

A black and white photograph of an ICE detention facility. In the foreground, there are multiple layers of barbed wire fencing. Behind the fences, a tall, modern, light-colored building is visible. To the left of the building, two flagpoles stand; the one in front has an American flag, and the one behind it has a flag with the ICE logo. In the background, a large, arid hill rises under a clear sky.

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A Worsening Crisis:

**Failed Response To COVID-19
In ICE Detention**

Executive Summary

The United States is now more than six months into a devastating pandemic that has taken the lives of nearly 200,000 Americans. Among the hardest hit in this pandemic have been immigrant men, women and children housed in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention centers.

This report from Accountable.US seeks to shine a light on the pandemic as experienced in ICE detention facilities, bringing together research on the failures of ICE and its private detention center operators to put in place measures to slow the spread of COVID and protect the men, women and children in its care, as well as their employees.

Despite the warnings of experts, ICE leadership and private detention center operators failed to act early to mitigate risk and contain outbreaks of COVID-19 in their facilities by implementing the measures we know work like consistent physical distancing, masks and testing. So far this year, [more than 5,600 detainees](#) and more than 1,000 ICE and contract employees have been diagnosed with COVID in ICE facilities. This is most likely an undercount as ICE has failed to update its employee statistics [for the last three months](#) and they [refuse to require](#) their private contractors to publicize that information – even though nearly every ICE detention facility is run by contractors.

Detention center leadership has steadfastly ignored the pleas of detainees and their loved ones in addition to their own staff who have repeatedly [raised the alarm on the threat of COVID](#) in detention facilities. At one facility in Louisiana, two guards were initially [prohibited from wearing masks by their employer](#), private contractor LaSalle Corrections – both were later diagnosed with and died of COVID. Meanwhile, ICE and its contractors continue to exacerbate an already

dangerous situation by transferring detainees across facilities, spreading outbreak after outbreak as they go. An infectious disease expert [confirmed that the practice was reckless](#), stating, “you’re basically spreading the problems.” And even as COVID exploded throughout their facilities, contractors like CoreCivic and GEO boasted about their ability to [navigate the pandemic better than the government](#).

COVID cases have been reported in nearly 100 ICE detention facilities across the country, including:

- **Otay Mesa Detention Center**, in San Diego, which is run by CoreCivic and was the first to report a COVID-related death in ICE custody. A month before the death, Otay Mesa’s warden [prohibited a staff member from wearing a mask or gloves](#), saying “we don’t want to scare the inmates and detainees.”

- In **Mesa Verde**, in California, half of all detainees tested positive for COVID and a judge was forced to order mass testing for detainees and staff after emails showed ICE and its contractors deliberately limited testing. The judge [found](#) “there’s no question that this outbreak could have been avoided.”

- At CoreCivic’s **Eloy** facility in Arizona, 250 detainees were diagnosed with COVID as more than half of the detention center’s employees fell ill and a senior officer died. At least one staffer quit, [telling CoreCivic](#) the lack of PPE and other mitigation efforts led to an unsafe environment.

- In Virginia, **ICA-Farmville** confirmed 97% of its detainees positive for COVID [after it allowed dozens of detainee transfers into its facility](#) in June. In early July, an elderly Farmville detainee died of COVID while waiting for his deportation flight. And in early September, we learned the transfers took place [because the Department of Homeland Security needed an excuse to use charter flights to move personnel](#) to respond to protest activity in Washington, DC.

- Despite a judge's [order to release children in June](#), children and their families remain in ICE family detention centers, including at Karnes County Family Residential Center in Texas where 79 detainees have already tested positive for COVID.

The spread of COVID throughout the ICE detention system has been an unmitigated disaster and the need for relief is dire. Private contractors have been [used for decades](#) to ostensibly cut costs while outsourcing responsibility for the detention process and this pandemic has brought that failure into even sharper focus. Moving these processes back under real government accountability and reducing the population that are sent to these facilities are long-term, much-needed solutions.

There are also immediate changes that can be made to increase transparency including requiring ICE to update its reporting of staff COVID cases and requiring private detention contractors to publicize their staff data in real time, rather than in one-off responses to a patchwork series of lawsuits across the country. Additionally, ICE should immediately comply with judicial orders to release children and other vulnerable populations from the detention centers ICE and its contractors are so clearly ill-equipped to operate safely.

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COVID-19 In Detention Facilities – By The Numbers

Statistics On Detainees

As Of September 10, 2020, ICE Reported More Than 5600 COVID Cases In Its Custody At 94 ICE Detention Facilities – Detainee Population Nationwide Was 20,302 With 627 Active COVID Cases. [ICE Guidance on COVID-19 – ICE Detainee Statistics, accessed [9/10/20](#)]

NOTE: For active and total COVID cases and fatalities by facility, see appendix.

COVID Detainee Deaths In ICE Custody

As Of September 3, 2020, Six Detainees Have Died Of COVID While In ICE Custody. “He is the first case of a coronavirus death under ICE custody reported in Texas and the sixth in the country.” [Houston Chronicle, [9/3/20](#)]

As Of August 30, 19 Immigrants Had Died In ICE Custody In 2020 – The Most In A Single Fiscal Year Since 2006. “The man is the 19th detainee to die in ICE custody during the 2020 fiscal year, which ends on Sept. 30. The total number of ICE deaths so far this fiscal year is the highest total since 2006, when 19 immigrants died, according to ICE records.” [Buzzfeed, [8/30/20](#)]

Headline: BuzzFeed News: “The Number Of Immigrants Who Have Died In ICE Custody Is The Highest Since 2006.” [Buzzfeed, [8/6/20](#)]

High Death Toll Came Despite Significant Drop In ICE Population – From 55,000 Average To 21,500 From Fall 2019 To August 2020. “The number of deaths in ICE custody so far is also double that of the last fiscal year, despite a significant drop in the immigrant detainee population. Last fall, there were more than 55,000 people in ICE custody per day. As of Aug. 1, that number had dropped to about 21,500 per day.” [Buzzfeed, [8/6/20](#)]

57-Year Old Salvadoran Immigrant Carlos Ernesto Escobar Mejia Was Detained At Otay Mesa And Became First Recorded COVID Death In ICE Custody In Early May 2020. “Hospitalized and on a ventilator for a little over a week, a detainee from Otay Mesa Detention Center on Wednesday became the first in immigration custody nationwide to die from COVID-19. Carlos Ernesto Escobar Mejia died around 2:15 a.m., according to his sister, Maribel Escobar. Her brother, known to her by the nickname “Netio,” would have turned 58 later this month, Escobar said.... Rosa and her brother, the youngest of five siblings, came from El Salvador with their mother in 1980 during the country’s civil war to join Maribel, who was already in the United States. Rosa said she had lived with her brother ever since. Her brother was the only one in the family who hadn’t been able to get a green card. Both sisters are now U.S. citizens.” [San Diego Union-Tribune, [5/6/20](#)]

34-Year Old Guatemalan Immigrant Santiago Baten-Oxlaj, Detained At Stewart Detention Center In Georgia, Was Second Confirmed COVID Death In ICE Custody. “A 34-year-old Guatemalan man who tested positive for COVID-19 died in Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody at a Georgia hospital on Sunday, according to an internal government report obtained by BuzzFeed News. Santiago Baten-Oxlaj, 34, had been in ICE custody at Stewart Detention Center, in Lumpkin, since early March and had been granted a voluntary departure to Guatemala, ICE later confirmed in a press release.” [Buzzfeed News, [5/24/20](#)]

Baten-Oxlaj Was Arrested For DUI, Granted Voluntary Departure To Guatemala Weeks Prior To COVID Diagnosis. “Baten-Oxlaj was arrested on March 2 at a probation office in Marietta, Georgia, “pursuant to his conviction for driving under the influence,” ICE said. On

March 26, an immigration judge granted him voluntary departure. "At the time of his death, Baten was awaiting departure from the United States," ICE added. On April 17, he was admitted to a local hospital for treatment of decreased oxygen saturation levels, hospital officials tested the man for COVID-19 and the result was positive." [Buzzfeed News, [5/24/20](#)]

51-Year Old Mexican Immigrant Onoval Perez-Montufa, Detained In Glades County Detention Center In Florida, Was Third Recorded COVID Death In ICE Custody. "A Mexican immigrant died in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody over the weekend after contracting the coronavirus, according to the agency. This is the third known ICE detainee death linked to the virus. Onoval Perez-Montufa, a 51-year-old immigrant from Mexico, died Sunday afternoon at a south Florida hospital, where he had been hospitalized since July 1. ICE said he was transferred there after he reported having trouble breathing while at the Glades County Detention Center, a facility in Clewiston, Florida, operated by the local sheriff's office and used by ICE to hold immigrants it seeks to deport. Perez-Montufa tested positive for the coronavirus on July 2, according to ICE." [CBS News, [7/13/20](#)]

72-Year Old Canadian Immigrant, James Hill, Detained At ICA-Farmville In Virginia Was Fourth Confirmed COVID Death In ICE Custody. "A 72-year-old Canadian has died in hospital after he was held for nearly three months in a U.S. immigration detention centre that had a major COVID-19 outbreak. James Hill had been in custody at the privately run detention centre in Virginia operated on behalf of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Farmville Detention Center has made headlines because hundreds of detainees have been infected with the novel coronavirus, amid complaints of overcrowding and poor sanitation." [Globe & Mail, [8/6/20](#)]

Hill Fell Sick With COVID Days Before Scheduled Deportation Flight. "Mr. Hill was scheduled to fly to Canada on July 9, but just days before the flight, he had to be hospitalized with COVID-19 symptoms. A former physician in Louisiana, he was waiting to be deported after serving a 12-year sentence for writing Oxycontin prescriptions without seeing patients. . . . The family says Mr. Hill had served his sentence and did not deserve what happened to him. "All these years he was so looking forward to being back, and then through their negligence they let him die," Mr. Hunt said." [Globe & Mail, [8/6/20](#)]

70-Year Old Costa Rican Immigrant Jose Guillen-Vega Was Fifth Recorded COVID Death In ICE Custody And Second At Stewart Detention Center In Georgia. "A diabetic Costa Rican man in federal immigration custody has become the second detainee in Georgia to die from Covid-19 complications after being held at a detention center that has reported more than 150 coronavirus cases. Jose Guillen-Vega, 70, died Monday night at a Columbus hospital, according to a news release from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The preliminary cause of death was "cardiopulmonary arrest, secondary to complications of the coronavirus disease," officials said Wednesday. He had been hospitalized since Aug. 1. . . . Stewart's two coronavirus deaths are the most of any ICE facility in the nation. Three other people have died in federal immigration detention centers after testing positive for Covid-19, according to ICE." [Politico, [8/13/20](#)]

50-Year Old Honduran Immigrant Fernando Sabonger-García, Held At Joe Corley Processing Center In Texas, Was Sixth Recorded COVID Death In ICE Custody. "An immigrant from Honduras has died of COVID-19 while in the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement at a Conroe detention facility, the agency announced this week. Fernando Sabonger-García was pronounced dead at 11 a.m. last Friday at the Conroe Regional Medical Center. He is the first case of a coronavirus death under ICE custody reported in Texas and the sixth in the country." [Houston Chronicle, [9/3/20](#)]

Statistics On ICE Employees

March 19, 2020: First ICE Employee Confirmed COVID Positive. “A member of the medical staff at Elizabeth Detention Center in New Jersey has tested positive for coronavirus, the first case confirmed by Immigration and Customs Enforcement of an employee contracting the virus, ICE confirmed Thursday. The agency said no detainees in ICE custody currently have confirmed cases of COVID-19.” [Marshall Project, [3/19/20](#)]

ICE COVID Reporting Has Not Updated Employee Confirmed Case Count Since June 18, 2020. [ICE Guidance on COVID-19 – Employee Confirmed Cases, accessed [9/7/20](#)]

Facility	Location	Cases
Adelanto ICE Processing Center	Adelanto, CA	1
Alexandria Staging Facility	Alexandria, LA	15
Aurora Contract Detention Facility	Aurora, CO	2
Bergen County Jail	Hackensack, NJ	1
Butler County Jail	Hamilton, OH	1
El Paso Processing Center	El Paso, TX	1
Elizabeth Contract Detention Facility	Elizabeth, NJ	2
Eloy Detention Center	Eloy, AZ	1
Essex County Correctional Facility	Newark, NJ	1
Florence Correctional Center	Florence, AZ	1
Houston Contract Detention Facility	Houston, TX	2
Hudson County Jail	Kearny, NJ	1
La Salle ICE Processing Center	Jena, AL	2
Otay Mesa Detention Center	San Diego, CA	11
Stewart Detention Center	Lumpkin, GA	2
T. Don Hutto Residential Center	Taylor, TX	1
Not assigned to detention facilities	n/a	153
TOTAL		198

[ICE Guidance on COVID-19 – Employee Confirmed Cases, accessed [9/7/20](#)]

Private Detention Operators Lack Transparency – And Feds Don’t Require Them To Report

ICE Asserted It Had No Duty To Report COVID Cases Among Contract Staff That Operate Its Detention Facilities. “... ICE officials confirmed to the Observer they are not reporting cases of contractors who work in Texas immigration facilities who have tested positive for COVID-19 because they are employed by a third party. This means the list of infected employees who are potentially interacting with detained persons and facility staff is incomplete. ...None of these cases have been reported by ICE on its official list of COVID-19 positive detainees and employees, which lists only 25 infected detention center employees nationally. Instead, the agency says that information about infections of contractors must come from the contracting company. “The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Coronavirus website maintains information on individuals in our detention centers and ICE employees that have tested positive for COVID-19,” ICE said in a statement. “Contractor information is maintained with each contract organization.”” [Texas Observer, [4/16/20](#)]

ICE: “That Isn’t Something We Have To Provide.” ““That isn’t something we have to provide,” the agency said, later noting that ICE’s role isn’t to publish or discuss information about a third party.” [Miami Herald, [4/22/20](#)]

217 Of ICE’s 225 Detention Centers Nationwide Are Operated By Private Contractors.

“The order came after a Miami Herald story reported that the agency did not consider its third-party contractors ICE “staff,” and that the agency said it had no obligation to include them on its website detailing how many employees at its detention centers nationwide had contracted the virus. The Herald also reported that the agency got around having to disclose that a Miami detainee was sick with COVID-19 because the detainee was technically no longer at the detention center, but rather at a hospital. All three detention centers in South Florida — as well as 214 out of its other 222 centers nationwide — are operated by third-party contractors.” [Miami Herald, [4/22/20](#)]

As Of July 13, Private Contractors GEO, CoreCivic, MTC and LaSalle Testified To Congress That 938 Employees Had Tested Positive For COVID. “Of the 554 staff who tested positive, 352 employees have recovered, Hininger said. In addition, 167 immigration detention staff employed by the GEO Group have tested positive out of 3,700 employees, George C. Zoley, chairperson and CEO, told lawmakers. Another 144 immigration detention staff out of 3,000 staff employed by LaSalle Corrections and 73 of 1,200 workers employed by Management and Training Corporation have tested positive for COVID-19, said Rodney Cooper, the president and CEO at LaSalle, and Scott Marquardt, the president and CEO at MTC. The total number of detention staff who have tested positive for COVID-19 is 938, according to data revealed on Monday by the CEOs.” [Arizona Republic, [7/13/20](#)]

Headline: “Nearly 1,000 U.S. immigration detention center employees test positive for coronavirus.” [Reuters, [7/13/20](#)]

July 13 Congressional Hearing Was The First Time Private Detention Employee Infection Numbers Were Reported In Total. “It was the first time the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases involving private immigration detention contractors was publicly revealed.” [Arizona Republic, [7/13/20](#)]

At Mesa Verde Detention Center, ICE Intentionally Did Not Test Staff For Months To Avoid Impeding Immigration Enforcement Actions. “Chhabria’s order also directed that the approximately 140 staff members at Mesa Verde be tested immediately, beginning with their next shift, and weekly thereafter. Documents filed in the case showed that ICE intentionally did not test staff for months to avoid impeding immigration enforcement, McLean said.” [Los Angeles Times, [8/16/20](#)]

14 Staff Members At Mesa Verde Sought COVID Testing On Their Own And Were Positive. “But in mid-June, lawyers for ICE and GEO reported to the court that a staff member who obtained a test outside of work was positive for the virus, the first of 14 who would eventually report positive tests taken on their own, MacLean said.” [Los Angeles Times, [8/16/20](#)]

Headline: NBC News: “Nearly half the employees at an Arizona ICE detention center have tested positive for COVID-19.” [NBC News, [7/8/20](#)]

Headline: Tucson Sentinel: “103 coronavirus cases reported among Arizona immigration detention center’s employees.” [Tucson Sentinel, [6/22/20](#)]

Headline: Texas Observer: “At Least Seven Texas Detention Center Employees Who Tested Positive for COVID-19 Were Not Officially Reported by ICE.” [Texas Observer, [4/16/20](#)]

Federal Judge In Florida Ordered Private Detention Operators To Report COVID Cases Among Contract Staff Following Outbreaks At South Florida Facilities. “However, U.S. Attorney General Magistrate Judge Jonathan Goodman said the information must be released by Friday for the three detention centers in South Florida. “To the contrary, it is designed to encompass anyone and everyone who works at the three facilities — including, by way of example, employees of third party contractors who provide services and personnel to the detention centers,” he said.” [Newsweek, [4/15/20](#)]

Judge: “For Purposes Of Gauging The Health Risk To Detainees, It Matters Little Whether A COVID-19-Infected Guard Or Officer Receives A Paycheck From The United States Or From Akima (Or Some Other Company).” “The purpose of the declarations is to provide the Court with information, and the information should be comprehensive and not limited by technicalities, such as whether a guard or officer is a government employee or an employee of a third-party contractor or contracting vendor,” Goodman said in The Herald. “For purposes of gauging the health risk to detainees, it matters little whether a COVID-19-infected guard or officer receives a paycheck from the United States or from Akima (or some other company).” [Newsweek, [4/15/20](#)]

A Failure To Mitigate & Cruel Indifference To Suffering

Detainees And Their Loved Ones, Detention Center Workers Have Raised The Alarm On Facility Conditions

Headline: NBC News: “‘I’m afraid to take COVID home,’ a guard at an ICE detention facility says.” [NBC News, [5/20/20](#)]

Headline: NBC News: “‘Like sitting ducks’: Amid coronavirus, families, attorneys sound alarm over ICE detainees.” [NBC News, [3/29/20](#)]

Detainees In More Than A Dozen Facilities Announced Protests And Strikes In Response To COVID Outbreak. “In response to the pandemic, immigrants in at least a dozen ICE facilities have announced protests and strikes. Irwin was about to join them. “Our lives have a lot of value, as mothers, fathers, children, grandparents, spouses, siblings,” Barahona read from the letter in Spanish. “We are humans, and we have the right to live.” He began to cry. He has diabetes and hypertension, and knows he is at risk. “They want to be certain that they are not alone,” he said. “Nobody wants to be fighting by themselves.”” [New York Times, [6/4/20](#)]

More Than 4000 Physicians Signed Letter Urging ICE To Release Detainees “To Avoid Preventable Deaths.” “But that number is still too high, according to the more than 4,000 physicians who sent a letter to ICE demanding the release of even more people “to avoid preventable deaths.” As of May 11, ICE reported that of the almost 1,700 detainees who had been tested, roughly half had received positive results for the virus.” [New York Times, [5/15/20](#)]

Texas Detainee’s Wife Spent Months Calling Detention Center Leadership, CDC To Try To Help Detention Center Residents As Her Husband And 131 Others Were Infected – “I’m Fighting A Losing Battle.” “Mejia said he was finally tested for COVID-19 in mid-May. He came back positive, along with 131 other men at Bluebonnet, roughly a quarter of those held there. The rural West Texas facility now has the second-largest outbreak of any ICE facility in the country, ICE data shows. ... Mejia’s wife, Betsy, said she’s tried for months to get help for the men at Bluebonnet.

She posted on Facebook. She called the warden in Anson and the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. From their home in Kilgore, Texas — more than 300 miles from Bluebonnet — she's not sure what more she can do. "I'm fighting a losing battle," she said." [NBC News, [5/31/20](#)]

Doctor At GEO Facility Told Detainees Not To Watch The News And That COVID Was A Simple Flu. "Kerlys: I asked what their plan for avoiding mass contagion was. She ignored me and started answering another question. I raised my hand and said, "Answer my question, please." The doctor said to calm down, that we shouldn't be watching the news because it was pure paranoia. That it was a simple flu. "I have two young daughters at home," she said. "I wouldn't be here if it were that serious."

Mailenys: She told us not to worry, that only old people get the coronavirus.

Kerlys: I read. Being in detention doesn't mean we're ignorant.

Jennifer: Another woman asked about people who are asymptomatic. She went to someone else. We said, "No. Answer the question." A lot of women started saying, "You're not a doctor, you're a psychologist." [Mother Jones, [4/22/20](#)]

Headline: Mother Jones: "The Women Asked ICE for Soap. They Got Pepper-Sprayed Instead." [Mother Jones, [4/22/20](#)]

Detainee In New Jersey Provided One Bar Of Soap For Handwashing And Showering Per Week, Told By Guards – "Well, You're Going To Have To Die Of Something." "In the recording, Umaña explained that the facility has provided hand sanitizer for guards but not for detainees. Umaña said detainees receive a single bar of soap for a week, both for showering and washing hands; if they want more, they must buy it from the prison commissary for \$1.70. According to Umaña, guards have responded to detainees' demands with dismissal and rage. "They don't do anything," he said in Spanish on the recording. "They only yell at us and tell us that if we complain — that 'unless we see you get really sick, or you really have a high fever, we can't do anything with you.' So we say, 'If we have a bad fever, and lots of us are sick, we can die here,' and they say, 'Well, you're going to have to die of something.'" [ProPublica, [3/23/20](#)]

Failure To Provide Basic Mitigation Tools Like Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Detainee At CoreCivic's Eloy Detention Facility In Arizona Reported Detention Staff Did Not Regularly Use Masks, Gloves. "According to a filing in Arizona federal court that has not previously been made public, detainee Yarjelis Madueno Davila told her attorney in May: "The Correctional Officers don't regularly use masks and gloves. Even if they do have masks on, the Correctional Officers sometimes take them off to speak.'" [NBC News, [7/8/20](#)]

ICE Officer Told Eloy Detainee Who Voiced Concerns About COVID In The Facility That CoreCivic, Not ICE, Was Responsible For Detainees' Safety. "Private prison operators and their federal clients tend to play a game of passing the buck, with people inside as with the media. A woman held at Eloy wrote that when she tried to complain to a visiting ICE officer, the official said, "Well good luck, because we ICE officers are in charge only of your cases, and CoreCivic is in charge of your safety.'" [The Intercept, [7/27/20](#)]

CoreCivic's Otay Mesa Warden Prohibited Staff From Wearing Mask Or Gloves "Because We Don't Want To Scare The Employees And...Inmates And Detainees." "Gregory Arnold walked into the warden's office April 1 as the novel coronavirus ripped through one of the largest immigration detention centers in the United States. Waiting with about 40 guards to begin his shift, he heard a captain say face masks were prohibited. Incredulous, he and a guard who recently gave birth wanted to hear it from the boss. Arnold told Warden Christopher LaRose that he was 60 years old and lived with an asthmatic son. "Well, you can't wear the mask because we don't want to scare

the employees and we don't want to scare the inmates and detainees," Arnold recalls the warden saying. "With all due respect, sir, that's ridiculous." Arnold retorted. He said he wanted to wear a mask and gloves, and "everyone else should be doing the same." But the warden was unmoved." [Associated Press, [7/19/20](#)]

Two Guards At Richwood Correctional Center In Louisiana Died Of COVID – Both Were Initially Prohibited From Wearing Masks By Their Employer, LaSalle Corrections. "Two guards at an immigration detention center in Louisiana have died after contracting the coronavirus, raising new questions about whether the U.S. government is adequately protecting 30,000 immigrants in custody and the staff guarding them. Relatives of both Carl Lenard, 62, and Stanton Johnson, 51, said the Richwood Correctional Center in Monroe, Louisiana, had at one point prevented them from wearing masks as the virus spread through the facility." [Associated Press, [4/29/20](#)]

LaSalle Corrections Only Allowed Staff To Start Wearing Masks And Other PPE On April 8, Two Days After A Reporter Asked About PPE Policy. "Another Richwood employee who also spoke on condition of anonymity said in early April that guards were being told not to wear their own masks or gloves to avoid spreading panic among detainees, as many have pleaded for their release to avoid contracting the virus and more than 20 lawsuits have been filed against ICE. Two days after the AP asked LaSalle Corrections about its personal protective equipment policy, the jail staff was told on April 8 they could start to wear masks and other equipment, according to the Richwood employee. LaSalle executive Scott Sutterfield told the AP that protective equipment "is provided as necessary and employees can bring and wear masks." [Associated Press, [4/29/20](#)]

ICE Continues To Transfer Detainees Across Facilities, Spreading Outbreak

Headline: NBC News: "ICE keeps transferring detainees around the country, leading to COVID-19 outbreaks." [NBC News, [5/31/20](#)]

Headline: Reuters: "U.S. immigration officials spread coronavirus with detainee transfers." [Reuters, [7/17/20](#)]

Reuters Investigation Found At Least 195 Transfers Involving Detainees Moved From Centers With COVID To Those Without Or Vice Versa. "The analysis of immigration court data identified 268 transfers of detainees between detention centers in April, May and June, after hundreds in ICE custody had already tested positive for COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. Half of the transfers Reuters identified involved detainees who were either moved from centers with COVID-19 cases to centers with no known cases, or from centers with no cases to those where the virus had spread. ... The Reuters review of immigration court records identified 195 transfers to or from detention centers where ICE had reported confirmed cases." [Reuters, [7/17/20](#)]

Infectious Disease Expert: It Is Not Possible To Transfer Detainees Safely In Current Environment. "Carlos Franco-Paredes, an infectious disease doctor studying COVID-19 outbreaks in correctional settings, said it is not possible to transfer detainees safely in the current environment. "If you're moving people, particularly from an area where there is an ongoing outbreak, even though you sequester them for two weeks or so, there is contact with people," said Franco-Paredes. "You're basically spreading the problems." [Reuters, [7/17/20](#)]

Farmville Facility Initially Reported 2 COVID Cases – After 74 Detainees Were Transferred In, Farmville Reported Worst Outbreak In ICE Detention System With 315 Cases One Month Later. "At least one transfer resulted in a super-spreading event, according to emails from ICE and officials at a detention center in Farmville, Virginia, court documents and interviews with more than a dozen detainees at the facility. Until that transfer, only two detainees had tested positive at the

Farmville center — both immigrants transferred there in late April. They were immediately isolated and monitored and were the only known cases at the facility for more than a month, court records state. Then on June 2, ICE relocated 74 detainees from Florida and Arizona, more than half of whom later tested positive for COVID-19. By July 16, Farmville was the detention center hardest-hit by the virus with 315 total cases, according to ICE data.” [Reuters, [7/17/20](#)]

Headline: ProPublica: “In a 10-Day Span, ICE Flew This Detainee Across the Country — Nine Times.” [ProPublica, [3/27/20](#)]

Headline: Dallas Morning News: “Virus began spreading in Texas detention center as positive immigrants were quickly transferred in from Northeast.” [Dallas Morning News, [4/27/20](#)]

Headline: Denver Westword: “Detainee Transfers Lead to COVID-19 Increase at Aurora ICE Facility.” [Denver Westword, [9/4/20](#)]

ICE Confirmed Nationwide Transfers Were Responsible For Increase In COVID Cases At Aurora Detention Center In Colorado. “A recent uptick in COVID-19 cases at an immigrant detention facility in Aurora was caused by nationwide transfers, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokesperson confirms. From August 20 to August 30, the number of COVID-19 cases at the Aurora Contract Detention Facility, which is run by private prison company GEO Group, jumped from 24 to 34, the biggest rise in such a short period of time for the center.” [Denver Westword, [9/4/20](#)]

At Detention Facility Where Two Guards Died, Detainees Were Transferred In From Other States And Suspected Of Having COVID. “In the meantime, detainees were being brought in from other facilities in Texas and Louisiana to Richwood, the employee said. Some of them were suspected of having the coronavirus.” [Associated Press, [4/29/20](#)]

LaSalle Guard Was Instructed To “Freeze Them Out” – Blast Detainees With A/C – To Artificially Lower Temperatures As High As 103 Degrees To Continue Transfer And Deportation Process. “In May, Officer Smith was at the airport in Alexandria, Louisiana, with a group of immigration detainees on the verge of being deported. But there was a problem. Smith—who asked to be identified by a pseudonym out of fear of retaliation for speaking out—said that the detainees’ temperatures reached as high as 103 degrees. If detainees had temperatures above 99 degrees, they couldn’t be deported under Immigration and Customs Enforcement policy. So Smith was instructed to blast the air conditioner to “freeze them out” so they could pass temperature checks and get on the plane. Smith is a whistleblower at the Richwood Correctional Center, a COVID-ravaged immigration detention center in northern Louisiana, speaking out with legal representation from the Government Accountability Project, a watchdog organization that protects corporate and government whistleblowers.” [Mother Jones, [7/21/20](#)]

LaSalle Guard Was Instructed To Transfer COVID-Positive Detainee From One Facility To Another Without Informing Anyone Of His Test Results. “In April, Officer Smith needed to find a colleague to help transport an immigration detainee from Richwood. But Smith had been told by a superior not to inform anyone that the detainee had tested positive for COVID-19. So Smith used coded language to convey the danger to colleagues. They got the message and refused the assignment. Eventually, a supervisor recruited a colleague to help take the infected detainee to another LaSalle facility. When they arrived, the man was so sick he could barely sit up. Smith said there were no protocols in place for how to transport someone with COVID-19.” [Mother Jones, [7/21/20](#)]

August 2020: ICE Confirmed Transfers Were Still Happening Between Facilities. “In the letter, detainees said they worry contagion will continue because new detainees are still arriving. They said

some come from other detention facilities like Eloy, others are newly detained, and none of the new arrivals are being tested for COVID-19. "COVID-19 continues because they continue to bring in more detainees from the outside, who have been living in the US," the letter said. "They mix them in with the rest of us as though nothing would go wrong." In an email, ICE spokesperson Yasmeen Pitts O'Keefe said the agency follows federal health guidelines for COVID-19 testing and health care for those detained. She said transfers occur to keep detention center populations low for social distancing. "All detainee transfers and transfer determinations are based on a thorough and systematic review of the most current information available," Pitts O'Keefe said." [Arizona Public Media, [8/20/20](#)]

Private Detention Centers Oversold Their Ability To Respond To Crisis

May 2020: CoreCivic Claimed They Were Better Positioned Than Government Facilities To Comply With Social Distancing Guidance As A Result Of Extra Capacity

Within Its Facilities. "Social distancing, according to the CDC, is a critical step everyone should take in order to reduce the spread of the virus. When a facility is operating above its design capacity, there is less available square feet per resident, in some cases, making social distancing in accordance with the CDC guidance impossible. Our facility designs are generally more modern and allow for easier separation and social distancing plans. And as the outbreak of the virus has impacted various public correctional systems, our bed capacity has become an important part of our government partners' ability to adhere to the CDC guidelines regarding distancing and separation of COVID-19 positive individuals. Examples of this are with both the states of Kansas and Nevada who have extended agreements with us to allow for lower density within their systems by utilizing capacity within our Saguaro facility in Arizona. What is yet to be determined is if these measures to reduce density and capacity levels will be implemented on a more permanent basis across our nation's correctional systems. But as always, we believe our capacity serves an important role in reducing overcrowding among our government partners." [CoreCivic Q1 2020 earnings call, [5/7/20](#)]

August 2020: CoreCivic Boasted It Had "Successfully Navigated" Staff Shortages Caused By COVID Outbreaks. "However, positive test for employees can present operational challenges from a staffing perspective. We have successfully navigated these challenges by utilizing available staff from other nearby facilities without positive cases, when necessary." [CoreCivic Q2 earnings call, [8/5/20](#)]

April 2020: GEO Group CEO: "We Have Taken Comprehensive Steps To Address And Mitigate The Risk Of COVID-19 Across All Of Our Facilities." "As you've heard today, we have taken comprehensive steps to address and mitigate the risk of COVID-19 across all of our facilities and programs. Ensuring the health and safety of all of those in our care and our employees has always been our number one priority. We are committed to working closely with our government agency partners and local health officials across the country as well as continue to fight the spread of COVID-19." [GEO Group Q1 earnings call, [4/30/20](#)]

April 2020: GEO Group Claimed All Facilities "Operate Safely" With Regular Access To Soap And Sanitation Products And 24/7 Healthcare. "All of our facilities operate safely and without overcrowded conditions. All of our facilities have access to regular handwashing with clean water and soap, as well as ample hygiene and sanitation products. All of our GEO Secure facilities provide 24/7 access to healthcare." [GEO Group Q1 earnings call, [4/30/20](#)]

August 2020: GEO Group Claimed Focus On PPE And Testing Allowed Them To Mitigate The Risk Of COVID In Their Facilities. "While most of our facilities have experienced some cases of COVID-19, we believe the steps we have taken and our focus on personal protective equipment and testing has allowed us to mitigate the risks of COVID-19." [GEO Group Q2 earnings call, [8/6/20](#)]

Case Studies

Otay Mesa – San Diego, CA – Operated by CoreCivic

Need To Know

	Total Positive	Deaths Reported
Detainees	168	1
ICE Employees	11*	0
Private Employees	30+	0

NOTE: ICE has not updated employee reporting since June 18, 2020.
[ICE Guidance on COVID-19, accessed [9/10/20](#); Associated Press, [7/19/20](#)]

Background

57-Year Old Salvadoran Immigrant Carlos Ernesto Escobar Mejia Was Detained At Otay Mesa And Became First Recorded COVID Death In ICE Custody In Early May 2020. “Hospitalized and on a ventilator for a little over a week, a detainee from Otay Mesa Detention Center on Wednesday became the first in immigration custody nationwide to die from COVID-19. Carlos Ernesto Escobar Mejia died around 2:15 a.m., according to his sister, Maribel Escobar. Her brother, known to her by the nickname “Netio,” would have turned 58 later this month, Escobar said.... Rosa and her brother, the youngest of five siblings, came from El Salvador with their mother in 1980 during the country’s civil war to join Maribel, who was already in the United States. Rosa said she had lived with her brother ever since. Her brother was the only one in the family who hadn’t been able to get a green card. Both sisters are now U.S. citizens.” [San Diego Union-Tribune, [5/6/20](#)]

CoreCivic Required Detainees At Otay Mesa To Sign Contracts Written In English That Limited The Company’s Liability Before They Were Given Protective Masks. “The new surgical masks arrived Friday, but they initially came with conditions, according to Salazar. Salazar’s account of what happened when the masks arrived is corroborated by a signed declaration from San Diego attorney Anna Hysell, whose client called her immediately after it happened, as well as messages from other attorneys who heard similar stories from their clients. Before the masks were to be distributed, the unit manager handed the women contracts written in English, telling them they would have to sign in order to get masks....The document, as read over the phone to the Union-Tribune, included a section saying that detainees agree to “hold harmless” CoreCivic and its agents and employees ‘from any and all claims that I may have related directly to my wearing the face mask.’” [San Diego Union-Tribune, [4/10/20](#)]

Headline: San Diego Union-Tribune: “Detainees at Otay Mesa Detention Center were offered masks, but only if they signed contracts.” [San Diego Union-Tribune, [4/10/20](#)]

Early April: Otay Mesa Warden Prohibited Staff From Wearing Mask Or Gloves “Because We Don’t Want To Scare The Employees And...Inmates And Detainees.” “Gregory Arnold walked into the warden’s office April 1 as the novel coronavirus ripped through one of the largest immigration detention centers in the United States. Waiting with about 40 guards to begin his shift, he heard a captain say face masks were prohibited. Incredulous, he and a guard who recently gave birth wanted to hear it from the boss. Arnold told Warden Christopher LaRose that he was 60 years old and lived with an asthmatic son. “Well, you can’t wear the mask because we don’t want to scare the employees and we don’t want to scare the inmates and detainees,” Arnold recalls the warden saying. “With all due respect, sir, that’s ridiculous.” Arnold retorted. He said he wanted to wear a mask and gloves, and “everyone else should be doing the same.” But the warden was unmoved.” [Associated Press, [7/19/20](#)]

By Mid-April, Otay Mesa Had The Largest Outbreak At An ICE Facility Nationwide.
[KPBS, [4/14/20](#)]

CoreCivic Guard Named 2019 Employee Of The Year For Otay Mesa Quit Her Job Because Leadership Refused To Implement Safety And Mitigation Measures. “Margarita Smith, a guard who was named CoreCivic’s Otay Mesa employee of the year in 2019, said managers frequently discouraged workers from wearing masks. ... On March 17, the day that San Diego limited public gatherings to 50 people and closed restaurants, colleagues gathered to grill the warden. Smith recalls wondering why so many people -- including about half the lieutenants -- were allowed to gather so closely together in one room....Gloves were hard to find, Smith said. Arnold said the ones he saw were too small for his hands. Hand sanitizer dispensers were often empty. Feeling the warden wasn’t taking the virus seriously, Smith felt she had no choice. At 48, she missed a week of work in early March with pneumonia, has asthma and had been sick off and on since November. She quit. “I thought to myself I’m not going to get sick again,” she said. “I just had a feeling that things weren’t going to go good.” [Associated Press, [7/19/20](#)]

CoreCivic, Acting On ICE Instructions, Blocked Detainees At Otay Mesa From Speaking To Advocacy Group Representatives That Provided Assistance For Food And Phone Calls, Access To Reporters. “Detainees inside Otay Mesa Detention Center can no longer call a group of activists that helps them with money for food and phone calls and listens to their concerns about conditions inside. CoreCivic, the private prison company that runs the facility, recently blocked calls to phone numbers belonging to Otay Mesa Detention Resistance, an organization that was instrumental in helping detainees share their experiences with journalists and others as the biggest COVID-19 outbreak among immigration detainees nationwide spread at the facility. CoreCivic confirmed via email that it told the company that operates the phone lines to block the numbers. ‘We took this action at the direction of our government partner,’ said Amanda Gilchrist, spokeswoman for CoreCivic, referring to Immigration and Customs Enforcement. She directed further inquiry to ICE.” [San Diego Union-Tribune, [6/15/20](#)]

Headline: Los Angeles Times: “COVID-19 concerns prompt hunger strikes and protests inside Otay Mesa Detention Center.” [LA Times, [4/17/20](#)]

Mesa Verde – Bakersfield, CA – Operated by GEO Group

Need To Know

	Total Positive	Deaths Reported
Detainees	59	0
ICE Employees	0*	0
Private Employees	15+	0

NOTE: ICE has not updated employee reporting since June 18, 2020.

[ICE Guidance on COVID-19, accessed [9/10/20](#); Palm Springs Desert Sun, [8/16/20](#)]

Background

Headline: Bakersfield Californian: “Coronavirus outbreak reported at Mesa Verde immigrant detention center.” [Bakersfield Californian, [8/5/20](#)]

Headline: KQED: “Half of All Detainees at Bakersfield ICE Facility Have Tested Positive For COVID-19.” [KQED, [8/18/20](#)]

Headline: Los Angeles Times: “ICE deliberately limited testing at Bakersfield immigration facility with COVID-19 outbreak.” [LA Times, [8/6/20](#)]

Headline: Palm Springs Desert Sun: “Judge orders COVID-19 tests for all detainees at Bakersfield ICE facility; half already positive.” [Palm Springs Desert Sun, [8/16/20](#)]

Emails Show Mesa Verde Leadership Refused To Conduct Mass Testing At Facility, Admitting It Would Be Too Difficult To Adequately Isolate Positive Cases “Due To The Housing Restrictions We Face.” “Last month, as the coronavirus spread through federal immigration detention centers around the country, officials at the Mesa Verde facility in Bakersfield rejected a suggestion to test all detainees there because it would be difficult to quarantine those who tested positive, the officials said. In an email on July 6, Janese Mull, the acting field office director for Immigration and Customs Enforcement in San Francisco, said lawyers for ICE had advised that it was in the facility’s best interest to look into conducting COVID-19 testing for all detainees. But Brooke Sanchez Othon, a clinical operations specialist at Wellpath, a private Nashville-based healthcare company that provides services to ICE detention facilities, pushed back against Mull’s direction. The proposal to test all detainees, Sanchez Othon wrote, already had been denied “due to the housing restrictions we face.” “Testing all detainees will potentially cause the same housing issue we had last week but on a larger scale,” Sanchez Othon continued, referring to the problem of quarantining infected detainees. “Completing the testing is not the issue it is just what we will need to do with the results once they are received.” [LA Times, [8/6/20](#)]

Federal Judge On Mesa Verde Outbreak: ICE Has “Responded To The Health Crisis In Such A Cavalier Fashion” That It Has “Lost The Right To Be Trusted.” “On Thursday, a federal judge in San Francisco issued a searing ruling, saying that ICE has “responded to the health crisis in such a cavalier fashion” that it has “lost the right to be trusted.” “The documentary evidence shows that the defendants have avoided widespread testing of staff and detainees at the facility, not for lack of tests, but for fear that positive test results would require them to implement safety measures that they apparently felt were not worth the trouble,” Judge Vincent Chhabria wrote in granting the temporary restraining order.” [LA Times, [8/6/20](#)]

Judge Ordered Testing For All Staff At Mesa Verde – “There’s No Question That This Outbreak Could Have Been Avoided.” “Late Friday, a federal judge ordered U.S. Immigration and

Customs Enforcement to test all staff at the Mesa Verde facility in Bakersfield for COVID-19 after recently ordering ICE to begin testing all detainees. In his emergency oral order, Federal District Court Judge Vince Chhabria directed ICE to immediately test around 140 staff members at the facility immediately, beginning with their next shift and on a weekly basis thereafter. "I'm ordering that it be done immediately and nobody stop working until they're completed," he said. "There's no question that this outbreak could have been avoided." [KGET, [8/17/20](#)]

July 2020: GEO Group HR Manager Advised Guard Who Reported Her Husband Had COVID And Father-In-Law Was Hospitalized With COVID To Come Into Work As Long As She Wore PPE And Was Asymptomatic. "The paper trail also shows that guards were encouraged to work, even if they could have been exposed to the virus. In a July 1 email, a GEO human resources manager informed Allen, the warden, that a guard had called to say that her husband had tested positive for COVID-19 and her father-in-law was on life support due to the virus. The manager said she explained to the guard that, "if she is symptom-free then she can come to work as long as she wears her [Personal Protective Equipment] and stays 6 feet away." [Palm Springs Desert Sun, [8/16/20](#)]

April 2020: GEO Claimed They "Advised Our Employees To Remain Home" If They Had Symptoms And Implemented Paid Leave And PTO To Care For Family Members. "We advised our employees to remain home if they exhibit flu-like symptoms. And we've exercised flexible paid leave and paid-time-off policies to allow for employees to remain home if they exhibit flu-like symptoms or to care for a family member." [GEO Group Q1 earnings call, [4/30/20](#)]

Headline: KQED: "ICE Kept Man in Detention After Judge Granted Him Relief – Then He Got COVID-19." [KQED, [8/12/20](#)]

22-Year Old Salvadoran Man With Schizophrenia Was Granted Deportation Relief By Judge But Kept In Mesa Verde On Appeal For More Than A Month And Caught COVID. "More than a month after he was granted relief from deportation by an immigration judge, a 22-year-old Salvadoran man remains locked up at a privately run detention facility in Bakersfield, where he's now diagnosed with COVID-19. Christian Orellana, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia and other psychological disorders, proved he would likely suffer persecution or torture because of his mental illness if returned to El Salvador, said Orellana's attorney, Ambar Tovar, with the United Farm Workers Foundation. In a June 25 order, Judge Ila C. Deiss at the immigration court in San Francisco authorized a "withholding of removal" for Orellana, who grew up in Los Angeles, so that he can remain in the U.S. But immigration authorities appealed Deiss' ruling and kept Orellana detained at the Mesa Verde Immigration and Customs Enforcement Processing Center, where he contracted the coronavirus in July and reportedly became ill." [KQED, [8/12/20](#)]

Eloy – Eloy, AZ – Operated by CoreCivic

Need To Know

	Total Positive	Deaths Reported
Detainees	250	0
ICE Employees	1*	0
Private Employees	159+	1

**NOTE: ICE has not updated employee reporting since June 18, 2020.*

[ICE Guidance on COVID-19, accessed [9/10/20](#); KTAR, [8/9/20](#); ABC 15, [6/15/20](#)]

Background

Headline: NBC News: “Nearly half the employees at an Arizona ICE detention center have tested positive for COVID-19.” [NBC News, [7/8/20](#)]

Headline: Arizona Republic: “Former Eloy correctional officers blame negligence for huge COVID-19 outbreak.” [Arizona Republic, [7/1/20](#)]

Headline: ABC 15: “Eloy corrections officer dies of COVID-19-related complications.” [ABC 15, [6/15/20](#)]

At Least 159 CoreCivic Staff At Eloy Tested Positive For COVID By End Of July. “Ryan Gustin, a CoreCivic spokesman, said 128 CoreCivic employees at the Eloy facility tested positive for COVID-19 on July 1-2, about 40% of employees there. By July 27, he said, 159 of the center’s roughly 315 employees — about half — had tested positive. Since then, 139 of those employees have recovered and been cleared for work.” [KTAR, [8/9/20](#)]

Detainees And Staff At Eloy Detention Center Reported Staff Shortages Due To COVID Outbreak Left Detainees Without Access To Showers, Laundry And Other Necessities. “Nearly half the employees at an Arizona ICE detention center have tested positive for COVID-19, with a guard dying of the disease, and according to two employees and 14 migrants, a shortage of staff has left detainees in their cells without access to showers, laundry and other necessities.” [NBC News, [7/8/20](#)]

Detainees Reported Being Kept In Cells For Over 24 Hours At A Time Due To Staff Shortages. “Four reported having been held in their cells at least once for over 24 hours because of a lack of guards to monitor them; others reported consistently having been kept in their cells for all but 20 minutes a day.” [NBC News, [7/8/20](#)]

Employee At CoreCivic’s Eloy Detention Center Criticized Response Efforts – “Most Of Our Staff Is In A War Zone.” “An employee said that in recent weeks he and others have been scared to go to work at Eloy. He said leaders at the facility should have done a better job informing staff early on whether they had come into contact with someone with the virus. “Most of our staff is in a war zone. We are exposed on a daily basis,” the employee said. “They were not doing the best contract tracing in the facility, and that’s why I think the exposure has spread between staff, detainees and family members of staff.” [NBC News, [7/8/20](#)]

Employee At CoreCivic’s Eloy Quit In The Wake Of COVID Outbreak Among Detainees And Staff, Cited Lack Of PPE And Being Forced To Work In Pods Without Protective Gear. “One officer, Nicholas Berg, 30, a three-year-veteran, said he abruptly quit June 9, the day after working a night shift because he no longer felt safe working at the Eloy Detention Center due to the high numbers of workers and detainees infected by the virus and the lack of adequate protections. ‘I

called HR the very next day, June the 9th, and said, 'You know what? I'm done, I feel super-unsafe here,' Berg said. "I feel like there's a huge lack of PPE (personal protective equipment). I can never find gloves. We've been requesting N95 masks and those are scarce. I don't know where they went off to. We're being forced to work in these pods without any protection at all.'" [Arizona Republic, [7/1/20](#)]

Eloy Employees Reported Being Given Plastic Garbage Bags Rather Than Protective Gowns When Entering Isolation Pods With COVID-Positive Detainees. "In addition, Berg and the second correctional officer interviewed said staff who enter "isolation pods" where infected detainees are housed are given masks, gloves and visors to wear but not protective gowns. Instead, correctional officers are given clear garbage bags with holes cut in them to wear like ponchos, leaving their arms and backs exposed, they said." [Arizona Republic, [7/1/20](#)]

Eloy Employee Reported Seeing A Detainee Instructed To Hold A Frozen Water Bottle To His Forehead To Lower His Temperature So He Could Be Deported. "Berg also said he witnessed a detainee being told to hold a frozen water bottle against his forehead after a thermometer pointed at his forehead showed he had a high fever so that he could be deported to a country in Central America. They "told the dude to hold it up to his head until he basically temped out," Berg said. "So they basically kind of tricked it until it temped correctly so they could write it down" that he didn't have a fever." [Arizona Republic, [7/1/20](#)]

DACA Recipient Carlos Martinez, Who Was Praised On US Senate Floor And Later Detained At Eloy, Was Infected With COVID. "Carlos Martinez was one of the first people in Arizona to get DACA back in 2012. He was literally a poster child for the program: In 2012 and again in 2015, Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) brought a large poster board portrait of Martinez to the Senate floor to help illustrate the need to protect Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals from Republican efforts to kill it. ... But for the last 11 months, Martinez has been locked up in a for-profit immigration detention center in Arizona. He has lost his DACA status and fallen ill with COVID-19." [Mother Jones, [7/16/20](#)]

Following Diagnosis, Martinez Was Not Given Medication For Seven Days, Then Tylenol And Cough Syrup And Was Checked For Fever Just Once Over Three Day Period. "Shortly after his diagnosis Martinez started getting chills and feeling worse. He felt as though he had a fever for more than five days—a nurse checked his temperature on day one of solitary confinement and didn't come back for three days. He had no energy, got a cough, and lost his sense of taste. ... Martinez said he didn't receive any medication for seven days. After a week he was given Tylenol and cough syrup. After 19 days, he was taken to a separate building with other men who had already spent a couple of weeks in isolation." [Mother Jones, [7/16/20](#)]

Martinez Had Been Granted Residency By A Judge Before The Pandemic Spread In February But Was Held Until August As DHS Appealed The Decision. "Attorney Claudia Arévalo, who represented Martínez, said the Board of Immigration Appeals sided with a judge's decision that canceled his deportation order in February. The Department of Homeland Security dropped its appeal of that ruling. The February decision also granted Martínez permanent residency, but he had to remain in the detention center while the DHS appeal was processed." [Arizona Daily Star, [8/24/20](#)]

ICA Farmville – Farmville, VA – Operated by Immigration Centers of America

Need To Know

	Total Positive	Deaths Reported
Detainees	339	1
ICE Employees	0*	0
Private Employees	27+	0

**NOTE: ICE has not updated employee reporting since June 18, 2020.*
[ICE Guidance on COVID-19, accessed [9/10/20](#); Farmville Herald, [7/23/20](#)]

Background

Farmville Reported 97% Of Detainees – 259 Of 268 – Confirmed Positive For COVID. “By the end of June, fifty-one of those 74 transfers to Farmville had tested positive, the apparent catalyst that would make the all-adult male center the largest coronavirus outbreak in a U.S. immigrant detention facility. There, 259 of the 268 detainees — nearly 97% — currently in the facility are confirmed positive. The facility has recorded 339 confirmed COVID-19 cases, according to the ICE website, a tally that includes people who have been released.” [Richmond Times-Dispatch, [8/11/20](#)]

Headline: Washington Post: “Federal scientists begin addressing massive covid-19 outbreak at immigration detention center in Virginia.” [Washington Post, [8/10/20](#)]

10-Person CDC Team Sent In To Address Outbreak That Affected Nearly All 298 Detainees, Resulted In One Death At ICA Farmville Detention Center. “A team of federal scientists arrived Monday at an immigration detention center in Farmville, Va., to begin addressing the worst outbreak of the novel coronavirus at any such facility in the country, according to the office of Gov. Ralph Northam. The 10-person team from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will work with the local health department to assess and manage the crisis, Northam’s office said Monday. One detainee at the privately run facility who had covid-19 died last week. Nearly all of the 298 detainees are being monitored for infection, according to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.” [Washington Post, [8/10/20](#)]

Headline: Richmond Dispatch: “Farmville’s ICE facility accepted 74 transfers in June. It became the largest COVID-19 outbreak in an immigrant detention center.” [Richmond Times-Dispatch, [8/11/20](#)]

Of 74 Detainees Transferred To Farmville, 51 Later Tested Positive For COVID After Not Being Quarantined Following Transfer. “During a hearing on a lawsuit filed on behalf of four detainees, Brinkema chastised U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Immigration Centers of America, the company that operates the facility, for not doing more to prevent infections, noting that the virus quickly began to spread there in June after 74 detainees were brought in from detention centers in Arizona and Florida without first being quarantined. The lawsuit, filed in Alexandria’s U.S. District Court, claims that 51 of those transfers later tested positive in an outbreak where 259 detainees are being monitored for the virus, nearly all of the facility’s population, according to ICE.” [Washington Post, [8/11/20](#)]

Transfers To Farmville In Early June Were Done To Justify Charter Flights To Washington DC For DHS Personnel Used For Protest Response. “The Trump administration flew immigrant detainees to Virginia this summer to facilitate the rapid deployment of Homeland Security tactical teams to quell protests in Washington, circumventing restrictions on the use of charter flights for employee travel, according to a current and a former U.S. official. ... “They needed to justify the

movement of SRT,” said the DHS official, referring to the special response teams. The official and the former ICE official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive internal decisions. They and another DHS official briefed on the operation characterized the tactical teams’ travel on ICE Air as a misuse of the charter flights.” [Washington Post, [9/11/20](#)]

Federal Judge Ordered ICE To Halt Transfers To And From ICA Farmville Facility Amid Largest Outbreak In Any ICE Facility Nationwide. “A federal judge on Tuesday barred the Trump administration from transferring more undocumented immigrants into a Virginia detention center that is home to the nation’s largest novel coronavirus outbreak inside such a facility. U.S. District Court Judge Leonie M. Brinkema also said she would decide whether to allow an independent health expert to inspect the Farmville facility after the Center for Disease Control and Prevention delivers a report Friday on testing being conducted there this week.” [Washington Post, [8/11/20](#)]

Federal Judge Ordered New Independent Health Inspection At ICA Farmville After Learning Staff Were Still Failing To Wear Masks, Continuing Work While Symptomatic As Massive Outbreak Spread. “A federal judge Monday ordered a new inspection at a Virginia immigration detention center hit hard by the coronavirus after learning that some of the facility’s staff members were still not properly wearing protective masks, while others continued working shortly after showing symptoms of the illness. U.S. District Judge Leonie M. Brinkema expressed frustration that the Trump administration and Immigration Centers of America, the company that operates the Farmville center, have not more forcefully moved to stem the outbreak, which is the largest inside a facility of its kind in the country. Most of the center’s population of nearly 300 detainees are being monitored for the virus, according to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.” [Washington Post, [8/17/20](#)]

Judge: “This Is Not Rocket Science... It’s Amazing To Me That This Would Not Have Been Done.” “‘This is not rocket science,’ Brinkema said during a court hearing for a lawsuit filed on behalf of detainees, after also learning that the center’s dining areas do not appear to accommodate physical distancing and that a policy for detainees to sleep at least six feet apart may not have been strictly enforced. ‘It’s amazing to me that this would not have been done in a facility, which, because of the large inmate population, should have been on clear notice that you’ve got to have people distanced in order to prevent spread of the virus,’ said Brinkema, who last week ordered ICE to stop transferring detainees into the facility. ‘The fact that not all employees are wearing masks, or PPE, correctly is very problematic.’” [Washington Post, [8/17/20](#)]

Farmville Detainee With COVID Reported “Hell We’re Living In” With Closely Packed Beds, Bugs In Food, Delayed Medical Attention. “His cough is hollow, a raspy effort he said feels like blades scraping his lungs. Whispering into the phone — his one vehicle to the outside world as he grapples with a reality he calls “a hell we’re living in” — he recites the horrors he’s come to know well at Farmville’s immigrant detention center: bugs in food, beds less than 6 feet apart, dust particles in vents he fears will kill him if COVID-19 doesn’t, and medical attention that’s delayed because nearly everyone at the center has tested positive. “I’m scared to die here,” he said on a collect call from inside the detention center. The detainee, who tested positive for the coronavirus, spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.” [Richmond Times-Dispatch, [8/11/20](#)]

ICA Leadership Refused To Mandate Staff COVID Testing, Claiming That Local health Department Advised Against It. “But ICA-Farmville has not mandated staff testing, saying in a statement to The Times-Dispatch that it was recommended not to by the Prince Edward County Health Department, ‘especially for staff that were asymptomatic.’ In a statement, they added legal counsel further advised that without the health department declaring a public health emergency, “We could not mandate tests as a condition of employment.” [Richmond Times-Dispatch, [8/11/20](#)]

State Health Officials Confirmed They Had Never Advised Against Staff Testing At Farmville And ICA In Fact Denied Two Offers For State Testing Of Staff. “VDH spokesperson Maria Reppas said Tuesday that “the facility was never advised by VDH-Piedmont HD not to conduct mass testing of staff” and that Virginia has been under a public health emergency since mid-March. Bob Mauskopf, the director of emergency preparedness for the Virginia Department of Health, said the VDH and local health department are in constant contact with the facility and offered COVID-19 testing for the detention center’s staff in July and were denied twice.” [Richmond Times-Dispatch, [8/11/20](#)]

72-Year Old Canadian Immigrant, James Hill, Detained At ICA-Farmville In Virginia Was Fourth Confirmed COVID Death In ICE Custody. “A 72-year-old Canadian has died in hospital after he was held for nearly three months in a U.S. immigration detention centre that had a major COVID-19 outbreak. James Hill had been in custody at the privately run detention centre in Virginia operated on behalf of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Farmville Detention Center has made headlines because hundreds of detainees have been infected with the novel coronavirus, amid complaints of overcrowding and poor sanitation.” [Globe & Mail, [8/6/20](#)]

Hill Fell Sick With COVID Days Before Scheduled Deportation Flight. “Mr. Hill was scheduled to fly to Canada on July 9, but just days before the flight, he had to be hospitalized with COVID-19 symptoms. A former physician in Louisiana, he was waiting to be deported after serving a 12-year sentence for writing Oxycontin prescriptions without seeing patients. . . . The family says Mr. Hill had served his sentence and did not deserve what happened to him. “All these years he was so looking forward to being back, and then through their negligence they let him die,” Mr. Hunt said.” [Globe & Mail, [8/6/20](#)

Karnes County Family Residential Center – Karnes City, TX – Operated by GEO Group

Need To Know

	Total Positive	Deaths Reported
Detainees	79	0
ICE Employees	0*	0
Private Employees	7+	0

**NOTE: ICE has not updated employee reporting since June 18, 2020.*
[ICE Guidance on COVID-19, accessed [9/10/20](#); Washington Post, [7/7/20](#)]

Background

June 2020: Federal Judge Ordered Release Of Children From Detention Centers, Denounced Prolonged Detention Of Families Amidst Pandemic. “A federal judge on Friday ordered the release of children held with their parents in U.S. immigration jails and denounced the Trump administration’s prolonged detention of families during the coronavirus pandemic. U.S. District Judge Dolly Gee’s order applies to children held for more than 20 days at three family detention centers in Texas and Pennsylvania operated by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Some have been detained since last year. Citing the recent spread of the virus in two of the three facilities, Gee set a deadline of July 17 for children to either be released with their parents or sent to family sponsors.” [Associated Press, [6/26/20](#)]

Federal Judge: “There Is No More Time For Half Measures.” “The family detention centers “are ‘on fire’ and there is no more time for half measures,” she wrote.” [Associated Press, [6/26/20](#)]

Headline: San Antonio Express-News: “Immigrant families in Texas detention test positive for coronavirus.” [San Antonio Express-News, [6/26/20](#)]

Karnes County Family Residential Center Reported In Late June That 11 Family Members Detained At Facility Had Tested Positive For COVID. “Four detained immigrant families have tested positive for the coronavirus, marking the first cases at family detention centers since the pandemic began. The families, with a total of 11 people, were new admissions to the Karnes County Family Residential Center, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility about 55 miles southeast of San Antonio.” [San Antonio Express-News, [6/26/20](#)]

Headline: TIME: “120 Children Remain in ICE Detention Despite Court Order For Them to Be Released Due to COVID-19 Concerns.” [TIME, [8/17/20](#)]

By Mid-August, 73 Family Members Detained At Karnes Facility Had Tested Positive For COVID. “As of Monday, 73 immigrants detained at the Karnes County Family Residential Center in Karnes City, Texas, have tested positive for COVID-19, and three have been confirmed at the South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley, Texas, according to ICE data.” [TIME, [8/17/20](#)]

Appendix – ICE Detainee COVID Cases By Facility

Facility	Active Cases	Deaths	Total Cases
Charleston County Detention Center	0	0	2
Columbia Regional Care Center	0	0	1
Folkston ICE Processing Center (D. Ray James)	21	0	67
Irwin County Detention Center	11	0	42
Robert A. Deyton Detention Center	0	0	1
Sheriff Al Cannon Detention Center	0	0	1
Stewart Detention Center	17	2	327
Worcester County Jail	1	0	1
Bristol County Detention Center	0	0	1
Franklin County House of Corrections	0	0	7
Strafford County Corrections	0	0	2
Wyatt Detention Center	0	0	2
Buffalo (Batavia) Service Processing Center	0	0	49
Chase County Detention Facility	33	0	59
Lincoln County Detention Center	0	0	1
McHenry County Adult Correctional Facility	2	0	5
Pulaski County Detention Center	17	0	69
Bluebonnet Detention Facility	0	0	296
Johnson County Law Enforcement Center	1	0	1
Kay County Detention Center	0	0	1
Moore Detention Center	0	0	20
Prairieland Detention Facility	20	0	88
Rolling Plains Detention Center	1	0	56
Aurora Contract Detention Facility	20	0	38
Calhoun County Correctional Center	2	0	15
Geauga County Jail	1	0	1
Morrow County Correctional Facility	0	0	48
Saint Clair County Jail	1	0	11
Cibola County Correctional Center	0	0	1
El Paso Service Processing Center	7	0	186
Otero County Processing Center	0	0	150
Torrance County Detention Center	0	0	55
Coastal Bend Detention Center	12	0	12
Houston Contract Detention Facility	8	0	132
IAH Polk Adult Detention Facility	7	0	25

Joe Corley Detention Center	0	1	50
Montgomery Processing Center (Houston)	0	0	207
Adelanto ICE Processing Center	2	0	13
Baker County Detention Center	1	0	4
Broward Transitional Center	30	0	121
Glades County Detention Center	14	1	163
Krome North Service Processing Center	17	0	180
Larkin Behavioral Health Center	0	0	2
San Juan Staging Facility	0	0	1
Wakulla County Jail	2	0	32
Elizabeth Detention Center	0	0	18
Essex County Jail	0	0	8
Adams County Correctional Center	32	0	74
Alexandria Staging Facility	18	0	137
Allen Parish Detention Center	0	0	10
Catahoula Correctional Center	0	0	117
Etowah County Jail	1	0	22
Jackson Parish Correctional	41	0	47
LaSalle ICE Processing Center - Jena	2	0	28
LaSalle ICE Processing Center - Olla	3	0	25
Pine Prairie ICE Processing Center	0	0	65
Richwood Correctional Center	27	0	100
River Correctional Center	8	0	19
South Louisiana Correctional Center	0	0	3
Winn Correctional Center	35	0	198
Bergen County Jail	1	0	5
Hudson County Jail	0	0	14
Pike County Correctional Facility	0	0	22
York County Prison	53	0	58
CCA Florence Correctional Center	3	0	21
Eloy Federal Contract Facility	1	0	250
Florence Detention Center	2	0	66
La Palma Correctional Facility	13	0	366
Cache County Jail	15	0	15
Henderson Detention Center	17	0	20
Nevada Southern Detention Center	3	0	10
Nye County Jail	0	0	37
Washington County Jail	2	0	3
El Valle Detention Facility	27	0	40

Karnes County Family Residential Center	4	0	79
Laredo Processing Center	2	0	3
Limestone County Detention Center	1	0	53
Port Isabel Detention Center	4	0	142
Rio Grande Detention Center	2	0	161
South Texas Family Residential Center (Dilley)	1	0	4
South Texas ICE Processing Center (Pearsall)	3	0	178
Webb County Detention Center (CCA)	1	0	85
Imperial Regional Detention Facility	0	0	3
Otay Mesa Detention Center (San Diego CDF)	0	1	168
San Luis Regional Detention Center	0	0	12
Mesa Verde ICE Processing Center	53	0	59
Tacoma ICE Processing Center (Northwest Detention Center)	2	0	14
Douglas County Corrections	1	0	1
Freeborn County Adult Detention Center	1	0	4
Linn County Jail	0	0	2
Phelps County Jail	0	0	2
Polk County Jail	0	0	12
Caroline Detention Facility	0	0	5
Immigration Centers of America - Farmville	0	1	339
TOTAL	627	6	5670