

Many staff workers in prisons would rather get fired than get the COVID-19 vaccine

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The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in prisons has intensified ever since the new Delta variant hit jails and prisons hard once again in late 2020. Has the vaccine decreased COVID cases in prisons? Residents have complained about not having necessary supplies to combat COVID and how overcrowding has made it difficult to social distance and protect themselves against the virus. Staff refusing to get vaccinated has also brought a new challenge. Many staff members prefer to lose their jobs than to get the vaccine. People in prisons do not have many options when it comes to protecting themselves against the virus. Even though there are many negative aspects of being incarcerated during a pandemic, some residents in some prisons have received the vaccine. However, if staff refuse to get vaccinated, they could be the ones bringing the virus to prisons and infecting many people incarcerated by increasing the rates of COVID spread amongst those who are yet not vaccinated and to those who are vaccinated, who may still get sick. Not only that, but they are risking their own family's health by possibly taking the virus home.

Many staff members and correctional officers from prisons have stated that they do not want to receive the vaccine because they fear the short and long-term effects of the COVID-19 vaccine. In this case, the short-term effects seem to last for 24 hours and have the same side effects compared to the flu. As of now we are unaware of any known long-term effects that come with the vaccine. There are other conspiracy theories that people believe of the COVID vaccine. For example, people have said that the vaccine contains a microchip that will track our whereabouts. However, those conspiracy theories have also been denied by many physicians. Employees who work in places where there is more risk of getting covid such as prisons,

detention centers, and even healthcare centers believe that once they have been infected with COVID that they are immune to the virus. However, that is not always the case, and individuals can indeed get sick again.

The rates of vaccination amongst staff working in prisons have increased as the pandemic has continued. According to the Marshall Project programs data, the current rate of staff immunization, in the Bureau of Prisons in 36 states, have already received at least one dose which is calculated to be around only 48%. Meaning that less than half of prison staff in some states are vaccinated putting residents at risk.

Some correctional systems have decided to offer their employees higher pay in exchange for them to stay due to there being a shortage of staff and some systems are incentivizing the vaccine with bonuses and paid time off. For staff who refuse, many must face daily, weekly, or random testing for COVID-19 virus. However, that will not show a dramatic decrease in COVID rates among prisons and other detention centers...it sill simply alert us to positive cases.

Among having people not wanting to get vaccinated for the health of those in prison and of their own families outside of prison, Residents do not have many options on how to be more sanitizing when the pandemic first hit. Overcrowding became a larger problem when the pandemic hit because social distancing was incredibly difficult and many prisons were not equipped with the appropriate PPE such as masks. As much as they would try to keep six feet distance, it was impossible. Justice-involved persons share cells where there is not enough space to create social distancing as recommended. Once residents set foot outside of their cells, the same thing happens. There is no social distancing due to them being in an environment that only fits a certain number of people. Poor ventilation in prison and detention centers increases the risk of airborne infections spreading. According to epidemiological surveys, COVID-19 also impacts

health issues there are constantly higher rates of chronic health issues such as asthma, tuberculosis, and hypertension in prison. People in prisons are at a greater risk of catching Coronavirus or the new Delta variant. Other factors including, pregnant women that are why not only inmates in prisons must get vaccinated, but also the staff members. According to the *American Journal of Public Health*, 155,000 people have tested positive in prisons, and more than 1,000 people died nationally. Prisoners have rights as well, and one of them should be to be able to respect their health because it is as important as ours is too. Just because they are in jail or prison does not mean that they do not deserve to have any rights.

Many states have already issued a proclamation requiring most state employees to get the vaccine for COVID-19. In this case, others may believe that not getting the vaccine is understandable and that the person should have the right to choose whether they want to be vaccinated or not. However, achieve a safe carceral environment without having to wear a mask, or in general, being afraid of a virus, we first must get detention centers and healthcare workers vaccinated and practice all safety measures of social distancing and vaccination requirements to see a change in rates of COVID and the Delta variant.

Getting vaccinated could save many lives whether it is inside prisons or outside. Practicing better social distancing and sanitary procedures will help reduce the high rates of COVID-19 in detention centers and prisons. That is why prisons need to step up their games when it comes to vaccinating inmates and staff members. The availability of enough sanitary supplies is important as well as residents being in an environment where the most basic needs are available and met. Justice-involved persons need masks, hand sanitizer, and soap to be able to keep a clean environment. However, many residents have already claimed that once they run out of soap or hand sanitizer, it is hard to obtain it again. Many have also stated that if they

are lucky enough, when one gets sick, they are taken to solitary confinement or to areas where others are sick, so by one side that avoids others to get sick (Blackwell, 2021).

Staff members should be required to get vaccinated since they are working in an environment where there are many people at risk of getting infected. Everyone should be required to get vaccinated if working in an area where the virus is easier to be exposed to. The COVID-19 vaccines have proven effective against the Delta Variant according to a Stanford study conducted at a California prison, it showed, “protection against symptomatic infection that remained high (84.2%). And, in men who previously had COVID-19, the vaccine reduced the risk of subsequent infection by 80.5%” (Duff-Brown, 2021, p.1).

Please get vaccinated!!! Not only will it prevent you from getting sick, but you could save millions of lives. By not spreading the virus to others who don't want the virus but have no choice but to stay where they are and pray that no one coming in has the virus. People in prison and jails still have rights and deserve to use them, especially when people in prisons are already at greater risk.

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