Over 150 Health Experts Urge Cuomo to Release Prisoners at Risk for COVID-19

This includes New York inmates who are older, sick, pregnant or have serious respiratory conditions or compromised immune systems.

April 3, 2020 By Trent Straube

“In the wake of COVID-19, we write you as public and corrections health experts, physicians, and medical professionals, to ask you to grant emergency clemencies to New Yorkers in prison who are older, sick, pregnant, have serious respiratory conditions, or who have otherwise compromised immune systems.”

Thus begins a letter signed by more than 150 specialists—including several HIV and hepatitis experts—and addressed to New York Governor Andrew Cuomo in light of concerns about COVID-19, the potentially lethal disease caused by the novel coronavirus. Currently, New York has more cases and deaths related to the virus than any other state.

To learn more about HIV and COVID-19, read “UPDATED: What People With HIV Need to Know About the New Coronavirus.”

“As COVID-19 continues to spread throughout New York State, it will also continue to spread throughout the state prison system,” continues the April 2 letter obtained by POZ. “This will have devastating consequences for incarcerated New Yorkers, their families, prison staff, and entire communities throughout the state.”

About 43,000 people are incarcerated in the state prison system, and, as of Thursday morning, April 2, 24 cases of COVID-19 among state prisoners had been confirmed, reports The Daily News. In addition, 11 state parolees and 176 employees of the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision had also tested positive for COVID-19. There was no word on how many people have been tested.

The letter to the governor continues: “Over the years and decades we’ve worked in incarceration settings, we’ve seen the serious damage done to people in prison and jail by HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, MRSA, tuberculosis, seasonal influenza, and other viruses and communicable diseases. Correctional settings were and continue to be hotbeds for the spread of these outbreaks. Whether

it’s on prison cellblocks, in mess halls, program areas, or hallways, close contact among people in correctional settings is absolutely unavoidable and inevitably means the virus will be susceptible to serious spreading.”

In related news, keep in mind that novel coronavirus guidance and concerns for unique populations may vary. For example, see “3 Reasons COVID-19 Poses a Higher Risk for the LGBTQ Population,” “UPDATED: What People With Liver Disease Need to Know About the New Coronavirus” and similar articles regarding people with HIV and those people with cancer.

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