

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-502](#), a report to congressional addressees

Why GAO Did This Study

BOP was responsible for the custody and care of about 129,000 federal inmates in BOP-managed facilities, and employed more than 37,000 staff as of May 2021. Because of confined spaces, the prison population is particularly vulnerable during infectious disease outbreaks, such as COVID-19. About \$620 million has been appropriated to or designated by BOP for COVID-19-related efforts.

GAO was asked to review BOP's approach to responding to COVID-19. This report addresses, among other objectives: (1) BOP's development and updates of COVID-19 guidance; (2) BOP's provision of PPE, COVID-19 tests and vaccines, and infection and fatality rates for inmates and staff; and (3) the impact of COVID-19 on inmates and staff, and the extent to which BOP has incorporated lessons learned into its response.

GAO reviewed BOP policies, data, and other documentation related to the impact of COVID-19 and how BOP addressed it. GAO also conducted non-generalizable interviews of officials from five BOP facilities and one private facility operating under contract with BOP, selected based on inmate infection rates and other factors.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations that BOP evaluate communication of COVID-19 guidance, develop an approach to capture and share best practices and lessons learned; and develop an approach to ensure facilities apply these practices as appropriate. BOP concurred with all three recommendations.

View [GAO-21-502](#). For more information, contact Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or goodwing@gao.gov.

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BUREAU OF PRISONS

BOP Could Further Enhance its COVID-19 Response by Capturing and Incorporating Lessons Learned

What GAO Found

The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) has developed COVID-19 guidance, with input in part from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and periodically updates this guidance, but some BOP staff reported to GAO confusion in how to implement BOP's guidance. In addition, the Department of Justice's Office of Inspector General surveyed BOP staff and reported that of the 28 percent of employees who responded, 59 percent of respondents thought BOP's guidance was not clear. Routinely evaluating how it communicates its COVID-19 guidance to staff, and modifying its approach as needed based on staff feedback, would help BOP ensure that staff can understand and effectively implement the protocols for COVID-19 and any future public health emergency.

As of May 2021, BOP's data showed that:

- BOP obligated nearly \$63 million for personal protective equipment (PPE)—such as masks, hand sanitizers, gloves and COVID-19 testing kits—for staff and inmates.
- 45,660 inmates had tested positive, and 237 inmates had died from the virus. In addition, 6,972 staff members tested positive, with four deaths.
- BOP fully vaccinated about 56 percent of all inmates in BOP-managed facilities (73,050 inmates) and about 50 percent of all staff (19,000 staff)

COVID-19 has affected inmates and staff. For example, inmates faced reduced access to certain programs, services, visitors and facility spaces. For staff, quarantining procedures have resulted in reduced staff availability and increased the use of overtime. BOP has processes, such as teleconferences among BOP officials and facilities inspections, to identify best practices and lessons learned related to its COVID-19 response. However, BOP does not capture or share, bureau-wide, the lessons and practices discussed at its teleconferences, or have an approach for ensuring facilities apply them, as appropriate. Implementing approaches for such actions would help BOP ensure that the lessons and practices it identifies reach all facilities that could benefit from them, and that facilities actively improve their COVID-19 response efforts.

A BOP Facility's Housing Tents for Inmates in Quarantine and Isolation



Source: BOP. | [GAO-21-502](#)