

THE FACTS: COVID VACCINES FOR INCARCERATED PEOPLE IN ILLINOIS

Illinois has joined many other states in listing both corrections employees and people incarcerated in prisons and jails in the next stage ("Phase 1B") of COVID-19 Vaccine distribution. This decision makes *all* Illinoisans safer and less likely to contract COVID-19 and is an efficient and effective way to reach herd immunity and decrease community spread so that we can all get back to our normal lives as quickly as possible. **Here's the truth about vaccinating incarcerated people in Illinois.**

GETTING THE FACTS STRAIGHT

- **Incarcerated People are being vaccinated at the same time as elderly adults and essential workers, not before.** Phase 1B includes front-line workers like first responders, USPS workers, teachers, grocery store workers, corrections officers, and all people over the age of 65. Included with correctional workers are inmates, as people continually cycling through these facilities (employees and residents) and the inability to social distance heightens their risk of contracting and spreading the virus to the community.
- **Incarcerated People are not "cutting" the vaccine line.** The next phase of vaccine distribution is for adults who are at the risk of contracting COVID-19 or dying from it. Social distancing is impossible in congregate settings and makes the risk of transmission exceptionally high. **IDPH guidance for Phase 1B simply clarifies that incarcerated people will be treated equitably, like the other "long-term care residents" in state-run facilities "that provide a range of services," such as nursing home residents, who were already vaccinated in Phase 1A.**
- **Vaccinating Incarcerated People will not substantially delay vaccination for other Illinoisans.** Today there are approximately 76,000 people behind bars in Illinois. **That represents only about 2% of the 3.2 million people who qualify for the next round of vaccinations.** People in Phase 2 of the vaccination plan will have to wait a long time for Phase 1B to finish—but vaccinating prisoners does not make that wait longer.

WHY VACCINATING INCARCERATED PEOPLE IS THE RIGHT POLICY FOR ILLINOIS

- **Outbreaks behind bars don't STAY behind bars.** COVID-19 outbreaks in prisons and jails are one of the biggest sources of infections in the community. Jails and prisons are not "closed" environments: staff enter and leave every day and people are regularly released back into their communities. **This means that the more staff and incarcerated people have COVID-19, the more the disease will spread into our communities.** Cook County Jail was the #1 coronavirus hotspot in the country in April, and researchers found that **1 in 6** infections in Chicago at the time ultimately traced back to the Cook County Jail.
- **Incarcerated People use the same hospitals as every other Illinoisan – and vaccinating them is crucial to stopping ICUs from going over capacity.** When incarcerated people become seriously ill with COVID-19, they are sent to local hospitals with ICUs. **This is particularly dangerous in downstate prisons, which are mostly located in rural small towns, where the prison population is as big – or bigger – than the population of the local town.** Prison outbreaks can (and have) quickly overwhelmed local ICU capacity; in April, the National Guard was dispatched after the outbreak at Stateville Correctional Center got too big for Joliet's hospital system to manage.
- **Incarcerated People desperately need access to the COVID-19 vaccine because they are at heightened risk of dying from COVID-19.** Social distancing is impossible in prison. Combined with the poor health of many incarcerated people, this a lethal combination. According to *The Marshall Project*, as of January 14, at least 9,500 of Illinois' prison residents have tested positive for COVID-19—**1 in 4 prisoners, 3.2 times the rate in the state overall**—and 70 have died. No Illinois prisoner has been given a death sentence, and an unknown number of people have contracted the virus while in county jails *before their trial*. **Vaccinating incarcerated people is smart public health policy, and it's also the right thing to do.**