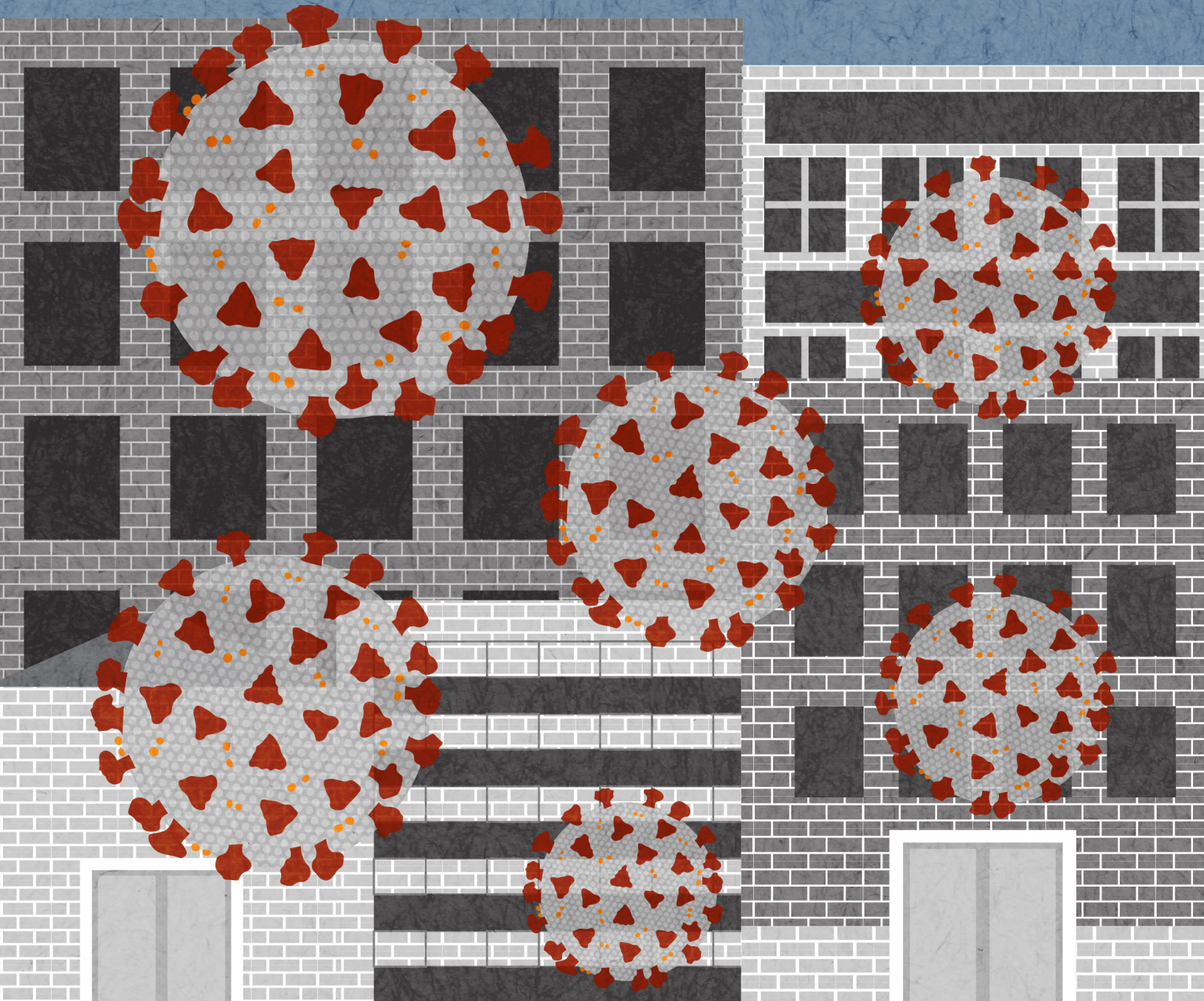


INFECTED WITH FEAR: The Coronavirus in Central Texas Jails



November 2021

AUTHORS

Texas Justice Initiative is a nonprofit organization that collects, analyzes, publishes and provides oversight for criminal justice data throughout Texas. Founded in 2016, TJI maintains a portal for data that is regularly updated and accessible to all for free. We push for increased transparency and accountability in criminal justice, and also work to improve data collection efforts in Texas whenever possible.

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Texas Appleseed is a public interest justice center. Our nonprofit, celebrating our 25th anniversary in 2021, works to change unjust laws and policies that prevent Texans from realizing their full potential. We anchor a dynamic network of pro bono partners and collaborators to develop and advocate for innovative and practical solutions to complex issues. Texas Appleseed also conducts data-driven research that uncovers inequity in laws and policies and identifies solutions for lasting, concrete change. The many issues on which we work are united by the goal of greater justice.

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Disclaimer: Though the research and findings included in this report involve a “protected class” under the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, the manner in which the research was completed adheres to the Department’s “exemption” process, which allows investigators to conduct research on protected classes as long as certain requirements are followed (e.g., avoiding collection and reporting on private identifiable information, redacting or deleting any information collected in this regard prior to analysis/sharing). No identifying information was gathered from the surveys used in this research, and the findings only apply to the specific jails we studied.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

The purpose of this report was to explore how jails in the Austin Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) – which include Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis, and Williamson counties – responded to the coronavirus pandemic. We used a mixed methods approach in this research, combining analyses of first-hand experiences via surveys with secondary data that counties self-reported and a comprehensive examination of relevant policies, directives, and executive orders. We received survey responses from people in jail and jail staff. Correctional institutions, such as county jails, are particularly susceptible to the increased transmission of Covid-19.¹ Incarcerated individuals experience higher rates of chronic health conditions than the general population.² And the daily rotation of individuals entering and exiting the jails presents an increased risk for coronavirus infections to occur, risks notably amplified by overcrowding.³ To this end, particular attention should be given to how local jails are preventing and controlling the viral spread of Covid-19.

This research sought to answer three overarching questions:

1. How have these five jails managed Covid-19 considering CDC guidelines/recommendations?
2. How could these jails improve their response to Covid-19?
3. Are there future lessons that could be applied to future health crises?

The results revealed a messy patchwork of inconsistent policies, ambiguity, and confusion as jails attempted to maintain operations amid a new and unknown pandemic. While some jails made valiant efforts to stave off the spread of the coronavirus, there are many areas where improvement is needed.

Key Findings

- **Lack of transparency and clarity in jail policies.** During the pandemic, jail policies, like CDC policies, frequently changed and were not communicated well, causing stress for jail staff, as indicated in survey responses. Maintaining transparent and clear policies avoids confusion, reduces stress, provides guidance, and allows for external oversight so that jails are more likely to adhere to best practices.
- **Inconsistent cleaning policies.** In all counties, fewer than half of incarcerated individuals who responded to the survey indicated that jail staff consistently cleaned common areas, which is recommended to ensure the prevention and control of viral spread.
- **Inadequate face mask policies.** Some of the counties evaluated had policies dictating how frequently face masks should be replaced, but some did not. In surveys, jail staff said that masks were made available upon request – placing the onus on people who were incarcerated to obtain new masks. Masks should be frequently replaced, especially if damaged or soiled, and jail staff should consistently and proactively provide masks to people in jail.

1 World Health Organization. *UNODC, WHO, UNAIDS, and OHCHR joint statement on COVID-19 in prisons and other closed settings.* (2020, May). <https://www.who.int/news/item/13-05-2020-unodc-who-unaid-and-ohchr-joint-statement-on-covid-19-in-prisons-and-other-closed-settings>

2 Cloud, D. (2014, November). *On Life Support: Public Health in the Age of Mass Incarceration.* Vera Institute of Justice. <https://www.vera.org/publications/on-life-support-public-health-in-the-age-of-mass-incarceration>

3 McCullough, J. (2021, January 28). *With a stalled court system, some Texas jails are dangerously overcrowded in the pandemic.* Texas Tribune. <https://www.texastribune.org/2021/01/28/texas-jails-overcrowded-coronavirus>

- **Lack of access to Covid-19 testing.** Jails' policies regarding Covid-19 testing were generally ambiguous about the frequency and availability of tests. Many of the counties' policies did not require testing a sample of incarcerated individuals or appropriately separating individuals who are at high risk of contracting Covid-19. Jail administrators should adopt relevant policies and make these policies clear to improve access to Covid-19 testing.
- **Obstacles to receiving medical care.** Many jailed survey respondents said that the pandemic worsened their ability to afford and receive medical care. While one county waived medical fees associated with Covid-19, others did not and charged individuals for basic treatment needs, such as Tylenol, cough suppressants, and doctor visits. Access to medical treatment for non-Covid-19 symptoms/conditions was also affected. To ensure that jailed individuals are receiving adequate medical care, especially that which could further reduce the risk of spreading Covid-19 in the jails and to the community, administrators should commit to waiving medical fees for Covid-19 treatment and dedicate a portion of the medical staff to non-Covid related matters.
- **Inconsistent, ineffective, and absent quarantine practices.** The jails examined were unable to effectively and responsibly quarantine sick individuals. Some jails made no effort to quarantine infected people whatsoever, while others essentially placed sick people in isolation, locking them down for 15 to 18 hours a day with limited access to recreation and religious services. Some jails were successful in quarantining incoming individuals for two weeks from the general population. Jail administrators should identify alternatives to in-person services, such as virtual learning or books, provide letter-writing materials, and waive fees for calls. Efforts to reduce the jail population should also be prioritized, to make quarantines, when necessary, more effective.

Moving Forward

This research has only scratched the surface in assessing how jails are managing Covid-19. Each of the topics explored in this report warrants an in-depth evaluation of how policies are being adopted, interpreted, and implemented. An evaluation of this magnitude could be invaluable, not just for stamping out Covid-19 but to reduce the transmission of other viruses and health crises in jails.

INTRODUCTION

In late 2019, a new coronavirus was identified as SARS-CoV-2 and began to quickly spread across the globe. The virus caused a worldwide pandemic of a highly infectious respiratory illness, called Covid-19, which is responsible for more than 675,000 deaths in the United States as of September 2021, per the CDC Covid-19 data tracker.

Correctional facilities are particularly susceptible to the increased transmission of coronavirus,⁴ and people incarcerated experience higher rates of chronic health conditions than the general population.⁵ County jails can be overcrowded, and the daily change of individuals entering and exiting the jails, including jail staff, presents an increased risk for coronavirus infections to occur.⁶ Therefore, particular attention should be paid to how to manage the coronavirus – or another pandemic – in county jails.

The purpose of this report is to evaluate how jails in the Austin Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) – which include Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis, and Williamson counties – responded to the virus in their jails. Our research is based on information from the Texas Commission on Jail Standards (TCJS), the jails’ own policies, and surveys conducted among people incarcerated in those jails, jail staff, and defense attorneys. These resources and sources combined create a snapshot of how these jails have fared during the pandemic and identify areas where jails can improve. In this research, we sought to answer these overarching research questions:

1. How have jails handled Covid-19?
2. How could jails improve their response to Covid-19?
3. Are there lessons that could be applied to future health crises?

Overview and Timeline of Statewide Policies. TCJS is a state agency that is responsible for regulating, monitoring, and providing technical assistance to all county and private jails across the state. Their purpose is to “promulgate reasonable rules and procedures” and ensure that all jails operating in Texas maintain the minimum standards that the commission establishes. As Covid-19 cases became apparent in the U.S., TCJS issued a series of “Technical Assistance” memos. These memos, though void of any consequences if gone unadhered to, are a tool used by TCJS to offer jails in the state guidance on the most “efficient” and “effective” means to jail management. This guidance echoed the best practices put forth by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and provided a template for reporting positive Covid-19 cases, as well as quarantined cases due to exposure. The following is a brief overview of the Technical Assistance memos issued, meant to give context to both the timing of statewide advisories and communication received from the state to counties, beginning in February 2020. On February 28, TCJS sent a memo to sheriffs and jail administrators instructing them to add a question about travel to their intake screening and to practice good hygiene.⁷ Two weeks later, in mid-March 2020, Gov. Greg Abbott issued a disaster proclamation related to Covid-19 and many coronavirus-related policies began in earnest. Shortly after Abbott’s disaster proclamation, officials released a flurry of advisories that dictated how all county jails should operate. These included:

- March 13 - The Texas Supreme Court issued an administrative order suspending in-person hearings and instructing courts to take any reasonable actions to mitigate Covid-19⁸

4 World Health Organization. *UNODC, WHO, UNAIDS, and OHCHR joint statement on COVID-19 in prisons and other closed settings.* (2020, May). <https://www.who.int/news/item/13-05-2020-unodc-who-unaid-and-ohchr-joint-statement-on-covid-19-in-prisons-and-other-closed-settings>

5 Cloud, D. (2014, November). *On Life Support: Public Health in the Age of Mass Incarceration.* Vera Institute of Justice. <https://www.vera.org/publications/on-life-support-public-health-in-the-age-of-mass-incarceration>

6 McCullough, J. (2021, January 28). *With a stalled court system, some Texas jails are dangerously overcrowded in the pandemic.* Texas Tribune. <https://www.texastribune.org/2021/01/28/texas-jails-overcrowded-coronavirus>

7 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. (2020, February 28). *Technical Assistance Memorandum Re: Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19).* https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TA_Memo-Coronavirus.pdf

8 Administrative Order No. 20-9042. (2020). <https://www.txcourts.gov/media/1447321/209042.pdf>

- March 13 - TCJS issued a memo suspending visitation to county jails with the exception of attorneys⁹
- March 17 - TCJS issued a memo detailing recommendations for operating jails during the coronavirus pandemic, including screening, limiting movement, personal protection equipment (PPE), cleaning supplies, and reducing the jail population¹⁰
- March 19 - TCJS issued a memo suspending education and rehabilitation programs¹¹ and released a Covid-19 screening form for all jails to use¹²
- March 25 - TCJS issued a memo directing all county jails to follow and implement recommendations set forth by the CDC¹³
- March 27 - TCJS issued a memo directing jail staff to take the temperature of incarcerated individuals before transporting them to a Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) facility¹⁴

On March 29, Gov. Abbott issued executive order GA-13, which prohibited the pretrial release of individuals with previous convictions of crimes involving physical violence or the threat of physical violence, or individuals awaiting trial on charges involving physical violence.¹⁵ Shortly afterwards, on April 3, TCJS released a memo directing jail administrators to give magistrate judges who are setting a person's bond conditions a current copy of the individual's criminal history. The action was necessary, TCJS said, in order to release and hold people in a way that complied with Gov. Abbott's executive order.¹⁶ Importantly, this executive order limited the ability of jurisdictions to reduce their jail populations and thereby mitigate the risk of spreading Covid-19 in jail — something that both the CDC and TCJS recommended.¹⁷

From May through August 2020, TCJS released four more Technical Assistance memos. In these memos, TCJS instructed jail administrators to do things like continue limiting visitation to solely attorneys and clergy,¹⁸ only transport people to TDCJ facilities if they are masked and don't have a fever,¹⁹ contact an inspector if their jail was nearing capacity,²⁰ and electronically submit daily Covid-19 reports if there is an active case of Covid-19 among jail staff or incarcerated individuals.²¹ As the pandemic continued and vaccines became more widely available, some of the statewide policies implemented in 2020 were relaxed beginning in March

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- 9 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. (2020, March 13). *Technical Assistance Memorandum Re: Suspension of Visitation Plan* https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TA_Memo_Suspension_Visitation.pdf
- 10 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. (2020, March 17). *Technical Assistance Memorandum Re: COVID-19 General Recommendations*. https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/TA_MEMO-COVID-19_General_Recommendations.pdf
- 11 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. (2020, March 19). *Technical Assistance Memorandum Re: Suspension of Education and Rehabilitation*. https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TA_Memo-Suspension_Education_and_Rehabilitation.pdf
- 12 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. *COVID-19 Inmate Screening*. https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-19_Inmate_Screening_Form.pdf
- 13 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. (2020, March 25). *Technical Assistance Memorandum Re: CDC Recommendations for Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) in Correctional/Detention Facilities*. https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TA_MEMO-CDC_Recommendation_COVID-19_Detention-Correctional_Facilities.pdf
- 14 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. (2020, March 27). *Technical Assistance Memorandum Re: COVID-19 Transport of inmates to TDCJ*. (March 27, 2020) https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TA_Memo-COVID-19_TDCJ_Transport.pdf
- 15 Exec. Order No. GA-13, (2020, March 29). Available at: https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/EO-GA-13_jails_and_bail_for_COVID-19_IMAGE_03-29-2020.pdf
- 16 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. (2020, April 3). *Technical Assistance Memorandum Re: COVID-19-Providing Current Criminal History (CCH) for Magistration*. https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/TA_Memo-COVID-19_Magistration.pdf
- 17 See Texas Appleseed, Doctors for America, and Texas Criminal Justice Coalition toolkit for a summary of Executive Order GA-13, available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e94bf923d1461047aa5972d/t/5e94cdo4bfaecc6753ac474a/1586810124315/COVID-19+County+Criminal+Justice+Stakeholder+Toolkit+040620+Final.pdf>
- 18 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. (2020, May 22). *Technical Assistance Memorandum Re: Suspension of In-Person Visits by Executive Order GA-25*. https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/TA-MEMO_Suspension_of_In-person_Visits_n_Jails-Correctional_Facilities.pdf
- 19 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. (2020, July 15). *Technical Assistance Memorandum Re: Transport of inmates to TDCJ*. https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/TA_Memo-Transport_of_Inmates_to_TDCJ.pdf
- 20 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. (2020, August 4). *Technical Assistance Memorandum Re: Population/Capacity General Letter*. https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Population_and_Capacity_General_Letter-8-2020.pdf
- 21 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. (2020, August 18). *Technical Assistance Memorandum Re: Daily Reporting of COVID-19 Cases*. https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/TA_Memo-COVID_Reporting.pdf

2021. Specifically, TCJS lifted restrictions on visitation,²² stopped requiring people to wear facial masks,²³ and resumed education and rehabilitation programs.²⁴ On June 15, 2021, TCJS stopped collecting daily Covid-19 reports from jails that were experiencing cases. The agency did not provide an explanation.

METHODOLOGY

In order to find out how jails intended to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, TJI submitted records requests under the Texas Public Information Act to Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis, and Williamson counties. Specifically, TJI requested any and all policies and protocols that the five sheriffs' offices adopted to address the coronavirus pandemic from January 1, 2020 to June 1, 2021. Policies and protocols only depict how things *should* be functioning, however. We sought to better understand jail practices by hearing about the actual experiences inside these five county jails. To do so, we designed three surveys — one each for incarcerated individuals, jail staff, and defense attorneys from the five-county area — that assessed how well jails were functioning and implementing the previously outlined best practices and policies. Given the exploratory and descriptive nature of this study, self-report surveys were chosen as the primary method for collecting information and data. The structure of self-report surveys allows for versatility in the data being collected, efficiency as a method of collection, and generalizability towards these specific jail populations.²⁵ Self-report surveys also work to collect information on small and large populations and allow investigators to ask questions that explore aggregate characteristics.²⁶

Researchers reviewed the previously noted CDC and TCJS recommendations. The Executive Director from Texas Jail Project, who works extensively with jailed individuals and their families, identified areas of concern she'd heard repeatedly, like the cost of medication and lack of personal protection equipment. These best practices and areas of concern formed the basis of the surveys distributed among incarcerated individuals, jail staff, and defense attorneys. The three surveys included both quantitative and qualitative questions that inquired about experiences, behavior, and opinions (see Appendix A). The use of both quantitative and qualitative questions offered a better understanding of contextual and less obvious issues, such as the extensive use of lockdowns and the removal of religious services and recreation time in Travis County.

Focus on Defense Attorneys

Since defense attorneys are partly responsible for the length of time an individual spends in jail, evaluating the factors impacting their ability to adequately represent their clients during the pandemic is a topic that indeed requires further research. Whether defense attorneys have access to their client, whether their client's rights are being upheld, and whether CDC guidelines are being adhered to, are all matters of concern in this regard. Given the importance of these matters, an attempt was made to study this dynamic for the purpose of this project; though due to the low number of responses received (n = 44), these findings were not integrated into the larger report.

As such, it is strongly recommended that any future research in this area make a similar (though potentially further reaching) attempt to research the impact that the pandemic has had on the attorney-client relationship for jailed individuals.

22 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. (2021, March 3). *Technical Assistance Memorandum Re: EO GA-34 Visitation*. https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/TA_Memo-EO_GA-34_Visitation.pdf

23 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. (2021, May 19). *Technical Assistance Memorandum Re: EO GA-36 Facial Coverings*. https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/TA_Memo-EO_GA-34_Visitation.pdf

24 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. (2020, April 19). *Technical Assistance Memorandum Re: Education and Rehabilitation/Outside Work Details*. https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/TA_Memo-Education_and_Rehabilitation_Programs_Outside_Work_Details.pdf

25 Bachman, R & Schutt, R. (2008). *The Practice of Research in Criminology and Criminal Justice*, Third Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

26 Kubena, J. L. (2014). Self-Report Surveys. In J. Albanese (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

One of the main limitations of this study is that it is cross-sectional, meaning data is only collected at one point in time. Additional limitations inherent in self-report studies are recall errors and fabrications. In order to ensure the validity of self-report data, researchers have used different methods to estimate the accuracy of individual responses. This study addresses this by comparing quantitative with qualitative feedback. Both types of data mirrored each other in both small and large counties. Additionally, the findings do not seek to substantiate causation or relationships between variables, but, rather, attempts to identify and meaningfully describe what was happening in Central Texas jails during the Covid-19 pandemic.

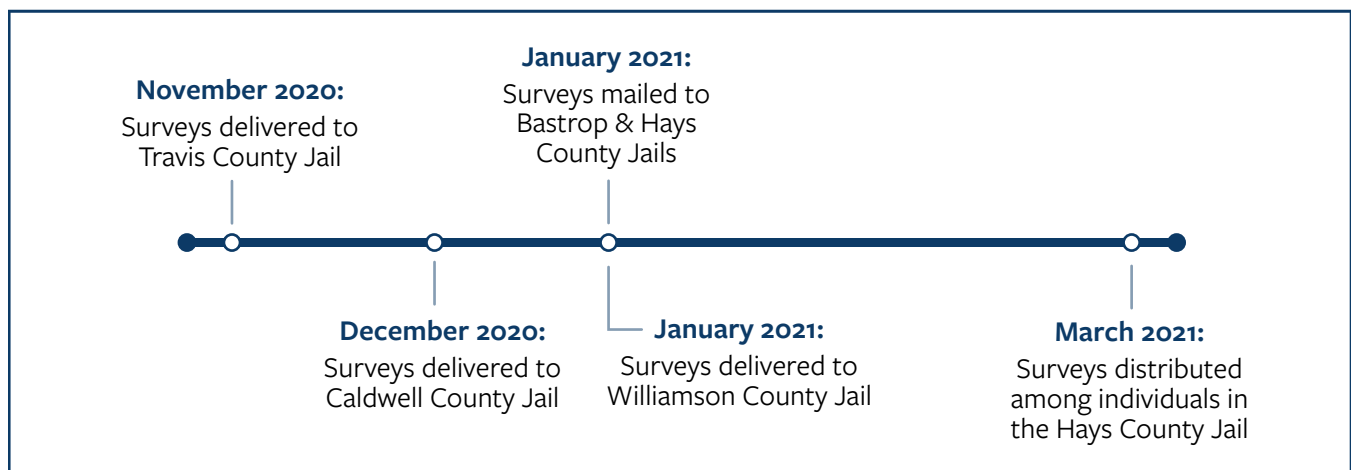
Jailed Individuals Survey

To reach individuals who were incarcerated in the five county jails, we designed a bilingual (Spanish and English) survey tool printed on a large (6" x 11") postcard that was stamped and self-addressed to be returned to the research team. Techniques that are known to increase response rates were used, including 1) the distribution of a bilingual — Spanish and English — cover letter that explained the purpose of the survey, 2) using a “hook” question to get the respondent interested in completing the survey, 3) using mostly close-ended questions, 4) using a smaller number of questions that read clearly and concisely, 5) using contingency questions, and 6) identifying the sponsors for the validity of the research. The surveys were accompanied with a letter stating that we were studying how Covid-19 affected people in jail, that participation was voluntary, and assurance that their answers would be kept completely anonymous. We also provided the address of each organization in case they wanted to get in contact to discuss their experiences in more detail. To increase the reliability and validity of the survey, multiple individuals who work to improve conditions for incarcerated persons were asked to review and comment on the tool. Reviewers were asked to give extra attention to the readability (i.e., comprehension and reading level) of the survey. Using their feedback, adjustments were made and sent to individuals.

Once the survey tool was designed, we asked administrators of each of the five facilities if they would distribute the postcards on our behalf. Staff at the Travis County, Williamson County, and Caldwell County jails agreed and allowed us to drop off surveys at the jail to be distributed by jail staff. A different approach was necessary for the two other facilities, so we set out to mail the postcards to individuals incarcerated in the Hays and Bastrop county jails. First, we requested lists of incarcerated individuals from the two counties under the Texas Public Information Act. Then, we mailed the postcards and cover letters to the listed individuals. Overwhelmingly, the surveys were sent back to the research team without issue. However, after two months of not receiving a single response from Hays County, we discovered that they had not been distributed. At that point, the surveys were distributed to the listed recipients; by then, 83 of the addressees had been released.

The research team distributed postcard surveys among the jails in the five-county Austin MSA over a four-month period:

Figure 1: Research Timeline



In total, we distributed 3,109 surveys and received 1,231 responses, an approximate response rate of 40%. Most responses came from jailed individuals in Travis County (n=832, 68%), followed by Williamson County (n=249, 20%), Bastrop County (n=78, 6%), Hays County (n=46, 4%) and Caldwell County (n=26, 2%). The median age of respondents across all counties was 34.

Additionally, more than 40 survey recipients who were jailed sent us correspondence to further detail their experience in jail. In each case, we responded with a letter asking for permission to share their story and connected them with Texas Jail Project, whose mission is to help individuals in county jails.

Jail Staff Survey

The self-report surveys for jail staff were constructed from information obtained through the surveys of incarcerated individuals, jail policies and procedures, and best practices. The survey was built using SurveyMonkey in early May of 2021, and began with a letter describing our project and listing the members and contact information of our research team. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and anyone who did not wish to participate was able to simply close the survey, and their response was not recorded.

TJI then again communicated with officials from all facilities to distribute the questionnaires to staff. Officials at four of the five facilities (Caldwell County Jail, Hays County Jail, Travis County Jail and Williamson County Jail) agreed to distribute the surveys to their staff in May. The Bastrop County Sheriff did not distribute the surveys. Additionally, TJI shared the link to the questionnaire on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. The SurveyMonkey questionnaire for jail staff was open for responses for four weeks beginning in May of 2021.

In total, we received 229 responses and discarded two responses.²⁷ Most responses came from employees in Travis County (n=120, 53%), followed by Williamson County (n=91, 40%) and Hays County (n=16, 7%). Survey response rate varied from 7% in Hays County to 31% in Williamson County.²⁸ Most respondents worked in the jail an average of 10-13 years. Most respondents in Travis County were between the ages of 35-54, whereas most respondents in Williamson County were between the ages of 25-34 and 55-64, and most respondents in Hays County were between the ages of 25-44.

OVERVIEW OF COVID-19 INFECTIONS IN CENTRAL TEXAS JAILS

In April 2020, TCJS began to collect and publish reports containing data on Covid-19 infections in county jails.²⁹ The data the jails reported to TCJS included: the number of jailers with active and positive tests, the number of jailers quarantined/isolated pending Covid-19 test results, the number of detained/incarcerated individuals with active and positive tests, the number of detained/incarcerated individuals pending test results, the number of detained/incarcerated individuals in quarantine/isolation, the number of detained/incarcerated individuals being treated offsite for Covid-19, the number of confirmed deaths related to Covid-19, and the number of suspected deaths related to Covid-19.

From these reports, we were able to provide a snapshot of the spread of Covid-19 in Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis, and Williamson counties. However, it is important to note that these reports are limited — the data is self-reported and not verified. Additionally, there was no assurance that counties were filing reports properly. TCJS only required counties to submit a daily report if they had an active Covid-19 case; therefore, facilities

27 We received only one response from Caldwell County so it is not included in our summary. One survey was dropped from Travis County because it did not have a corresponding consent form, and five individuals from Williamson County declined to take the survey.

28 Survey response rate calculated out of total number of jail staff as of May 2021. Total number of jail staff was taken from a public information request to the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE).

29 Texas Appleseed began collecting and tracking the daily TCJS Covid-19 reports starting on April 13, 2020. The data is available at: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1BcMXQm2BDnYU9HyklQS7a9vWFYfP3cATEqu91DFrAc/edit?usp=sharing>

inconsistently reported their data to the state. In fact, while data was being collected from April 2020 to June 2021, Caldwell County only submitted daily Covid-19 reports to TCJS 12% of the time and Travis County, with the highest reporting rate of the studied counties, still only submitted daily reports about half of the time.

Table 1: Average Reporting Rates and Jail Population as reported to TCJS for Central Texas County Jails (April 13, 2020-June 14, 2021)

Central Texas County Jails	Average Reporting Rate for Time Period (%)	Average Jail Population for Time Period
Bastrop	20.0	255
Caldwell	12.1	137
Hays	47.7	317
Travis	55.1	1,726
Williamson	28.4	469

Based on the daily reports, the five studied counties had several apparent Covid-19 outbreaks. The Bastrop County Jail saw infections peak in July 2020, reporting 28 infections of jail staff and incarcerated individuals. Similarly, Hays County Jail had the highest number of infections in July 2020, reporting 93 infections.

The Travis County Jail’s highest number of infections was in January 2021, reporting 101 infections. The Caldwell County Jail saw infections peak in February 2021, reporting 34 infections. The following charts show the total number of infections of jail staff and incarcerated individuals from April 13, 2020 to June 14, 2021 (Figures 2-6). Importantly, the charts show how inconsistently jails reported to TCJS.

Of note: surveys were distributed in the Travis County Jail in late November, as the population’s infections were on the rise. Many survey respondents expressed fear and deep concern in their surveys.

**Figures 2-6: Total Number of Covid-19 Infected Jail Staff and People in Jail
(April 13, 2020-June 14, 2021)**

Figure 2: Bastrop County Jail Daily Covid-19 Infections

Reporting rate = 20%

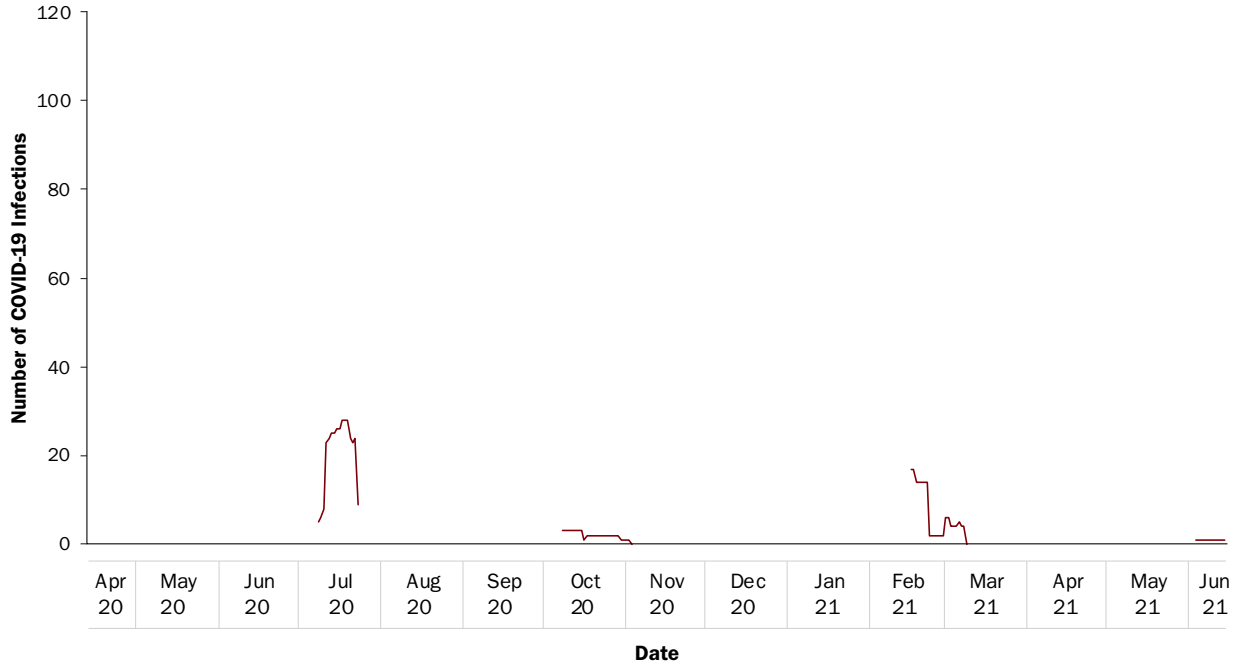


Figure 3: Caldwell County Jail Daily Covid-19 Infections

Reporting Rate = 12%

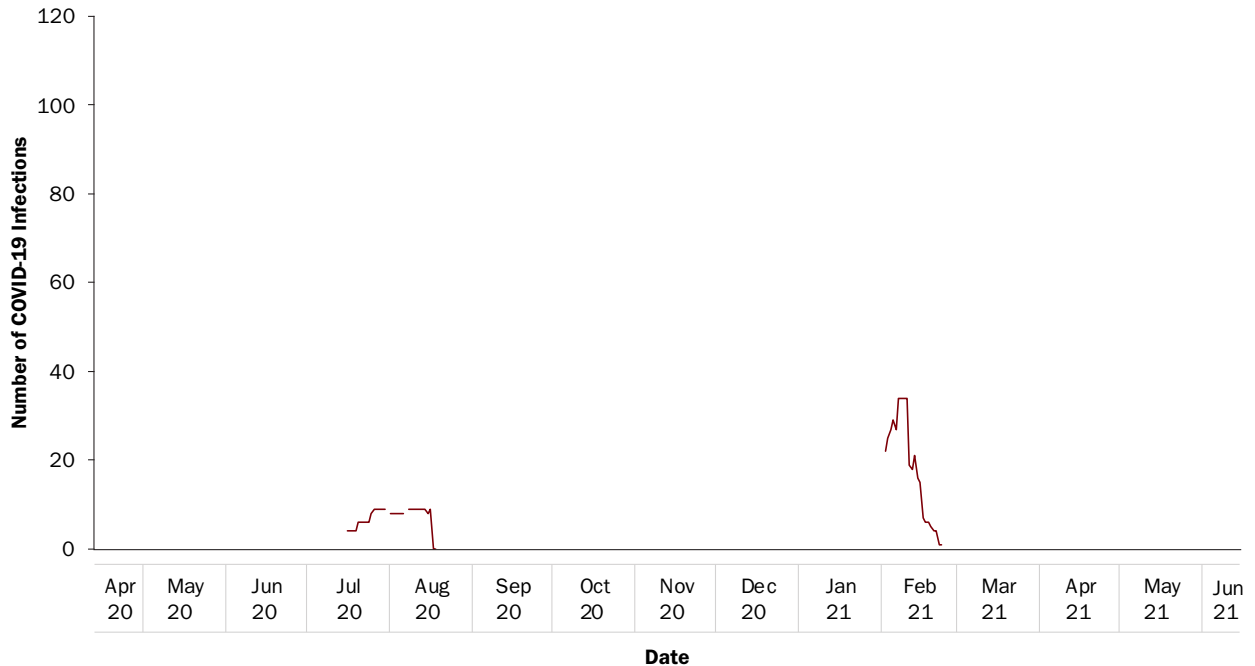


Figure 4: Hays County Jail Daily Covid-19 Infections

Reporting Rate = 48%

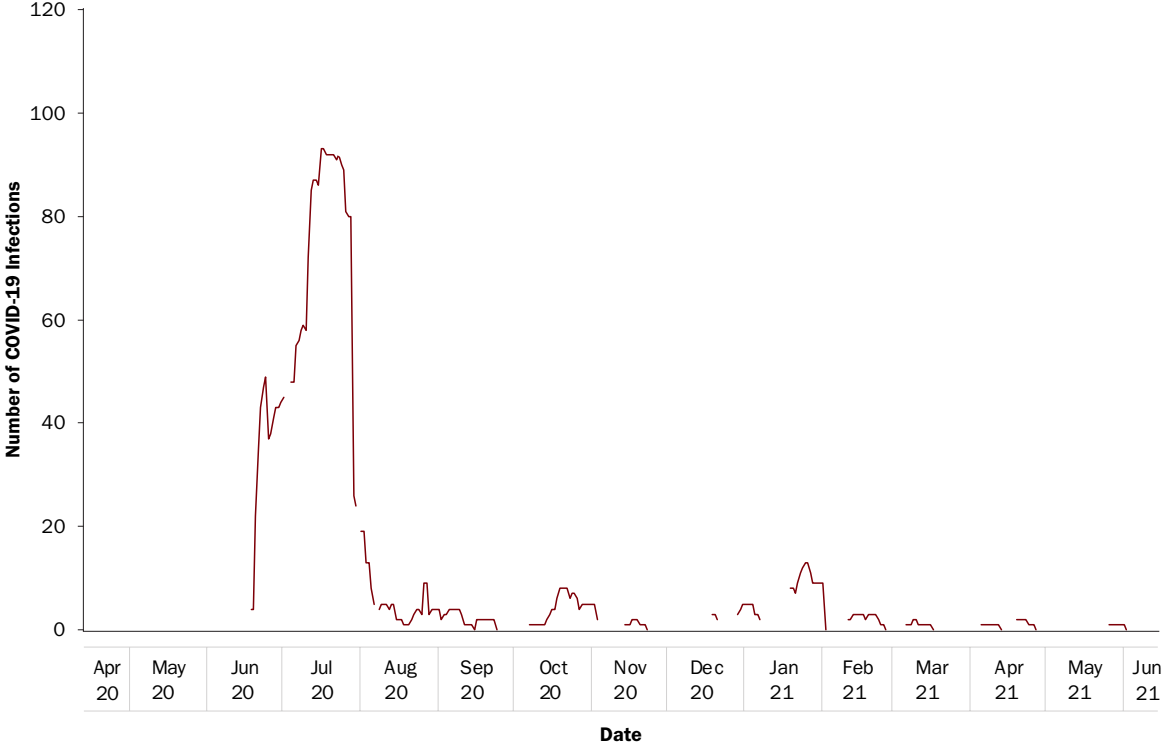


Figure 5: Travis County Jail Daily Covid-19 Infections

Reporting Rate = 55%

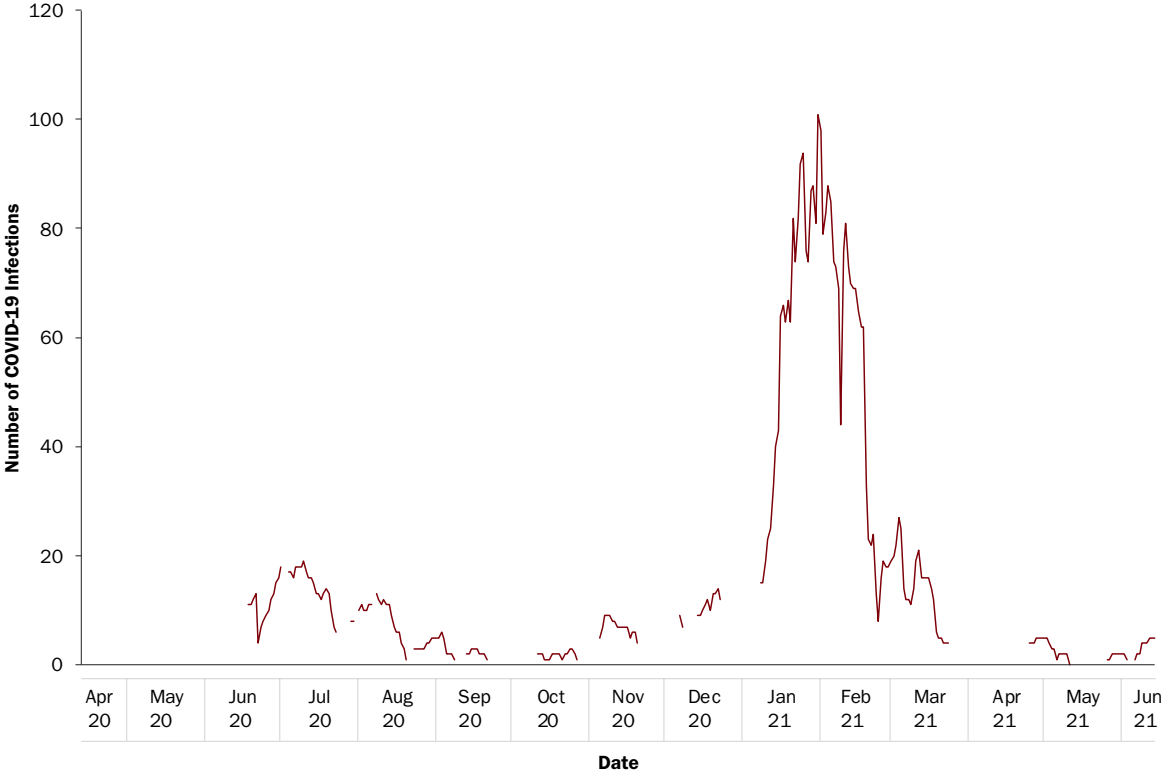
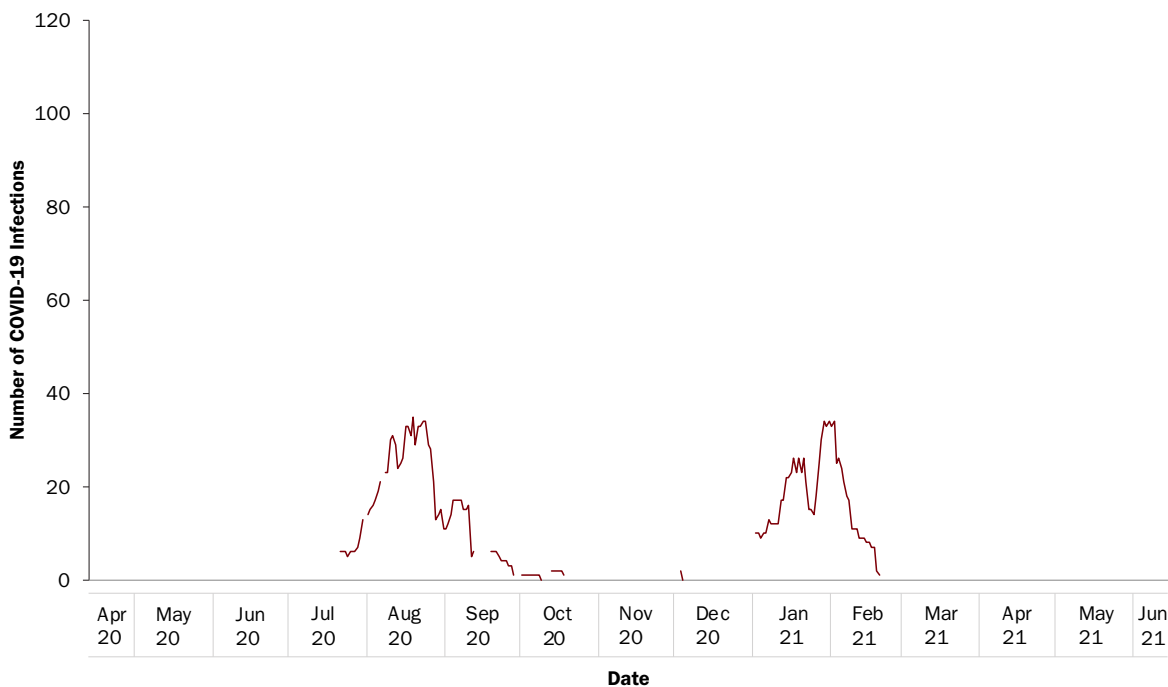


Figure 6: Williamson County Jail Daily Covid-19 Infections

Reporting Rate = 28%



Source: Texas Commission on Jail Standards

Note: Texas Appleseed began collecting daily TCJS Covid-19 reports on April 13, 2020 though TCJS began collecting reports from jails starting on April 9, 2020. There are six dates where Texas Appleseed did not collect data in 2020 (6/4, 6/13, 7/2, 7/3, 7/31, and 8/7).

There were several counties where the infection rate in jail was at times higher than the infection rate in the unincarcerated population.³⁰ In the Caldwell County Jail in August 2020, the rate of Covid-19 infections was approximately 1.79 times higher than the rate in the general community of Caldwell County.³¹ Similarly in the Williamson County Jail in August 2020, the percent of the population infected with Covid-19 was 1.85 times higher than the infection rate of all of Williamson County. Lastly, the Hays County Jail’s infection rate was substantially higher in July and August of 2020 than that of the overall county. In July 2020, the percentage of people incarcerated in the Hays County Jail who were infected with Covid-19 was more than 9 times higher than that of the percentage of people infected in the county as a whole.

³⁰ In an effort to compare the percentage of people who tested positive for Covid-19 in each county over the corresponding time period to the percent of infected general population in each county, confirmed county cases for those same time periods as reported by the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) were reviewed and analyzed (see data available at: <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/AdditionalData.aspx>) The most current population estimates as projected by the United States Census Bureau for this county was also considered (see data available at: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/williamsoncountytexas,traviscountytexas,hayscountytexas,caldwellcountytexas,bastropcountytexas/POPo10220>).

³¹ It is worth noting that the TCJS Covid-19 data for the month of August 2020 for Caldwell County contains data for a little more than half of the 31 days in this month (54.84%).

Table 2: Rate of Covid-19 Infection in Hays County Jail vs. Hays County (2020-2021)

Month Reported	Rate of Infection in Hays County Jail (%)	Rate of Infection in Hays County (%)
July 2020	15.0	1.6
August 2020	3.8	2.2
September 2020	1.0	2.5
November 2020	1.1	2.9
December 2020	0.3	3.7
February 2021	1.3	6.8
June 2021	0.2	8.2

The data from the TCJS reports underscore the importance of regularly reviewing and understanding jail policies on handling the virus. It is important to note TCJS no longer requires county jails to submit daily Covid-19 reports,³² and Covid-19 infections are still occurring in Texas jails.³³ Particularly as new variants are discovered, urgent attention should continue to be given to how detention facilities can reduce the spread of Covid-19.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: HOW HAVE JAILS HANDLED COVID-19?

As stated earlier, the research team obtained policies and procedures for each of the five jails studied through requests under the Texas Public Information Act. All five counties were responsive to the open records requests. Four counties released what appeared to be a comprehensive set of policies. Because of retention practices, however, Hays County was unable to provide a complete set of policies — only those that staff printed out and placed in binders were made available for review.

The Technical Assistance memos and orders from government officials gave county jail leadership advice on how to best fight the coronavirus in their facilities. To determine what the best practices were for the five jails in question, we turned to national experts. In 2020, the CDC began to provide guidance on how jails should mitigate the coronavirus in their facilities, and TCJS recommended that Texas jails follow the CDC guidelines.³⁴ The CDC guidance includes recommendations on operational preparedness, prevention, and management (see CDC recommendations at: <https://bit.ly/39BuQta>). Using the CDC’s recommendations as best practices, we evaluated how jails have managed (1) cleaning/disinfection and hygiene practices; (2) infection control, including personal protection equipment; (3) testing; and (4) medical isolation and quarantine. These CDC recommendations focus mainly on preventing the spread of Covid-19 and managing Covid-19 cases.

In our review of the jail policies, we looked for any policies that followed the best practices as outlined by the

³² As of June 15, 2021

³³ Wiley, K. (2021, August 20). ‘They don’t deserve to die’: Central Texas jail waited 7 months to offer jail population COVID-19 vaccine. KXAN. <https://www.kxan.com/investigations/they-dont-deserve-to-die-central-texas-jail-waited-7-months-to-offer-jail-population-covid-19-vaccine/?ipid=related-recirc>

³⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Interim Guidance on Management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Correctional and Detention Facilities*. (2021, June 9). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/correction-detention/guidance-correctional-detention.html>

CDC. Further, we provided additional evidence of the *implementation* of these policies through our surveys to incarcerated individuals and jail staff. It is possible that we did not receive all of the policies that were adopted; this is particularly true of Hays County. Hays County noted that while they were able to provide most of their policies, a single comprehensive collection of all policies does not exist. There were other policies communicated through email that they were not able to provide without significant effort. They identified at least 85,000 emails that they would need to be reviewed and redacted, a process that would take months. As such, our review of Hays County policies is based solely on the policies that were printed and provided to staff in a binder. This in itself is a practice that does not comport with the CDC operational preparedness recommendations, which include ensuring that staff and incarcerated individuals are informed about policies. When policies are not written down and easy to find, it may impact a jail’s ability to effectively communicate and enforce those policies.³⁵ We can only speak to the policies that were released to us in accordance with the Texas Public Information Act. Therefore, the following checklists denote whether a policy that was provided to us explicitly had language that covered a best practice as recommended by the CDC.

Cleaning/Disinfecting/Hygiene Practices/PPE

CDC Best Practices Review and Results.

The CDC recommended that jails provide no-cost access to masks, soap, running water and hand drying machines or disposable paper towels, tissues, and if possible, alcohol-based hand sanitizer.³⁶ The recommendations encouraged reinforcing proper hand washing, and cough and sneeze etiquette. Additionally, the CDC recommended that someone at the facility clean high-touch surfaces once a day, and more frequently if there is a high transmission rate of Covid-19, and to disinfect the facility if someone tests positive for Covid-19. TCJS instructed jail administrators to provide incarcerated individuals with supplies to clean “multiple times a day” so that they could wipe down tables, benches, sinks, toilets and phones to curb the spread of Covid-19.³⁷

Policy Review Results.

The following chart (Table 3) denotes whether each county jail had a policy that was related to a CDC best practice around PPE, cleaning, disinfecting, and hygiene practices. **A checkmark indicates there was a relevant policy, but frequency or access varied widely across counties and over time.** See Appendix B for a detailed overview of jail policies and accompanying survey results.

35 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Interim Guidance on Management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Correctional and Detention Facilities*. (2021, June 9). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/correction-detention/guidance-correctional-detention.html#Preparedness>

36 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Interim Guidance on Management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Correctional and Detention Facilities*. (2021, June 9). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/correction-detention/guidance-correctional-detention.html>

37 Texas Commission on Jail Standards. (2020, March 17). *Technical Assistance Memorandum Re: COVID-19 General Recommendations*. https://www.tcjs.state.tx.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/TA_MEMO-COVID-19_General_Recommendations.pdf

Table 3: County Jail Policies Checklist: PPE/Cleaning/Disinfecting/Hygiene Practices

CDC Best Practices	Bastrop	Caldwell	Hays	Travis	Williamson
Access to masks	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Access to soap and running water	✓		✓	✓	
Access to paper towels, tissues					
Access to hand sanitizer, disinfectant	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cleaning facilities policy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Encourage good hygiene etiquette (i.e., hand washing, covering sneezes)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Incarcerated Individuals' Survey Results.

The results from our survey of people in jail flagged several issues in cleaning, disinfecting, and hygiene practices. Caldwell, Hays and Williamson County incarcerated individuals reported this as one of their top concerns. In open-ended responses in Caldwell County, 19% of people who submitted open-ended responses described problems in obtaining cleaning products and issues with access to clean water and functioning plumbing.

While a majority of respondents across most counties indicated that they had easy access to and enough soap, 53% of jailed individuals in Williamson County reported limited access and limited supply of soap. Several people wrote that soap was taken away at one point because incarcerated individuals were using too much. Of those who submitted open-ended responses, 27% of Williamson County respondents described problems in obtaining cleaning products or about the overall cleanliness of the jail. There were many reports of routinely asking and/or begging for more cleaning supplies, but not receiving them.

Table 4: Incarcerated Individuals' Survey Question: During your time in jail, have you had easy access to and enough soap?

Response	Bastrop County n = 78	Caldwell County n = 26	Hays County n = 46	Travis County n = 832	Williamson County n = 249
Yes	54%	54%	59%	62%	47%
No	45%	46%	37%	34%	53%
NA/No Response	1%	0%	4%	4%	0%

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Additionally, incarcerated individuals indicated concerns about how frequently jail staff would clean common areas, with only 18% of incarcerated individuals agreeing that jail staff consistently cleaned common areas in Williamson County, 19% in Caldwell County, and 26% in Hays County.

In many instances, responses from incarcerated individuals differed than responses from jail staff members.

Table 5: Incarcerated Individuals’ Survey Question: During your time in jail, have jail staff consistently cleaned common areas?

Response	Bastrop County n = 78	Caldwell County n = 26	Hays County n = 46	Travis County n = 832	Williamson County n = 249
Yes	44%	19%	26%	49%	18%
No	56%	73%	65%	46%	82%
NA/No Response	0%	8%	8%	6%	0%

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Jail Staff Survey Results.

Unlike incarcerated individuals, most jail staff indicated that cleaning was one of the primary things their jails did right during this time. This difference in reporting may be due to the time lag between the distribution of incarcerated individuals who received and returned their surveys before jail staff surveys were distributed and returned, but the significant contrast is worth noting. Employees also indicated that cleaning common areas was always or most of the time done by their co-workers (63% for ‘always’ in Hays County, 43% for ‘most of the time’ in Travis County, and 55% for ‘most of the time’ in Williamson County). Additionally, employees indicated that they had always seen their co-workers providing cleaning supplies (69% in Hays County, 42% in Travis County, and 46% in Williamson County).

In terms of access to cleaning supplies, most employees indicated that incarcerated individuals were able to access cleaning supplies upon request (with 81% in Hays County, 73% in Travis County, and 87% in Williamson County agreeing that incarcerated individuals had access to cleaning supplies upon request). Open-ended responses were in line with quantitative feedback, especially in Williamson County, as increasing cleaning was the second most cited process (quarantining was first) jail staff noted as most successful during this time.

“They’ve made cleaning supplies readily available more so than previously.”

– Williamson County Jail Staff

Table 6: Jail Staff Survey Question: How frequently do you see your fellow co-workers cleaning common areas?

Response	Hays County n = 16	Travis County n = 120	Williamson County n = 91
Not at all	0%	2%	0%
Rarely	0%	14%	18%
Most of the time	19%	43%	55%
Always	63%	23%	22%
No response	19%	18%	5%

Note: No responses were received from jail staff in Bastrop or Caldwell counties. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table 7: Jail Staff Survey Question: How frequently do you see your fellow co-workers providing cleaning supplies?

Response	Hays County n = 16	Travis County n = 120	Williamson County n = 91
Not at all	0%	4%	1%
Rarely	0%	5%	9%
Most of the time	13%	31%	40%
Always	69%	42%	46%
No response	19%	18%	4%

Note: No responses were received from jail staff in Bastrop or Caldwell counties. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table 8: Jail Staff Survey Question: Are incarcerated individuals able to access cleaning supplies upon request?

Response	Hays County n = 16	Travis County n = 120	Williamson County n = 91
Yes	81%	73%	87%
No	0%	3%	1%
I don't know	0%	6%	8%
No response	19%	18%	4%

Note: No responses were received from jail staff in Bastrop or Caldwell counties. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Infection Control, Including PPE

CDC Best Practices Review and Results.

The CDC recommended that masks be no-cost and that reusable fabric masks be laundered regularly.³⁸ Additionally, the CDC recommended that jail staff and incarcerated individuals have access to PPE including surgical masks, N95 respirators, eye protection, disposable medical gloves, and disposable gowns. The CDC also recommended that jail administrators implement social distancing strategies where possible.

Policy Review Results.

The following chart denotes whether each county jail had a policy that was related to a CDC best practice around infection control, including PPE. **A checkmark indicates there was a relevant policy, but frequency or access varied widely across counties and over time.** See Appendix B for a detailed overview of jail policies and accompanying survey results.

Table 9: County Jail Policies Checklist: Infection Control, including PPE

CDC Best Practices	Bastrop	Caldwell	Hays	Travis	Williamson
Access to masks that are either dispersed frequently (if disposable) or laundered regularly (if fabric)			✓	✓	✓
Access to PPE: surgical masks, N95 respirators, eye protection, medical gloves, disposable gowns	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social distancing policy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Incarcerated Individuals' Survey Results.

Most incarcerated individuals indicated that they had been given access to a face mask or shield during their time in jail. Responses varied for whether jail staff used face masks or shields (see Table 11); 73% of incarcerated individuals in Bastrop County indicated jail staff wore face masks or shields, whereas fewer individuals in Caldwell and Hays counties indicated jail staff wore face masks or shields.

³⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Interim Guidance on Management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Correctional and Detention Facilities.* (2021, June 9). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/correction-detention/guidance-correctional-detention.html>

Table 10: Incarcerated Individuals’ Survey Question: During your time in jail, have you been given protection equipment such as a face mask or face shield?

Response	Bastrop County n = 78	Caldwell County n = 26	Hays County n = 46	Travis County n = 832	Williamson County n = 249
Yes	82%	62%	83%	86%	84%
No	18%	38%	11%	10%	15%
NA/No Response	0%	0%	6%	4%	1%

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table 11: Incarcerated Individuals’ Survey Question: Are jail staff using masks or face shields?

Response	Bastrop County n = 78	Caldwell County n = 26	Hays County n = 46	Travis County n = 832	Williamson County n = 249
Yes	73%	27%	33%	55%	59%
No	5%	12%	15%	5%	8%
Sometimes	22%	58%	50%	33%	32%
NA/No Response	0%	4%	2%	6%	1%

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

In their open-ended responses, incarcerated individuals in Caldwell County repeatedly referenced a lack of appropriate PPE. In Williamson County, the most common problem identified was lack of clean or new PPE, an issue that was raised by 35% of respondents who responded to open-ended questions. The most prevalent complaint was that incarcerated individuals were only given one disposable mask that was not regularly replaced. Respondents in Williamson County said they were not given a new mask for 30 to 50 days at times, and if they did not wear a mask — even if it was soiled — disciplinary action was taken. One person in Williamson County noted that incarcerated individuals were not issued masks until the summer of 2020. Several individuals noted that Williamson County was going to initially charge for masks until media coverage.

Jail Staff Survey Results.

The results from our survey of jail staff indicated that their co-workers frequently wore masks, with respondents indicating that their co-workers wore masks most of the time (63% in Hays County, 45% in Travis County, and 52% in Williamson County).

Table 12: Jail Staff Survey Question: How frequently do you see your fellow co-workers wearing masks?

Response	Hays County n = 16	Travis County n = 120	Williamson County n = 91
Not at all	0%	0%	0%
Rarely	6%	3%	1%
Most of the time	63%	45%	52%
Always	13%	33%	43%
No response	19%	18%	4%

Note: No responses were received from jail staff in Bastrop or Caldwell counties. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

The most common types of PPE that survey participants used were face masks, though responses indicated high usage of other types of PPE, including gloves, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant. Across all three counties, the least commonly used type of PPE were face shields. Several participants indicated they were given additional forms of PPE not listed in the survey, such as biohazard suits and gowns.

Table 13: Jail Staff Survey Question: What types of personal protective equipment have you had regular access to? Select all that apply.

Response	Hays County n = 16	Travis County n = 120	Williamson County n = 91
Masks	94%	85%	92%
Shields	56%	53%	38%
Gloves	94%	83%	85%
Hand Sanitizer	88%	82%	88%
Disinfectant	88%	78%	75%
Other	31%	13%	5%
No response	6%	15%	8%

Note: No responses were received from jail staff in Bastrop or Caldwell counties.

Most jail staff indicated that incarcerated individuals had access to masks (81% in Travis and Hays counties, and 92% in Williamson County). When asked how frequently masks are provided, responses varied from daily, once a week, to whenever masks were damaged or soiled. In Hays County, there were 13 responses (81%) to the question of how frequently masks were provided to incarcerated individuals. The most frequent response

in Hays was once a week (77%) followed by upon request (23%). In Travis County, there were 84 responses (70%) to the question. The most frequent response was daily or almost once a day (45%), followed by unsure or unknown (20%), and upon request (15%). Respondents also noted that incarcerated individuals could receive masks as needed (8%), once a week (7%), or upon intake (4%). In Williamson County, there were 81 responses (89%) to the question. The most frequent response was upon request (43%), followed by unsure or unknown (17%), and when the mask was defective, used, or damaged (14%). Additionally, respondents noted that incarcerated individuals could receive masks as needed (12%), once a week (5%), or daily (5%).³⁹

Twenty-six percent of Williamson County jail staff who answered open-ended questions noted that Williamson County had done an excellent job of providing and using PPE. However, one of the primary causes of stress noted by jail staff who answered open-ended questions in Travis, Williamson, and Hays Counties was wearing masks for extended periods of time and problems with incarcerated individuals' compliance — not wearing masks when told to do so.

Testing

CDC Best Practices Review and Results.

The CDC recommended that jails suspend co-pays for medical care for incarcerated people.⁴⁰ Additionally, the CDC recommended conducting coronavirus tests on individuals who:

- had symptoms of Covid-19,
- were exposed to someone who tested positive for Covid-19, or
- previously tested positive for Covid-19.

The CDC also recommended that jail staff screen every individual for symptoms upon intake, and perform periodic coronavirus tests on various samples of individuals (e.g., individuals being processed for intake or individuals who are being transferred).

Policy Review Results.

The following chart (Table 14) denotes whether each county jail had a policy that was related to a CDC best practice around testing. **A checkmark indicates there was a relevant policy, but frequency or access varied widely across counties and over time.** See Appendix B for a detailed overview of jail policies and accompanying survey results

39 Note: respondents could have more than one theme listed in their response; each response was coded for multiple themes (e.g., if an individual responded that masks were provided “daily and upon request,” it would be coded as both daily and upon request).

40 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Interim Guidance on Management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Correctional and Detention Facilities.* (2021, June 9). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/correction-detention/guidance-correctional-detention.html>

Table 14: County Jail Policies Checklist: Testing

CDC Best Practices	Bastrop	Caldwell	Hays	Travis	Williamson
Suspension of co-pays for medical care for incarcerated individuals				✓	
Conducting coronavirus tests on individuals who had symptoms of Covid-19			✓	✓	✓
Conducting coronavirus tests on individuals who were exposed to someone who tested positive for Covid-19			✓	✓	✓
Conducting coronavirus tests on individuals who had tested positive for Covid-19			✓	✓	
Screen individuals for symptoms upon intake	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Screen and test a sample of individuals	✓		✓	✓	

Incarcerated Individuals’ Survey Results.

A majority of incarcerated individuals in all counties indicated that they were not given a Covid-19 test if they had asked for one. In fact, testing was a common issue raised in open-ended responses from incarcerated individuals in at least three county jails. In Bastrop County, 23% of respondents to open-ended questions described problems with getting a test, with one individual describing issues with quarantining and separations due to new arrivals. In Caldwell County, 15% of respondents to open-ended questions noted they had not received a Covid test. In Travis County, 15% of respondents to open-ended questions said that they had not been tested, with several noting they’d asked for tests. Lastly, in Williamson County, 10% of respondents to open-ended questions reported issues with asking for, but not receiving a Covid test. Two mentioned family members that were working on their behalf; another mentioned that the jail was initially charging inmates for the test.

When asked whether they had been tested for Covid-19 while in the jail, responses ranged from 19% of respondents in Caldwell County to 76% of respondents in Hays County indicating that they had been tested.⁴¹ Additionally, incarcerated individuals varied in their response to whether they had been exposed to someone who had Covid-19 or had Covid-19 symptoms, ranging from 16% of respondents in Travis County to 76% of respondents in Hays County indicating that they had.

⁴¹ It is important to note the surveys to individuals incarcerated in Caldwell County were distributed nearly three months earlier than surveys to individuals incarcerated in Hays County.

Table 15: Incarcerated Individuals' Survey Question: During your time in jail, have you experienced COVID-19 symptoms (cough, fever, difficulty breathing) or been exposed to someone who had COVID-19 symptoms?

Response	Bastrop County n = 78	Caldwell County n = 26	Hays County n = 46	Travis County n = 832	Williamson County n = 249
Yes	29%	31%	76%	16%	47%
No	44%	31%	15%	54%	31%
Unsure	27%	38%	7%	26%	21%
NA/No Response	0%	0%	2%	4%	0%

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table 16: Incarcerated Individuals' Survey Question: During your time in jail, have you been tested for COVID-19?

Response	Bastrop County n = 78	Caldwell County n = 26	Hays County n = 46	Travis County n = 832	Williamson County n = 249
Yes	37%	19%	76%	34%	25%
No	59%	81%	20%	62%	75%
NA/No Response	4%	0%	4%	4%	0%

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table 17: Incarcerated Individuals' Survey Question: If you asked for a COVID-19 test were you given a test?

Response	Bastrop County n = 78	Caldwell County n = 26	Hays County n = 46	Travis County n = 832	Williamson County n = 249
Yes	14%	15%	30%	23%	13%
No	74%	85%	57%	53%	77%
NA/No Response	12%	0%	13%	24%	10%

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Jail Staff Survey Results.

Jail employees in Travis County and Williamson County indicated that jail staff were not being tested for Covid-19 in the jail. In Hays County, most respondents indicated that employees were tested at the onset of

symptoms. Open-ended responses to the frequency of jail employees being tested revealed several themes. Most common among the responses were that testing occurred at the onset of symptoms and at the employee’s own discretion — with some noting that employees were tested outside of the jail. Others mentioned they weren’t getting tested but were being screened for symptoms, such as temperature taking.

Table 18: Jail Staff Survey Question: How frequently are jail employees being tested for Covid-19?

Response	Hays County n = 16	Travis County n = 120	Williamson County n = 91
Daily	6%	6%	5%
Weekly	0%	2%	1%
Monthly	0%	1%	0%
Other (open-ended)	75%	35%	38%
They are not testing	13%	44%	48%
No response	6%	13%	7%

Note: No responses were received from jail staff in Bastrop or Caldwell counties. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table 19: Jail Staff Survey Question: Open-ended response themes to frequency of COVID-19 tests

Themes	Hays County n = 12	Travis County n = 42	Williamson County n = 35
Upon exposure	0%	12%	0%
Upon request	17%	0%	6%
At onset of symptoms	58%	19%	26%
As needed	8%	7%	6%
At own discretion/ voluntarily	0%	33%	11%
Multiple times a week	0%	2%	0%
Other screening measures (e.g., temperature checks)	0%	12%	29%
Miscellaneous/ unknown	17%	14%	23%

Note: Percentages were calculated out of total responses to open-ended questions. Responses were coded as miscellaneous/unknown if response was unrelated to the question (e.g., how frequently incarcerated individuals were tested) or if response was unsure/don’t know. We did not receive responses from jail staff in Bastrop or Caldwell counties. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

When asked whether people incarcerated were getting tested for Covid-19 when they should be, most employees indicated that they were.

Table 20: Jail Staff Survey Question: Are incarcerated individuals getting tested for COVID-19 when you think they should be?

Response	Hays County n = 16	Travis County n = 120	Williamson County n = 91
Yes	81%	63%	63%
No	0%	6%	4%
I don't know	0%	13%	29%
No response	19%	18%	4%

Note: No responses were received from jail staff in Bastrop or Caldwell counties. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Medical Isolation and Quarantine

CDC Best Practices Review and Results.

Lastly, the CDC recommended that individuals who test positive for Covid-19 are placed in medical isolation.⁴² That type of confinement should be different from solitary confinement in that individuals in medical isolation should still have privileges and regular contact with medical service providers. If there are groups of individuals who test positive (or are exposed to others who test positive), then isolating (or quarantining) individuals as a group is recommended by the CDC, though with limited movement to other areas of the facility, and requiring social distancing when possible. In addition, they recommended that staff who work in proximity to individuals who test positive for Covid-19 also limit their movement to other areas of the facility.

If someone was exposed to an individual who tested positive for Covid-19, the CDC recommended that the person who was exposed to quarantine for 14 days. Ideally, the CDC recommended that individuals are quarantined separately, though they do provide guidance for quarantines as a cohort. In these instances, the CDC recommends housing those that have tested positive in the same pod, but not in the same cell. Their least preferred method of group quarantines allow for shared housing, though they emphasize the need to limit movement to other areas in the facility and to maintain social distancing at all times possible. While in quarantine, the CDC recommended that individuals are screened for symptoms and that staff limit their movement to other areas of the facility. The CDC also recommends that jails may quarantine incoming individuals for 14 days before moving them to the general population.

⁴² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Interim Guidance on Management of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Correctional and Detention Facilities.* (2021, June 9). <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/correction-detention/guidance-correctional-detention.html>

Policy Review Results.

The following chart denotes whether each county jail had a policy that was related to a CDC best practice around medical isolation and quarantine. **A checkmark indicates there was a relevant policy, but frequency or access varied widely across counties and over time.** See Appendix B for a detailed overview of jail policies and accompanying survey results.

Table 21: County Jail Policies Checklist: Medical Isolation and Quarantine

CDC Best Practices	Bastrop	Caldwell	Hays	Travis	Williamson
Medical isolation for incarcerated individuals who test positive	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Medical isolation that includes medical care		✓		✓	✓
Quarantine for 14 days for individuals exposed to someone who tested positive for Covid-19	✓		✓	✓	✓
Staff limit movement to other areas of facility			✓		

Incarcerated Individuals' Survey Results.

The percentage of incarcerated individuals who said they had tested positive for Covid-19 during their time in jail ranged from 4% in Travis County to 35% in Hays County. Of the individuals who tested positive for Covid-19, a majority indicated that they were not given medical treatment if they tested positive, with the exception of Caldwell County. There, most indicated that they had been given medical care (however, there were only 4 individuals in Caldwell County in our survey who had tested positive for Covid-19).

Table 22: Incarcerated Individuals' Survey Question: During your time in jail, have you tested positive for COVID-19?

Response	Bastrop County n = 78	Caldwell County n = 26	Hays County n = 46	Travis County n = 832	Williamson County n = 249
Yes	6%	15%	35%	4%	12%
No	87%	77%	61%	89%	82%
NA/No Response	6%	8%	4%	7%	6%

Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table 23: Incarcerated Individuals’ Survey Question: During your time in jail, were you given medical treatment if you tested positive and felt sick?

Response	Bastrop County n = 5	Caldwell County n = 4	Hays County n = 16	Travis County n = 32	Williamson County n = 29
Yes	40%	75%	19%	38%	17%
No	60%	25%	63%	63%	79%
NA/No Response	0%	0%	19%	0%	3%

Note: Percentages calculated out of total individuals who indicated that they had tested positive for Covid-19. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

When someone tests positive for Covid-19, best practices are for them to be placed in quarantine. This is where we heard the most problems occurred, based on respondents from all five facilities. For instance, in Hays County, 44% of respondents who answered open-ended questions cited the lack of, or limited quarantining of individuals with Covid-19, as their primary concern. Little or no precautions were cited by multiple individuals, even when jail staff knew a person had tested positive. Additionally, 28% of Hays County respondents to open-ended questions described very little or no medical care of all conditions including Covid-19 — some noted nursing staff arriving days later to check on a person with symptoms. A similar theme was expressed in Williamson County as well, with 18% of respondents to open-ended questions who discussed issues with jail quarantine procedures.

In the open-ended responses, quarantine practices fell into three categories — the process of how people were quarantined when first coming into the jail, what happened once people tested positive for Covid-19, and quarantine lockdowns that led to the loss of privileges. Incarcerated individuals in Williamson County who answered open-ended responses cited as one of their top concerns with several individuals the loss of privileges due to quarantine such as going to church and recreational time. In Travis County, the most frequently cited problem among incarcerated individuals who responded to open-ended responses (22%) was being locked down for 15-18 hours a day. Individuals cited multiple times on limited recreation time, inability to attend religious services, and missing visits with family members.

A Mother's Story

One woman incarcerated in the Travis County Jail corresponded with the research team after she received our survey. In her letter, sent November 23, 2020, the young woman wrote that she was “currently 7 ½ months pregnant. I think that it is the most selfish, dangerous, and inconsiderate thing that the justice system/government could possibly do by even allowing pregnant women to enter any jail facilities under such conditions as covid 19.” She went on to say that her baby was not developing as well as she should have, “due to lack of proper care and nutrition.” Four weeks later, she wrote back, worried about giving birth to a baby and then returning to the jail alone. “The fact that there is such a lack of compassion towards the possibility of having to come back after having my baby and missing out on two months of her life, is sickening. How heartless this system is to so easily separate a newborn from their mother?” The research team connected the young woman and her mother with Texas Jail Project to get the young woman out of jail. She later gave birth to a healthy baby outside of jail.

Jail Staff Survey Results.

Travis County Jail staff indicated that they adequately quarantined individuals entering the jail and appropriately used isolation units if someone presented symptoms. Williamson County Jail staff reported that there was nothing they could have done better with one jail staff noting the exception of moving people sooner that were Covid positive. Generally, across all counties, employees indicated that they thought that incarcerated individuals received adequate care during the pandemic.

Table 24: Jail Staff Survey Question: Has the jail been providing adequate care to incarcerated individuals during the coronavirus pandemic?

Response	Hays County n = 16	Travis County n = 120	Williamson County n = 91
Yes	81%	73%	82%
No	0%	2%	3%
I don't know	0%	7%	8%
No response	19%	18%	7%

Note: No responses were received from jail staff in Bastrop or Caldwell counties. Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Ten employees in Travis County and six employees in Williamson County indicated that they had witnessed instances where more medical care was warranted than what was provided. Three respondents in Travis County stated that there were issues with the medical team, with some noting that the medical team seemed reluctant or cold. Two respondents noted issues with cleaning and clearing out of quarantine. Additionally, one respondent noted that employees were told to come into work even when they were exposed to Covid. In Williamson County, employees also noted issues with the medical team — particularly with small staffing of the medical team and that incarcerated individuals with Covid were being treated at the same time as all other medical issues. Additionally, one respondent noted that quarantines had stopped, and another noted issues with transportation of incarcerated individuals. Lastly one response indicated that employees were told to come to work even when exposed to Covid-19.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: HOW COULD JAILS IMPROVE THEIR RESPONSE TO COVID-19?

Transparency and Clarity of Policies.

Policies must be continually reviewed and revised as the CDC continues to evolve best practices. However, this can mean that the up-to-date policies aren't known to or understood by jail staff and people in jail. This issue was made clear to us by the sheer volume of policies: we received hundreds of pages of policies from each county as counties were forced to adapt to changes in what was known about how the virus is transmitted. In fact, jail staff in Travis and Hays counties commented that unclear and changing policies were a source of stress at work. Notably, Travis County had the most complete and clear policies of all the counties that we requested information from, and yet it was still listed as a source of stress for jail staff. As mentioned, in Hays County, while the policies were supposed to have been printed out and made accessible to all staff, the binders of policies were incomplete.

Additionally, most counties did not adopt policies that directly reflected several best practices. For instance, Caldwell and Bastrop counties lacked explicit policies related to Covid-19 testing and jail staff movement. **Jail administrators should work to make current policies clear and concise to both jail staff and people in jail by posting them in the jail. Additionally, information about how the jail is handling Covid-19 should be transparent and easily accessible to the community, and should be consistently reviewed.**

“Before being moved to a bigger tank, I was in close quarters with COVID-19 positive inmates for 6 months and only those inmates were allowed to be tested. When attempting to talk to rank about moving positive inmates out of the tank, they made it clear “It was up to us to take care of ourselves.” As far as sanitation it was consistent for about a month and after that it was only a priority when they were able to do so. The inmates were also not made aware of any other precautions the jail was taking for covid-19 We were always told the same thing with no updates as if it were scripted.”

– Hays County Incarcerated Individual

“Its just been stressful & frustrating specially to not know whats going on. Not to mention the extra hours in the room, the isolation creates more anxiety. Please give us more time out.”

– Travis County Incarcerated Individual

Better Cleaning Policies.

One issue that was continuously raised in our surveys of people in jail were issues with cleaning. In all counties, fewer than half of those surveyed indicated that jail staff consistently cleaned common areas. In Caldwell and Williamson counties, people in jail noted that access to soap and problems accessing cleaning supplies were issues. **Jail administration should regularly provide soap and cleaning supplies, free of charge.**

“Getting cleaning supplies for the pod is like pulling teeth.”

– Williamson County Incarcerated Individual

“Staff is not cleaning nor giving us hand sanitizer or mask all the time.”

– Travis County Incarcerated Individual

Frequency of Replacing Face Masks.

Only some of the counties surveyed reported policies related specifically to the frequency that face masks should be replaced. Only Hays and Travis counties had masking policies that included replacing masks daily or twice a week. Williamson County’s policy stipulated that masks that are damaged or soiled will be replaced; however, people in jail noted that they sometimes had to wear a mask for 30-50 days at a time. As noted by jail staff, masks were made available upon request — placing the onus on people in jail to obtain new masks. **Masks should be frequently replaced, especially if damaged or soiled, and jail staff should consistently provide masks to people in jail.**



“Why do we have 2 wear masks if we don’t get exposed 2 covid,
we don’t leave! The guards do!!!”

–Travis County Incarcerated Individual



Access to Covid-19 Tests.

The policies related to Covid-19 testing were generally unclear about the frequency and availability of the tests. Travis County had clear guidelines and flowcharts indicating who receives a test and when, but other counties did not explicitly state when incarcerated individuals could request a test and when they would be given one. Many of the counties did not have a policy related to testing a sampling of individuals who are incarcerated, or separating individuals who are at high risk of contracting Covid-19. **Jail administrators should adopt relevant policies and make these policies clear so that it is understood when people in jail can request and obtain a Covid-19 test.**



“Scary! Not knowing
if I’ll contract the virus
and die in here.”

– Travis County
Incarcerated Individual



“Worrying about catching it from
co-workers who do not fully
participate in CDC and jail guidelines.”

– Williamson County
Jail Staff



Fees Charged for Medical Care.

Travis County was the only county we surveyed that explicitly had a policy to waive all medical fees related to Covid-19 or the flu, though some people in jail still noted issues with the lack or high cost of medical care. While there was no relevant policy in Williamson County, incarcerated individuals there said that they had to pay for things like Tylenol and cough suppressants, and had to pay \$40 to see a doctor. Bastrop, Caldwell, and Hays counties did not have explicit policies related to waiving medical fees. **In order to ensure that people incarcerated in jails are receiving good medical care that would further reduce the risk of spreading Covid-19 in the jails and to the community, jail administrators should immediately make sure to waive all medical fees.**

“Everyone is getting sick around me. No one is getting treated for symptoms. They charge for cold busters and aspirins. I ask officers for a covid-19 test and they brush me off.”

- Williamson County Incarcerated Individual

Access to Medical Care.

On top of not having medical fees waived, people in jail noted that access to quality medical care was lacking at all jails, and at least 16 jail staff noted that they had witnessed instances where more medical care was warranted than what was provided. Individuals who have underlying health issues are more susceptible to getting severely ill and are at a higher risk of dying from Covid-19; therefore, the treatment of those health issues in conjunction with needed treatment for Covid-19 is absolutely necessary. **Jail staff should immediately make sure that people incarcerated are able to receive timely medical care for both treatment of Covid-19 and treatment of other health issues.**

“Worst experience of my life thrown in pod w 23hr lockdown some were having 105 temps - fever and never were admitted to hospital nor a Dr.”

- Williamson County Incarcerated Individual

Issues with Quarantine.

By far, one of the most common concerns we received from people in jail was how quarantines were used in jails. These concerns included that individuals who tested positive were not quarantined, as was noted in Hays County; and that quarantine meant a complete loss of privileges, as noted in Travis and Williamson counties. People in jail reported being locked down for 15-18 hours a day with limited recreation and church time. **Jail administrators should identify alternatives to in-person services, such as virtual learning or books, provide letter-writing materials, and waive fees for calls. Additionally, effort should be made to reduce the jail population in order to make quarantines more efficacious.**

“It sucks cause we are locked down 19 to 20 hr a day because they got us coming out a tick a a time trying to prevent covid out break but they corenteen us for 2 week before we are house with general population then we are still basicly locked down wen we should have a say but we have no voice because we are in jail like we are some type of animal.”

– Travis County Jail Incarcerated Individual

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: WHAT ARE THE LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE?

This research has only scratched the surface on what jails are doing and how administrators can improve jail conditions. Each of the topics raised in this report warrants an in-depth review of how policies are being adopted and implemented. Additionally, jail administrators need to consider whether any policies should continue to be implemented as best practices to reduce the transmission of other viruses and health crises in jails.

There were several other issues that were raised in our surveys that we could not cover in this report. For example, we asked people in jail whether they had access to medical treatment for injuries or other illnesses outside of Covid-19, and responses in some counties indicated that access to medical care for other illnesses and injuries was difficult. People in jail noted the high cost of medical care or lack of medical care at all. Future research should examine how jails are managing health care generally during the pandemic, and jail administrators should make sure that individuals in jail are receiving timely and quality medical care.

Similarly, we asked jail staff several questions related to access to food. Most jail staff in Williamson and Hays counties indicated that they weren't sure whether the commissary was fully stocked, though staff noted in all counties that they believed people in jail were receiving an adequate amount of food. Jails limited cafeteria options during the pandemic so future research should examine in more detail whether there were any issues with access to food for incarcerated individuals.

Additionally, we had asked jail staff whether there were any issues with staffing at their facilities. Jail staff indicated that staffing levels were a concern, particularly for guards and medical personnel. Jail staff also noted that staff had to take time off work due to Covid-19. Future research should examine whether jails followed best practices as it relates to jail staffing and identify whether jails should modify their operating policies in order to reduce Covid-19 transmission.

Lastly, the timeline of our research meant that we did not consider or evaluate how jails handled vaccine distribution among individuals who were incarcerated. The coronavirus vaccination became available in Texas in early Spring of 2021, and we were therefore able to ask jail staff some questions about vaccinations. Jail staff indicated that they had been offered the vaccine but had varying levels of inoculation. Additionally, while Travis and Hays counties indicated that the vaccine was available to incarcerated individuals, most responses from jail staff in Williamson County were unsure whether the vaccine was available to incarcerated individuals. Future research might examine the accessibility of vaccines to people who were in Central Texas jails, as well as look at policies that facilities adopted related to vaccinating jail staff. This is especially important to examine, as CDC

research indicates that vaccination reduces severe cases of Covid-19 and should be used as a tool to reduce the spread of the disease in addition to other prevention strategies.⁴³

One issue that has been made clear throughout the Covid-19 pandemic is that jail administrators need to be flexible and adapt policies as needed, as more is learned about the virus and its transmission. Future research should examine how jails efficiently modify policies and procedures while also making jail staff and people in jail aware of the changes.

This research was grant-funded, and we completed our data-gathering in the spring of 2021 to be able to report our analyses. As a result, this research does not consider how jails reacted to the Delta variant, a significantly more contagious strain of the coronavirus that began to spread during the summer. Future research could evaluate how these five facilities responded to the Delta variant specifically, and whether they applied lessons learned in the previous months. However, this type of research would have different limitations, including the aforementioned decision by TCJS to stop collecting Covid-19 infection and death data in June, even amid the Delta variant wave.

43 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, July-August). *Outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 B.1.617.2 (Delta) Variant Infections Among Incarcerated Persons in a Federal Prison - Texas*. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7038e3.htm?s_cid=mm7038e3_x

Appendix A

Figure 7: Survey Administered to People in Jail

Please describe your experience with COVID-19 while you've been in jail. Describa su experiencia con COVID-19 mientras estuvo en la cárcel.



Thank you so much for your participation. Muchísimas gracias por su participación.

Texas Justice Initiative
P.O. Box 164286
Austin, TX 78746

Appendix A

Figure 7: Survey Administered to People in Jail

COVID-19 Survey/Encuesta



Please fill in the answers to the following questions, then put this postcard in the mail.
Por favor, complete las respuestas a las siguientes preguntas, luego pon esta postal en el correo.

About how many days have you been in jail since March? Desde Marzo, ¿aproximadamente cuántos días ha estado en la cárcel?	
What is your age? ¿Cuántos años tienes?	

During your time in jail...Durante su tiempo en la cárcel...

Have you had easy access to and enough soap? ¿Ha tenido acceso fácil y suficiente jabón?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes/Si <input type="checkbox"/> No/No
Have you been given protection equipment such as a face mask or face shield? ¿Le han dado una máscara facial o un protector facial por la cárcel?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes/Si <input type="checkbox"/> No/No
Have jail staff consistently cleaned common areas? ¿El personal de la cárcel ha limpiado constantemente las áreas comunes?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes/Si <input type="checkbox"/> No/No
Have you experienced COVID-19 symptoms (cough, fever, difficulty breathing) or been exposed to someone who had COVID-19 symptoms? ¿Ha experimentado síntomas de COVID-19 (tos, fiebre, dificultad para respirar) o ha estado expuesto a alguien que tenía síntomas de COVID-19?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes/Si <input type="checkbox"/> No/No <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure/No se
Have you been tested for COVID-19? ¿Se le ha hecho la prueba de COVID-19?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes/Si <input type="checkbox"/> No/No
Have you tested positive for COVID-19? ¿Has obtenido resultados positivos para COVID-19?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes/Si <input type="checkbox"/> No/No
Were you given medical treatment if you tested positive and felt sick? ¿Le dieron tratamiento médico si dio positivo y si se sintió enfermo?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes/Si <input type="checkbox"/> No/No

If you asked for a COVID-19 test, were you given a test? Si usted pidió un examen de COVID-19, ¿se le hizo un examen?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes/Si <input type="checkbox"/> No/No
Are jail staff using masks or face shields? ¿Los guardias usan máscaras o protectores faciales?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes/Si <input type="checkbox"/> No/No <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes/A veces
Have you been able to get medical treatment for injuries or other illnesses? ¿Ha podido recibir tratamiento médico por heridas u otras enfermedades?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes/Si <input type="checkbox"/> No/No <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes/A veces

Appendix B
Detailed Policy and Survey Support
Table 25: PPE/Cleaning/Disinfecting/Hygiene Practices

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey support
Access to masks	Bastrop	Staff directed to wear masks when interacting with incarcerated individuals; incarcerated individuals provided masks	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 82% indicated they had been given a face mask or face shield, and 73% indicated jail staff used face masks or face shields
	Caldwell	Staff required to wear masks while on duty; incarcerated individuals are required to wear masks	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 62% indicated they had been given a face mask or face shield during their time in jail, and 58% indicated jail staff sometimes used face masks or face shields
	Hays	Staff given surgical masks; staff instructed to wear masks while on job; incarcerated individuals who are quarantined given masks; incarcerated given 1 cloth mask have a 1:1 replacement; if incarcerated is medically vulnerable, then given KN-95 mask; cloth masks given at intake; staff given N-95 masks; as of May 2021 masks are optional for incarcerated	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 83% indicated they had been given a face mask or face shield during their time in jail and 50% indicated jail staff used face masks or face shields <i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> 76% indicated seeing coworkers wearing masks 'most of the time' or 'always' and 81% indicated that incarcerated individuals had access to masks.
	Travis	Staff required to wear face mask while in workplace; masks given to incarcerated individuals at intake	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 86% indicated they had been given a face mask or face shield during their time in jail and 55% indicated jail staff used face masks or face shields <i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> 78% indicated seeing coworkers wearing masks 'most of the time' or 'always' and 81% indicated that incarcerated individuals had access to masks.
	Williamson	Staff required to wear N95 masks; incarcerated individuals are provided a KN95 mask	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 84% indicated they had been given a face mask or face shield during their time in jail and 59% indicated jail staff used face masks or face shields <i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> 95% indicated seeing their coworkers wearing masks 'most of the time' or 'always' and 92% indicated that incarcerated individuals had access to masks.

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey support
Access to soap and running water	Bastrop	Incarcerated individuals provided 2 bars of soap	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey: 54% indicated they had easy and enough access to soap</i>
	Caldwell	No relevant policy found.	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey: 54% indicated they had easy and enough access to soap. In open-ended responses, 19% of people surveyed described problems in obtaining cleaning products and issues with access to clean water and functioning plumbing.</i>
	Hays	Each dorm equipped with one hand pump soap; incarcerated individuals given bar soap upon request	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey: 59% indicated they had easy and enough access to soap</i>
	Travis	Soap available to incarcerated individuals; weekly soap inventory report	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey: 62% indicated they had easy and enough access to soap</i>
	Williamson	No relevant policy found.	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey: 47% indicated they had easy and enough access to soap. In their open-ended responses, 27% of Williamson County respondents described problems in obtaining cleaning products or about the overall cleanliness of the jail. People in the Williamson County Jail reported very limited or no access to cleaning supplies and soap. Several people in jail noted that soap was taken away at one point because incarcerated individuals were using too much. Additionally, there were many reports of routinely asking and/or begging for more cleaning supplies, but not receiving them.</i>
	Access to paper towels, tissues	Bastrop	No relevant policy found.
Caldwell		No relevant policy found.	
Hays		No relevant policy found.	
Travis		No relevant policy found.	
Williamson		No relevant policy found.	

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey support
<p>Access to hand sanitizer, disinfectant</p>	<p>Bastrop</p>	<p>Staff access hand sanitizer and disinfectant</p>	
	<p>Caldwell</p>	<p>Hand sanitizer provided before visitation</p>	
	<p>Hays</p>	<p>Disinfectant provided at phone and kiosk stations with instructions on how to mix solutions</p>	
	<p>Travis</p>	<p>Soap dispensers and hand gel dispensers available to staff; hand sanitizing stations in high traffic areas</p>	
	<p>Williamson</p>	<p>Hand sanitizer is available at all workstations</p>	
<p>Cleaning facilities policy</p>	<p>Bastrop</p>	<p>Mopping twice a day and disinfecting recreation yards; bottle of cleaner provided per each housing unit; countertops, phones, and work areas cleaned several times daily</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 44% indicated that jail staff consistently cleaned common areas</p>
	<p>Caldwell</p>	<p>Staff told to clean and disinfect frequently</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 19% indicated that jail staff consistently cleaned common areas. In open-ended responses in Caldwell County, 19% described problems in obtaining cleaning products and issues with access to clean water and functioning plumbing.</p>
	<p>Hays</p>	<p>Staff told to disinfect area after each use; incarcerated individuals given cleaning supplies for their areas; housing cleaned once a week; staff told to clean/disinfect workstations upon leave; recreation areas cleaned daily</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 26% indicated that jail staff consistently cleaned common areas</p> <p><i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> 82% indicated seeing fellow coworkers providing cleaning supplies and cleaning common areas 'most of the time' or 'always'. 81% indicated that incarcerated individuals are able to access cleaning supplies upon request.</p>

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey support
Cleaning facilities policy	Travis	<p>Staff told facilities should be cleaned and disinfected routinely; frequent environmental cleaning of “high touch” surfaces; daily cleaning of rooms and laundry; chemical foggers and sprayers for area decontamination</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals’ Survey:</i> 49% indicated that jail staff consistently cleaned common areas</p> <p><i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> 73% indicated seeing fellow coworkers providing cleaning supplies and cleaning common areas ‘most of the time’ or ‘always’. 73% indicated that incarcerated individuals are able to access cleaning supplies upon request.</p>
	Williamson	<p>Housing areas and offices are on a scheduled cleaning and sanitizing; cleaning is performed by incarcerated individuals after meal; common areas sanitized daily; housing units are fogged and cleaned weekly</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals’ Survey:</i> 18% indicated that jail staff consistently cleaned common areas. In open-ended responses, 20% of individuals noted staffing shortages, jail staff not following COVID protocols, or concerns about exposure to infected jail staff. The most common (11%) was jail staff not following CDC recommended procedures such as washing hands or wearing masks.</p> <p><i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> 86% indicated seeing fellow coworkers providing cleaning supplies ‘most of the time’ or ‘always’ and 77% indicated seeing fellow coworkers cleaning common areas ‘most of the time’ or ‘always’. 87% indicated that incarcerated individuals are able to access cleaning supplies upon request.</p>
Encourage good hygiene etiquette (i.e., hand washing, cover sneezes)	Bastrop	<p>Encourage staff to wash hands and disinfect; incarcerated individuals are given written directions on mask wearing; educational materials are posted in facility; upon arrival incarcerated individuals instructed to wash hands</p>	
	Caldwell	<p>Encouraged staff to wash hands frequently</p>	
	Hays	<p>Staff instructed to wash hands frequently; educational materials for how to wear a mask provided to incarcerated individuals; staff provided incarcerated with a COVID-19 patient education document in English and Spanish</p>	

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey support
Encourage good hygiene etiquette (i.e., hand washing, cover sneezes)	Travis	Encouraged to wash hands frequently, use hand sanitizer, coughing and sneezing etiquette; educational materials posted on tablets and videos created for incarcerated individuals	
	Williamson	Staff encouraged to wash hands throughout shift	

Table 26: Infection control, including PPE

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey Support
Access to masks that are either: dispersed frequently (if disposable) or laundered regularly (if fabric masks)	Bastrop	No relevant policy found.	
	Caldwell	No relevant policy found.	
	Hays	Incarcerated individuals given one cloth masks that is replaced twice a week or for general wear and tear; surgical masks distributed at the beginning of each week and at any point after if initially refused	<i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> Out of thirteen open-ended responses (81% total responses), 77% indicated new masks were given to incarcerated individuals once a week and 23% indicated new masks were given upon request.
	Travis	Daily surgical mask exchange for incarcerated individuals	<i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> Out of eighty-four open-ended responses (70% of total responses), 45% indicated new masks were given to incarcerated individuals daily, followed by unsure or unknown (20%), and upon request (15%).

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey Support
<p>Access to masks that are either: dispersed frequently (if disposable) or laundered regularly (if fabric masks)</p>	<p>Williamson</p>	<p>Masks that are damaged or soiled will be replaced; staff masks are rotated daily and allowed to dry; N95s are discarded after 5 uses</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> In Williamson County, the most common problem identified in open-ended responses was lack of PPE, an issue that was raised by 35% of respondents. The most prevalent complaint was that incarcerated individuals were only given one disposable mask that was not regularly replaced. Respondents said they were not given a new mask for 30 to 50 days at times, and if they did not wear a mask – even if it was soiled – disciplinary action was taken. One person noted that incarcerated individuals were not issued masks until the summer of 2020. Several individuals noted that Williamson County was going to initially charge for masks until media coverage.</p> <p><i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> Out of eighty-one open-ended responses (89% of total responses), 43% indicated new masks were given to incarcerated individuals upon request, followed by unsure or unknown (17%), and when the mask was defective, used, or damaged (14%).</p>
<p>Access to PPE: surgical masks, N95 respirators, eye protection, medical gloves, disposable gowns</p>	<p>Bastrop</p>	<p>Incarcerated individuals with a fever are given an N-95</p>	
	<p>Caldwell</p>	<p>Face mask, eye protection, gowns, and gloves provided for medical staff</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> In their open-ended responses, a common theme identified in Caldwell County was a lack of appropriate PPE, cleanliness of jail, and cleaning supply shortages.</p>
	<p>Hays</p>	<p>Staff instructed to wear eye wear, surgical masks; gloves available; staff given N-95 masks</p>	<p><i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> The most common types of PPE that jail staff indicated they had access to were face masks (94%), gloves (94%), hand sanitizer (88%), and disinfectant (88%).</p>
	<p>Travis</p>	<p>N95, CAPR, or PAPR masks, gown, gloves, face shield (or glasses) for medical staff testing for COVID-19; masks, gowns, gloves, and eye protection for staff in isolation units</p>	<p><i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> The most common types of PPE that jail staff indicated they had access to were face masks (85%), gloves (83%), hand sanitizer (82%), and disinfectant (78%).</p>

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey Support
<p>Access to PPE: surgical masks, N95 respirators, eye protection, medical gloves, disposable gowns</p>	<p>Williamson</p>	<p>Staff interacting with individuals who have tested positive or are awaiting results have a suit, gloves, and faceshield; staff interacting with incoming individuals have mask, gloves, and faceshield; incarcerated individuals issued KN95 and trustees given N95</p>	<p><i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> The most common types of PPE that jail staff indicated they had access to were face masks (92%), hand sanitizer (88%), gloves (85%) and disinfectant (75%).</p>
<p>Social distancing policy</p>	<p>Bastrop</p>	<p>Staff encouraged to social distance where possible</p>	
	<p>Caldwell</p>	<p>While on recreation yard incarcerated individuals must social distance</p>	
	<p>Hays</p>	<p>Staff told to social distance whenever possible; some staff transition to working from home; social distancing directed during gatherings and meetings in offices; staff directed to follow social distancing with incarcerated individuals</p>	
	<p>Travis</p>	<p>Encouraged to socially distance where possible</p>	
	<p>Williamson</p>	<p>Staff encouraged to social distance where possible</p>	

Table 27: Testing

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey support
<p>Suspension of co-pays for medical care for incarcerated individuals</p>	<p>Bastrop</p>	<p>No relevant policy found.</p>	
	<p>Caldwell</p>	<p>No relevant policy found.</p>	
	<p>Hays</p>	<p>No relevant policy found.</p>	
	<p>Travis</p>	<p>Waived all medical fees related to Covid-19 or flu</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> In open-ended responses, fifteen percent of individuals reported issues with lack or high cost of medical care.</p>
	<p>Williamson</p>	<p>No relevant policy found.</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> Medical costs (13%) and lack of medical care (12%) were the most prevalent issues in open-ended responses. The cost of drugs included \$1 per pill for pain relievers like Tylenol or cough suppressants. The cost to see a doctor was \$40. Respondents also noted that medical care was “erratic” and lacking not only in the treatment of Covid symptoms, but for all other ailments.</p>
<p>Conducting coronavirus tests on individuals who had symptoms of Covid-19</p>	<p>Bastrop</p>	<p>No relevant policy found.</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 37% indicated they had been tested for Covid-19. 14% indicated they had been given a Covid-19 test if they asked for a test. In open-ended responses, 23% of respondents described problems with getting a test with one individual describing issues with quarantining and separations due to new arrivals and another wondering about accuracy of Covid test.</p>
	<p>Caldwell</p>	<p>No relevant policy found.</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 19% had indicated they had been tested for Covid-19. 15% indicated they had been given a Covid-19 test if they asked for a test. In open-ended responses, 15% noted they had not received a Covid test.</p>

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey support
<p>Conducting coronavirus tests on individuals who had symptoms of Covid-19</p>	<p>Hays</p>	<p>Individuals who experience symptoms of Covid-19 (high fever) are tested and quarantined</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 76% indicated they had been tested for Covid-19. 30% indicated they had been given a Covid-19 test if they asked for a test.</p> <p><i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> In open-ended responses, 58% indicated jail staff are tested at the onset of symptoms, 17% indicated staff are tested upon request. 81% indicated that incarcerated individuals are getting tested for Covid-19 when they think they should be.</p>
	<p>Travis</p>	<p>Screening for individuals presenting symptoms, including Covid-19 swab test</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 34% indicated they had been tested for Covid-19. 23% indicated they had been given a Covid-19 test if they asked for a test. In open-ended responses, 15% of individuals responded that they had not been tested, with several noting they'd asked for tests.</p> <p><i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> 44% indicated that jail staff are not tested for Covid-19, in open-ended responses, 33% indicated jail staff are tested at their own discretion/voluntarily, and 19% indicated jail staff are tested at onset of symptoms. 63% indicated that incarcerated individuals are getting tested for Covid-19 when they think they should be.</p>
	<p>Williamson</p>	<p>Individuals incarcerated who have a fever or other symptoms are tested and quarantined</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 25% indicated they had been tested for Covid-19. 13% indicated they had been given a Covid-19 test if they asked for a test. In open-ended responses, 10% inmates reported issues with asking for, but not receiving a Covid test. Two mentioned family members that were working on their behalf; another mentioned that the jail was initially charging inmates for the test. Additionally, seven people who responded to our survey reported they or other people incarcerated reported Covid symptoms to jail staff but were never tested nor treated.</p> <p><i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> 48% indicated that jail staff are not tested for Covid-19, in open-ended responses, 29% indicated jail staff are subject to other screening measure (e.g., temperature checks), and 26% indicated that jail staff are tested at the onset of symptoms. 63% indicated that incarcerated individuals are getting tested for Covid-19 when they think they should be.</p>

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey support
<p>Conducting coronavirus tests on individuals who were exposed to someone who tested positive for Covid-19</p>	<p>Bastrop</p>	<p>No relevant policy found.</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey: 29% indicated they had experienced Covid-19 symptoms or had been exposed to someone who had Covid-19 symptoms.</i></p>
	<p>Caldwell</p>	<p>No relevant policy found.</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey: 31% indicated they had experienced Covid-19 symptoms or had been exposed to someone who had Covid-19 symptoms.</i></p>
	<p>Hays</p>	<p>Dorm for individuals who have received negative results but have been exposed to someone who tested positive</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey: 76% indicated they had experienced Covid-19 symptoms or had been exposed to someone who had Covid-19 symptoms.</i></p>
	<p>Travis</p>	<p>Incarcerated individuals who report exposure are sent to quarantine and then given Covid-19 swab</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey: 16% indicated they had experienced Covid-19 symptoms or had been exposed to someone who had Covid-19 symptoms.</i></p>
	<p>Williamson</p>	<p>Staff who have come into contact with someone who is known to have Covid-19 are required to notify supervisor</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey: 47% indicated they had experienced Covid-19 symptoms or had been exposed to someone who had Covid-19 symptoms.</i></p>
<p>Conducting coronavirus tests on individuals who had tested positive for Covid-19</p>	<p>Bastrop</p>	<p>No relevant policy found.</p>	
	<p>Caldwell</p>	<p>No relevant policy found.</p>	
	<p>Hays</p>	<p>Dorm for individuals who have tested positive and are awaiting retest</p>	

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey support
<p>Conducting coronavirus tests on individuals who had tested positive for Covid-19</p>	<p>Travis</p>	<p>Tested if negative and showing no symptoms after testing positive and having symptoms</p>	
	<p>Williamson</p>	<p>No relevant policy found.</p>	
<p>Screen individuals for symptoms upon intake</p>	<p>Bastrop</p>	<p>Take temperature of incarcerated individuals and staff; asked screening questions; if an incarcerated person's temperature is high then given an N-95 mask; if jail staff temperature is high then they go home</p>	
	<p>Caldwell</p>	<p>Verbal, visual and temperature screening upon arrival for staff and incarcerated individuals</p>	
	<p>Hays</p>	<p>Conducted Covid-19 screening for incoming individuals including temperature check; if temperature over 100F are encouraged to seek medical attention; intake form has designated levels for non-symptomatic and symptomatic individuals; if identified as medically vulnerable at intake then given a KN-95 mask</p>	
	<p>Travis</p>	<p>Screening at intake for staff and incarcerated individuals including temperature checks; screening for individuals presenting symptoms and individuals exposed to someone who tested positive</p>	

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey support
<p>Screen individuals for symptoms upon intake</p>	<p>Williamson</p>	<p>Temperature of staff is taken daily and temperature of incarcerated individuals are taken twice daily; medical screening for incarcerated and staff; individuals coming into jail have to either take a Covid-19 test or quarantine</p>	
<p>Screen and test a sample of individuals</p>	<p>Bastrop</p>	<p>Take temperature of folks entering and exiting</p>	
	<p>Caldwell</p>	<p>No relevant policy found.</p>	
	<p>Hays</p>	<p>Random temperature checks of people in custody; chronic care in one unit; intake form has designated levels for non-symptomatic and symptomatic individuals; separate housing for symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals</p>	
	<p>Travis</p>	<p>Created a “male protected population unit” and “female protected population” for older inmates (age 65 at first, later to age 60)</p>	
	<p>Williamson</p>	<p>No relevant policy found.</p>	

Table 28: Medical isolation and quarantine

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey support
Medical isolation for incarcerated individuals who test positive	Bastrop	Incarcerated individuals with symptoms (temperature over 100) are isolated and medical staff are notified	
	Caldwell	Individuals testing positive or showing symptoms are isolated	
	Hays	Incarcerated individuals who exhibit symptoms (high fever) are tested and quarantined	
	Travis	Individuals who had symptoms are isolated; Provided separate dishes, utensils, tablets, and headphones	
	Williamson	Individuals who test positive are quarantined	
Medical isolation that includes medical care	Bastrop	No relevant policy found.	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 6% indicated they had tested positive for Covid-19 and 40% of those who tested positive said they were given medical treatment if they tested positive and felt sick.
	Caldwell	For individuals who test positive are given fluids, medicine, and monitored by medical staff	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 15% indicated they had tested positive for Covid-19 and 75% those who tested positive said they were given medical treatment if they tested positive and felt sick.
	Hays	No relevant policy found.	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 35% indicated they had tested positive for Covid-19 and 19% of those who tested positive said they were given medical treatment if they tested positive and felt sick. In open-ended responses, 28% of respondents described very little or no medical care of all conditions including Covid - some noted nursing staff arriving days later to check on a person with symptoms. <i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> 81% indicated that the jail has been providing adequate care to incarcerated individuals during the pandemic.

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey support
<p>Medical isolation that includes medical care</p>	<p>Travis</p>	<p>When individuals are isolated medical providers are alerted; individuals in isolation receive medical care including oral hydration, analgesic/antipyretic; if warranted individuals will be transferred to hospital</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 4% indicated they had tested positive for Covid-19 and 38% of those who tested positive said they were given medical treatment if they tested positive and felt sick.</p> <p><i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> 73% indicated that the jail has been providing adequate care to incarcerated individuals during the pandemic. Ten employees indicated they had witnessed instances where more medical care was warranted than what was provided. Three responses in Travis County stated that there were issues with the medical team, with some noting that the medical team seemed reluctant or cold. Two responses noted issues with cleaning and clearing out of quarantine. Additionally, one response noted that employees were told to come into work even when they were exposed to Covid.</p>
	<p>Williamson</p>	<p>Medical care provided on a 24-hour basis; incarcerated individuals have to take a temperature check twice daily; incarcerated individuals who test positive is checked twice a day for progressing Covid-19 complications; if warranted individuals may be transported to medical facility</p>	<p><i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> 12% indicated they had tested positive for Covid-19 and 17% of those who tested positive said they were given medical treatment if they tested positive and felt sick.</p> <p><i>Jail Staff Survey:</i> 82% indicated that the jail has been providing adequate care to incarcerated individuals during the pandemic. Six employees in Williamson County indicated that they had witnessed instances where more medical care was warranted than what was provided. In Williamson County, employees also noted issues with the medical team – particularly with small staffing of the medical team and that incarcerated individuals with Covid-19 were being treated at the same time as all other medical issues. Additionally, one response noted that quarantines had stopped and another noted issues with transportation of incarcerated individuals. Lastly one response indicated that employees were told to come to work even when exposed to Covid-19.</p>
<p>Quarantine for 14 days for individuals exposed to someone who tested positive for Covid-19</p>	<p>Bastrop</p>	<p>Incoming individuals are quarantined</p>	
	<p>Caldwell</p>	<p>No relevant policy found.</p>	

Best Practice	County	County Policy	Survey support
Quarantine for 14 days for individuals exposed to someone who tested positive for Covid-19	Hays	Staff quarantine policy following testing positive for Covid-19	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> By far the biggest issue in open-ended responses in Hays County noted by 44% of respondents was issues with a lack of or limited quarantining of individuals with Covid. Little or no precautions were cited by multiple individuals, even when jail staff knew a person had tested positive.
	Travis	10-14 day isolation for all new arrestees, who are monitored by medical; isolation for individuals who have been exposed to someone who tested positive	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> In open-ended responses, the most common complaint people in jail had (22%) was that they were being locked down for 15-18 hours a day. The limitation of recreation time, inability to attend religious services, and going outside were all mentioned by several individuals.
	Williamson	Incoming individuals are quarantined for 10 days	<i>Incarcerated Individuals' Survey:</i> In open-ended responses, 18% of respondents discussed issues with jail quarantine procedures. This theme falls into three categories – the process of how people were quarantined when first coming into the jail, what happened once people tested positive for Covid, and a quarantine procedure that led to the loss of privileges. The majority of individuals (12%) in this category talked about the process of being quarantined. Eight individuals talked about the loss of privileges due to quarantine such as going to church and recreational time.
Staff limit movement to other areas of facility	Bastrop	No relevant policy found.	
	Caldwell	No relevant policy found.	
	Hays	Staff scheduled to same area every day to minimize movement	
	Travis	No relevant policy found.	
	Williamson	No relevant policy found.	

