jones-Give-Us-Free-16nyuilpp919.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Tushar Kansal, Racial Disparity in Sentencing: A Review of the Literature (Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project, 2005), 4-5, <https://perma.cc/67L2-2C7S>. Carlos Berdejó, "Criminalizing Race: Racial Disparities in Plea Bargaining," Boston College Law Review 59 (2018), 3, <https://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3659&context=bclr>.