

Safety and Justice Challenge COVID-19 FAQ

1. How are people in jail being considered for release during COVID-19?

The Court of Common Pleas Criminal Division has attempted to systematically review as many people in jail as possible to consider if they could safely be released. Criminal Division judges, Pretrial Services, Adult Probation, and the Public Defender's Office have worked together to identify and screen individuals who could be released from the jail through bail modifications, detainer lifts, or parole.

The bail modification reviews began with individuals identified by the Allegheny County Jail as being at the highest risk if they were to contract COVID-19 due to their age or underlying health conditions. Bail modification requests are also being made by any attorney through the Pretrial Services web system and reviewed in the order that they are received. Pretrial Services individually reviews each request by looking at if the person has prior or current violent charges, and if the person has other holds such as local probation/parole detainers, state parole detainers and federal holds. Individuals who are determined to be appropriate for release are presented in the daily motions court for a Criminal Division judge to rule on the modification.

Criminal Division judges review people held in the jail on Adult Probation detainers using the list from the jail of medically compromised individuals, motions filed by attorneys, and individuals identified by Adult Probation. Adult Probation looks at all individuals detained in the jail, evaluates every individual's potential risk, and presents potential lifts to judges of individuals who Adult Probation believes would not pose a threat to public safety.

Criminal Division judges were also provided with lists of every individual who they have sentenced to the jail for consideration of whether any individuals could be paroled.

These efforts have resulted in the release of a significant number of individuals from the Allegheny County Jail. A daily count of the number of people released from jail can be found on the jail's [website](#). It is important to note that not every jail release can be attributed to the measures taken due to COVID-19.

2. How many people are in jail right now?

A daily update on the jail population is being provided on the jail's main [page](#). Historical jail population data are available in a [dashboard](#) on the Allegheny County Analytics website.

3. How many people are being admitted to the jail?

Data about the number of jail bookings since March 8th are available in a [dashboard](#) on the Allegheny County Analytics website, on the "other Allegheny County indicators tab."

4. How are people in jail being kept safe during COVID-19?

The Allegheny County Jail has taken several measures to protect the safety of residents and staff in the jail, including restricting visitors, implementing screening for fever and respiratory symptoms in people entering the jail, increasing cleaning, and providing masks to employees and residents. Additional information about the jail's response to the COVID-19 pandemic can be found on their [website](#).

5. How many people in the jail have been tested for COVID-19 and how many are positive?

The Allegheny County Jail [website](#) provides data on the number of individuals tested for COVID-19 and the number of positive tests that is updated daily.

6. How are people transitioning out of jail being supported?

The jail's [Discharge and Release Center](#) is still operating, which offers a free phone call, free bus ticket, free Narcan, and a packet of requested information about community resources.

Individuals who are enrolled in [Justice Related Services](#) are continuing to receive release planning and case management to ensure connection to housing and behavioral health treatment in the community.

Individuals who are enrolled in the [Re-Entry](#) program are continuing to receive support following release. Re-Entry clients' needs such as housing, transportation, education, substance use treatment, mental health treatment, food assistance, and other needs are being assessed and responded to by their Re-Entry service coordinator and their Re-Entry probation officer via phone calls, video conferencing, and text messages.

Individuals leaving the jail who are high-risk, symptomatic, COVID-19 positive, or have had known exposure to COVID-19 and who have nowhere to safely isolate may be eligible for the Department of Human Services' isolation and quarantine hotel. The Department of Human Services is working closely with the Health Department to determine the need for isolation and to coordinate with the jail when an individual being released is eligible for the hotel.

The Department of Human Services is utilizing resource specialists who typically work in Magisterial District Courts to do outreach to people who have been released from the jail since the onset of COVID-19. The resource specialists are calling recently released individuals to check in about housing, safety, health, human service needs, and court follow up, and offer connection to resources, as needed.

7. What happens to a person who is leaving the jail and is homeless?

Individuals leaving the jail who are homeless may call the Allegheny LINK from the jail's Discharge and Release Center to access available homelessness services. Individuals experiencing homelessness who meet the eligibility criteria listed above for the isolation and quarantine hotel may be referred there.

8. How are technical violations of probation being handled?

Adult Probation is limiting the use of jail for technical violations of probation in cases where there is no threat to public safety. Warrants for probation violations must be approved by probation management prior to issuance. In some cases, a technical violation may still necessitate a warrant to detain in the jail, such as if a person poses an immediate safety threat or a warrant is requested by a judge.

9. How do I find out if my court date has been rescheduled due to COVID-19?

Many court dates were rescheduled as a result of the [Declaration of Judicial Emergency](#) due to COVID-19. These [instructions](#) show how to look up your next court date online.