

## COVID-19 in Jails: A Population Excluded and an Approach to Identify and Treat Cases

### *Background*

Jails in Georgia hold about 40,000 persons on any given day. People residing in jails are generally awaiting trial, serving short-term sentences, or transitioning into a prison where they will complete a generally longer sentence.

The ongoing outbreak of COVID-19 first came to Georgia on March 2, 2020. Since, over two thousand cases have occurred across the state and most counties have been affected (Georgia Department of Public Health, 2020).

Because many people are entering and transitioning from Georgia jails daily, amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, there is growing concern that this population is at risk for COVID-19. Few cases have been detected in jails thus far; however, it is thought that little monitoring of COVID-19 has taken place.

### *Research Questions*

This study aims to understand: how many cases of suspected and confirmed COVID-19 are there in Georgia jails presently? And how many cases of COVID-19 are there in each jail for each subsequent week?

In addition to enumerating COVID-19, this study also poses the question of: how many diagnosed and suspect cases are being isolated and how many persons are under quarantine

### *Goals*

By initially monitoring for COVID-19 in jails, this study will attempt to estimate the prevalence of known and suspected cases of COVID-19, and how housing assignments for residents of jails may change in response to the presence of infection in the facility. By following up weekly, outbreaks of COVID-19 within jails can be identified and addressed.

Should COVID-19 be a hidden problem in jails, this documentation of suspect and confirmed cases will serve to advocate for allocation of additional resources to jails. Our study group may partner with the jail partners in requesting additional resources from local, district and state health department authorities as needed, if the jails identify unmet needs. This also study seeks to understand if there are enough isolation locations, if testing is being conducted thoroughly, and if healthcare needs are met.

Finally, this study finally aims to use students as collectors of data and build the capacity of public health students to work in incarceration in the future. It will also assist the jail personnel with finding information on the most up to date, evolving COVID-19 guidelines for jails.