

California, Ohio and Illinois release hundreds of inmates early to decrease the prison population during coronavirus crisis while some districts say they will not pursue prosecutions for 'low level' crimes

- Officials are working to reduce the prison population in preparation for potential quarantine of inmates
- Los Angeles County reduced its prison population by 600 since the end of February
- Daily arrests have also been cut down from 300 a day to 60
- Cuyahoga County, Ohio, also released 200 people since Friday
- Cook County, Illinois, secured the release of a pregnant inmate
- Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez said Tuesday that low-level offenses that don't jeopardize public safety will not be prosecuted
- Federal prisons have banned visits, even from lawyers, for 30 days
- There are no known cases of the coronavirus in a U.S. prison
- [Coronavirus symptoms](#): what are they and should you see a doctor?

By [FRANCES MULRANEY FOR DAILYMAIL.COM](#)

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Prisons in California, Illinois and Ohio are releasing hundreds of inmates early to decrease prison populations in an effort to combat the potential spread of **coronavirus** among inmates.

As of Tuesday morning, no prison in the United States has reported a case of COVID-19 but many county, state, and federal jails and courthouses are beginning to take preventative measures to ensure the safety of inmates.

Inmates are considered high risk because of their inability to social distance from others and their limited access to basic hygiene measures.

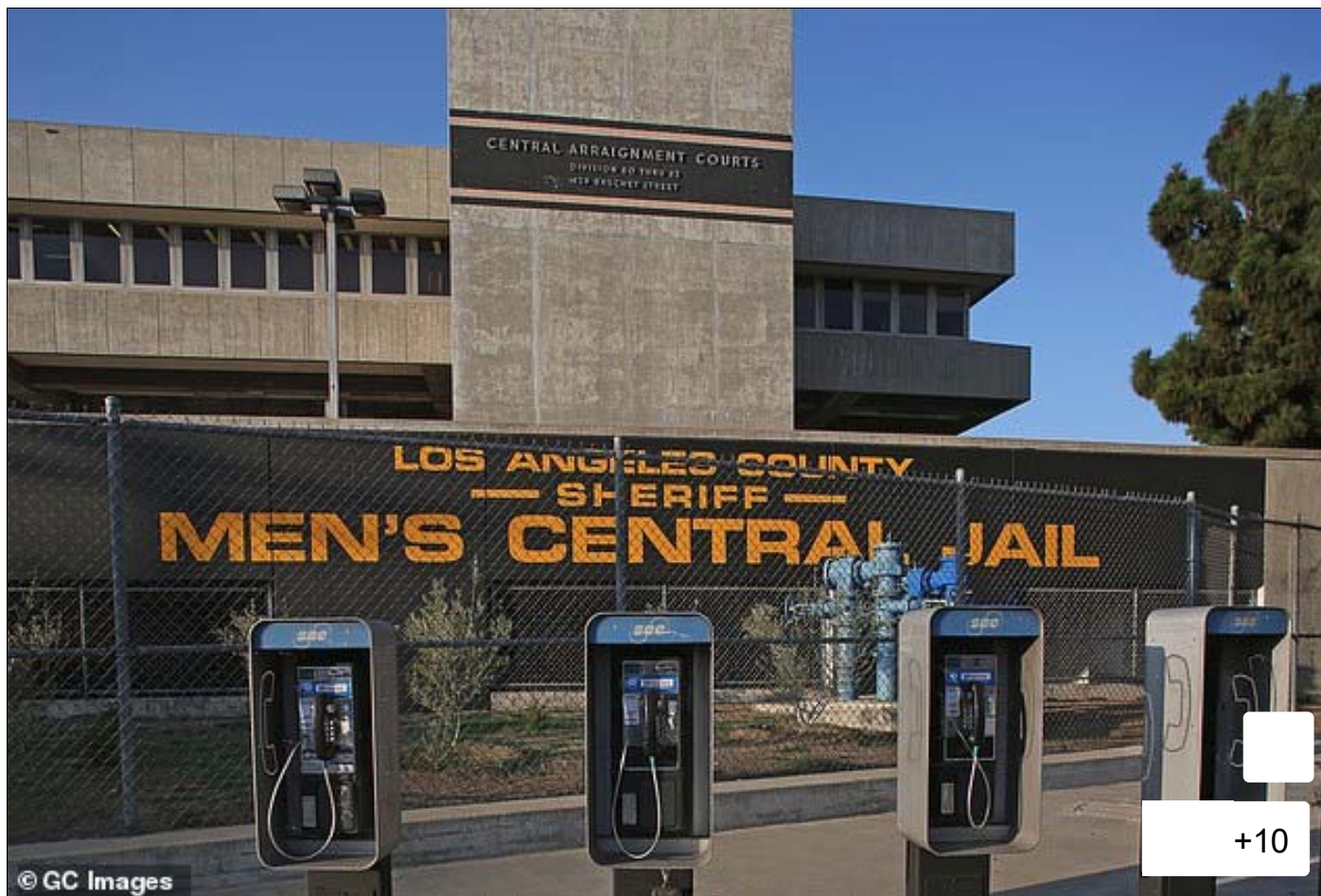
In response, Los Angeles County in California, Cuyahoga County in Ohio, and Cook County in Illinois have released or are planning to release inmates to allow for more space of social distancing and self-isolation.

In Brooklyn, 'low-level crimes' will also not be prosecuted, to limit potential exposure to the virus for employees and visitors, while New York Mayor Bill de Blasio warned that those arrested with 'flu-like' symptoms will be booked using video technology.



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Inmates crowd a dorm room inside the Men's Central Jail in 2014. There are currently 21 inmates in quarantine here as the county tries to reduce the risk of the coronavirus



Men's Central Jail in Los Angeles County where there are attempts to reduce the prison population to help prepare for the event of a coronavirus outbreak among inmates



Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva revealed he had called on officers to reduce the number of arrests and that they had dropped from 300 a day to 60 since February

Los Angeles County has decreased its prison population by 600 people to combat the potential spread of the **coronavirus** among inmates.

Early release is being granted to those with less than 30 days on their sentence, reducing inmates from 17,076 to 16,459 since the end of February.

The LA County sheriff is also asking officers to cite and release offenders when possible, which has reduced the daily number of arrests from 300 to 60.

The moves in LA County, where there are 94 coronavirus cases and one death, have seen daily arrests drop from 300 to 60, Sheriff Alex Villanueva said Monday at a news conference.

He added that the aggregate bond amount for people to be booked also went up from \$25,000 to \$50,000.



'Our population within the jail is a vulnerable population just by virtue of who they are and where they're located,' he said.

'So, we're protecting that population from potential exposure.'

There are already nine inmates in the county in isolation at a correctional treatment center, 21 inmates in quarantine at the Men's Central Jail and five in quarantine at the Twin Towers Correctional Facility.

Staff in these locations are said to be taking the temperature of anyone entering, looking for fevers.

But staff themselves are also at risk and several have already been placed in self-isolation.

'Over the weekend, we've had several of our personnel come into contact, and they have been self-isolated,' Villanueva said.

'However, fortunately, no one has actually tested positive for the virus.'



The Los Angeles River flows behind the Twin Towers Jail in Los Angeles County. Five inmates are in quarantine in the correctional facility as a result of the coronavirus



The Cuyahoga County Corrections Center in downtown Cleveland has released 200 inmates since Friday as they attempt to reduce the prison population against the coronavirus

Other prisons around the country are taking measures to prevent spread among inmates and staff.

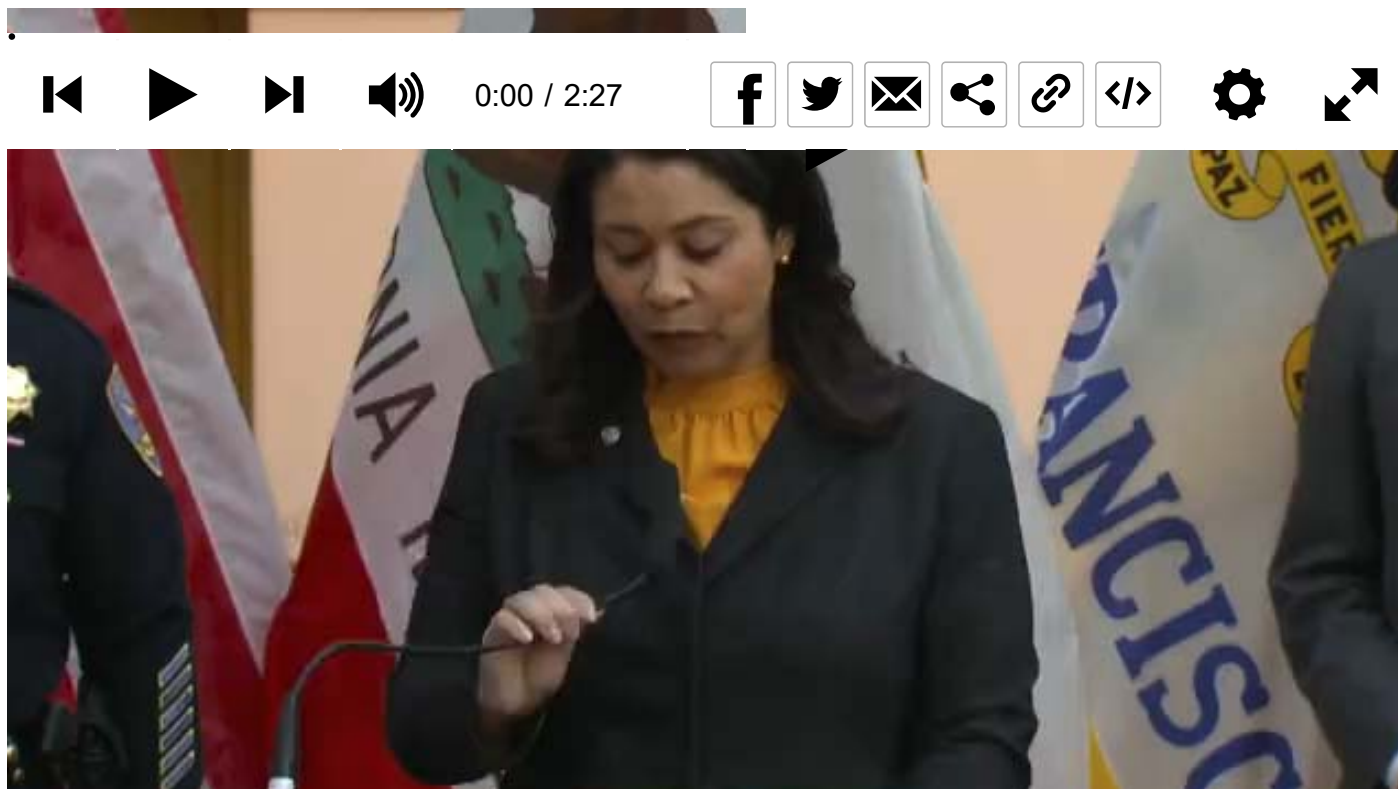
The U.S.'s 122 federal prisons and many of the 1,700-plus state prisons have banned visitors and volunteers.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons announced its ban Friday, joining most state and county prisons.

They have also banned lawyer visits for 30 days.

In response, many federal prisons are increasing the number of prisoner phone calls or the total number of minutes allotted.

San Francisco Mayor announces three week citywide lockdown



Prisons in Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, Ohio and South Dakota are looking to expand video calling abilities for inmates.

In Cleveland, Ohio, Cuyahoga County's common pleas court held extra hearings on Saturday to try and clear the prison population, releasing 200 people since Friday.

Those released were said to be low-level, non-violent inmates who have been placed on probation or released by having their bond reduced to a manageable level.

'We are trying to make as much room as possible, so when this virus hits our jail, the jail can deal with these people, quarantine them and deal with it instead of letting them sit there and infect the whole entire jail,' said Administrative Judge Brendan Sheehan.

'You gotta remember, the goal of this is to protect the community and the safety of the inmates. If someone's a serious violent person, well, we're using our discretion to make sure the community's safe also,' he added.



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An inmate in a six-bunk cell inside the Men's Central Jail in LA County. Inmates are more at risk than the general population as they can not social distance from other inmates

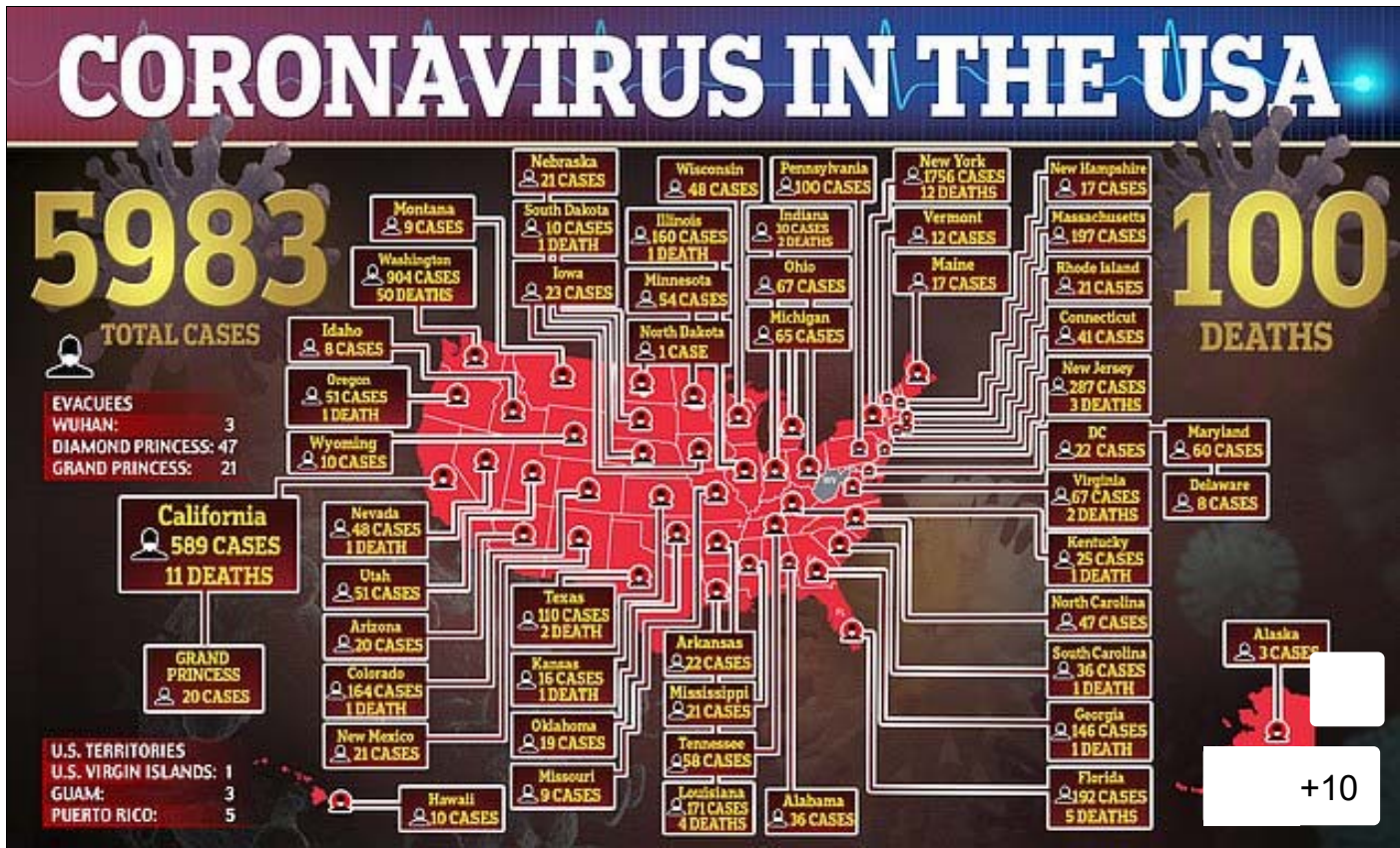


The Cook County Jail in Illinois is in talks to begin the compassionate release of inmates with exceptional health care needs who don't pose a threat amid the coronavirus crisis

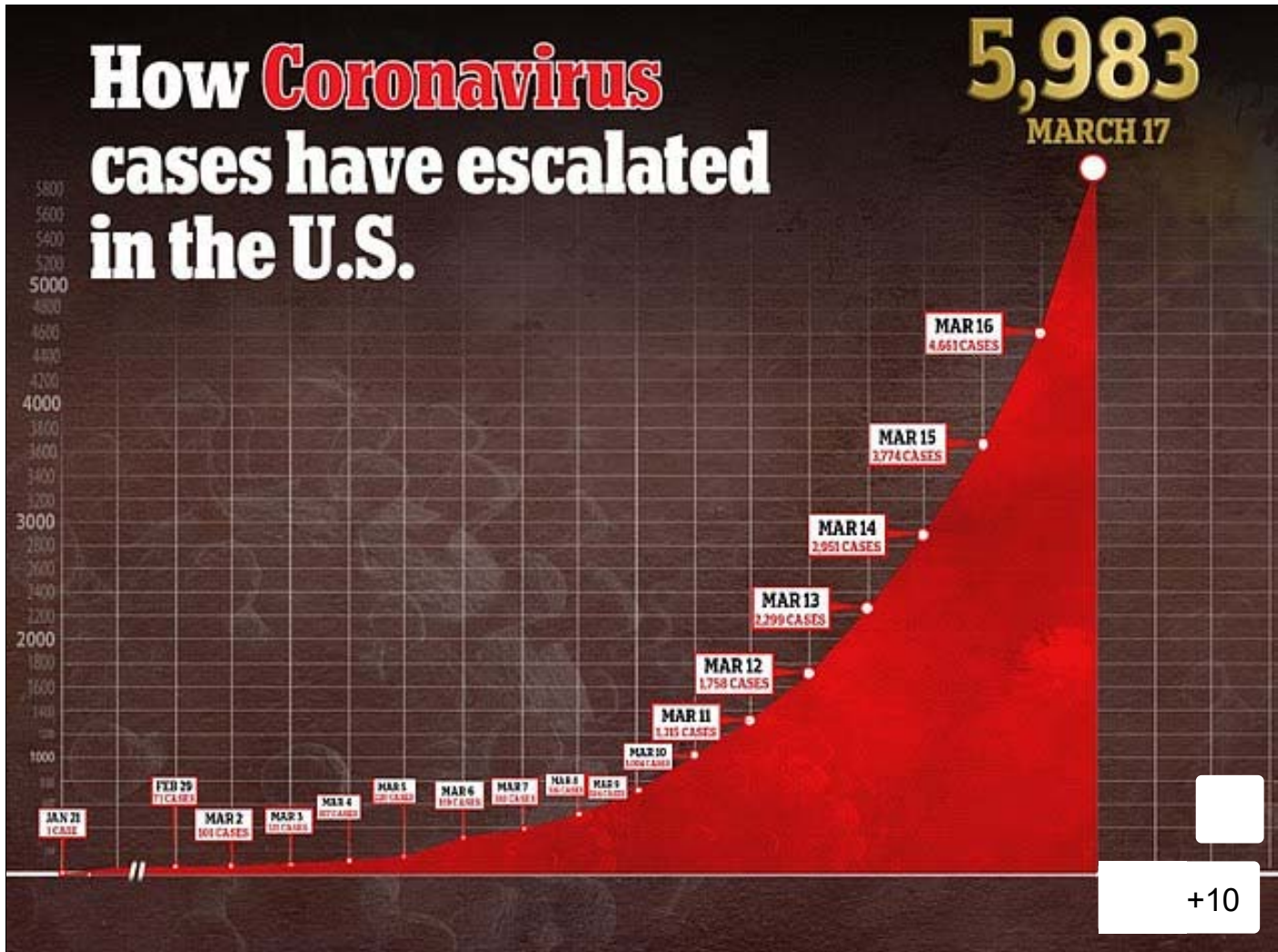
And in Cook County in Illinois, talks are underway to begin the compassionate release of inmates with exceptional health care needs who don't pose a threat or a flight risk.

Sheriff Tom Dart said the first of those early exits was secured on Monday.

'The office has already secured the release of several detainees deemed to be highly vulnerable to COVID-19, including a pregnant detainee and another detainee who was hospitalized for treatment not related to the virus,' the sheriff's office said in a statement.



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This graph shows how the number of coronavirus cases have risen in the U.S. since January

'Additionally, staff are reaching out to other jurisdictions regarding detainees who are in custody due to outstanding warrants on low-level offenses. Sheriff's staff are asking those jurisdictions to either quash those warrants or geographically limit them so that those detainees can be released from Cook County Jail.'

New arrivals in Cook County Jail, which has a population of 5,600, will now be kept in a receiving area to be monitored for symptoms before being placed with the general population and in Illinois state prisons, the 40,000 inmates plus staff will have increased access to hand sanitizer and soap.

In Massachusetts, Essex County Sheriff Kevin Coppinger's office revealed that 30 men who had been in community sober homes are now at the jail's pre-release center so that they could be monitored for illness.

Sheriff Coppinger said that it was so treatment could be provided on site if the men became ill.

CA Governor announces closure of all bars in the state



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And in Houston, Texas, the Harris County Juvenile Court announced that the court wing will be fully closed to all until further notice.

A person who had been at the court tested positive for the coronavirus, as did an employee at a correctional facility in Pennsylvania, where 34 inmates and staffers are now in quarantine.

In Brooklyn, District Attorney Eric Gonzalez said Tuesday that low-level offenses that don't jeopardize public safety will not be prosecuted amid the outbreak in an attempt to reduce the potential exposure of employees and visitors to the virus during the arrest, processing and detention process.

'During this public health emergency, it is imperative that we also protect those who might be exposed to the coronavirus during the procedures of arrest, processing and detention in Central Booking,' he said in a statement posted to Twitter, adding that they will 'immediately decline to prosecute low-level offenses that don't jeopardize public safety'.

Also in New York on Tuesday, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that if people have 'flu-like symptoms' when being arrested, they 'will not be taken to a precinct or to central booking' but there will 'specific methodology' used for their booking.

This will include the use of video conference systems to limit contact between those people and first responders.

The preventative actions come after evidence from previous outbreaks, such as an outbreak of mumps in Texas and New Jersey jails in 2019, highlighted the risk to the country's prison population.

Prisoners have limited access to basic hygiene measures and high rates of existing health issues. Those being held in handcuffs also can't cough into their elbow as advised and alcohol-based sanitizer is considered contraband in many US prisons.

U.S. prisoners have a higher than average rate of HIV and are more likely to be smokers than the general population.

And they are an aging population.

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Statement from Brooklyn DA Eric Gonzalez regarding the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

In the coming weeks, my Office will continue to provide essential services necessary to keep Brooklyn safe while adopting social distancing practices to keep our employees and visitors safe and to slow the spread of COVID-19.

During this public health emergency, it is imperative that we also protect those who might be exposed to the Coronavirus during the procedures of arrest, processing and detention in Central Booking.

Therefore, in the interests of public health and safety, and in appropriate exercise of prosecutorial discretion, we will immediately decline to prosecute low-level offenses that don't jeopardize public safety.

In addition, I am asking our defenders to alert us to clients in pre-trial detention who are vulnerable to infection and who we should consider releasing during this crisis.

**Eric Gonzalez
Brooklyn District Attorney**



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District Attorney Eric Gonzalez said Tuesday that low-level offenses that don't jeopardize public safety will not be prosecuted amid the outbreak to reduce potential exposure

From 1990 to 2012, the US prison population aged 55 and older increased by 550%.

Inmates have no way to social distance or self-isolate if there was an outbreak in a prison.

'You can't keep a 2- to 3-foot distance from inmates, and they can't keep that distance themselves,' Ray Coleman Jr., a teacher at the federal prison in Tallahassee, Florida, told [CNN](#).

Some experts have advised that the only way to fight against a prison coronavirus outbreak is to reduce the number of imprisoned people.

This method was used in Iran, the country with the third worst outbreak, with 70,000 prisoners temporarily released after China reported three provinces with more than 500 cases in prisons during the height of their outbreak.

'In the best of scenarios, we would only hope to delay this,' Josiah Rich, a Brown University epidemiologist and director of the Center for Prisoner Health and Human Rights, told [The Guardian](#).

'And because we have so many ill people behind bars, it's going to get there, it's going to spread like wildfire.'

The United States accounts for 22 percent of the world's prison population with around 2.3 million people incarcerated.

Read more:

[Prisons and coronavirus: Many are banning visits to protect inmates - CNN](#)

[Calls mount to free low-risk US inmates to curb coronavirus impact on prisons | US news | The Guardian](#)

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