

After three months of unprecedented declines, monthly decreases in the adult custodial population in Canada slowed in June

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There were over 7,000 fewer adults in a correctional institution in May 2020 compared with three months earlier in February. This represented a drop of 19% in the custodial population, as governments across Canada took steps to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. From May to June, however, the steep decline in the custodial population since the start of the pandemic eased, as measures to contain the spread of the virus in correctional facilities became more established.

This release presents the average daily count of adults in federal and provincial/territorial custody in Canada for May and June 2020, and follows the release of data from [February to April](#).

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented many health and safety challenges for Canadians. Correctional institutions are particularly at risk of COVID-19 outbreak due to the close-proximity living conditions of their populations, lack of physical distancing options, the movement of individuals in and out of facilities as well as the challenge of meeting new requirements for cleaning and hygiene practices. Publicly available data from [Correctional Service Canada](#) (CSC), show that as of October 21, 2020, 1,821 federal inmates had been tested for COVID-19, with 20% testing positive. All individuals have recovered, with the exception of two confirmed deaths.

In this context, federal and provincial/territorial correctional programs have been working closely with the Public Health Agency of Canada, as well as provincial and territorial health authorities, to implement measures to ensure the continued health, safety and well-being of employees and persons in custody and to maintain safe and secure environments (see note to readers).

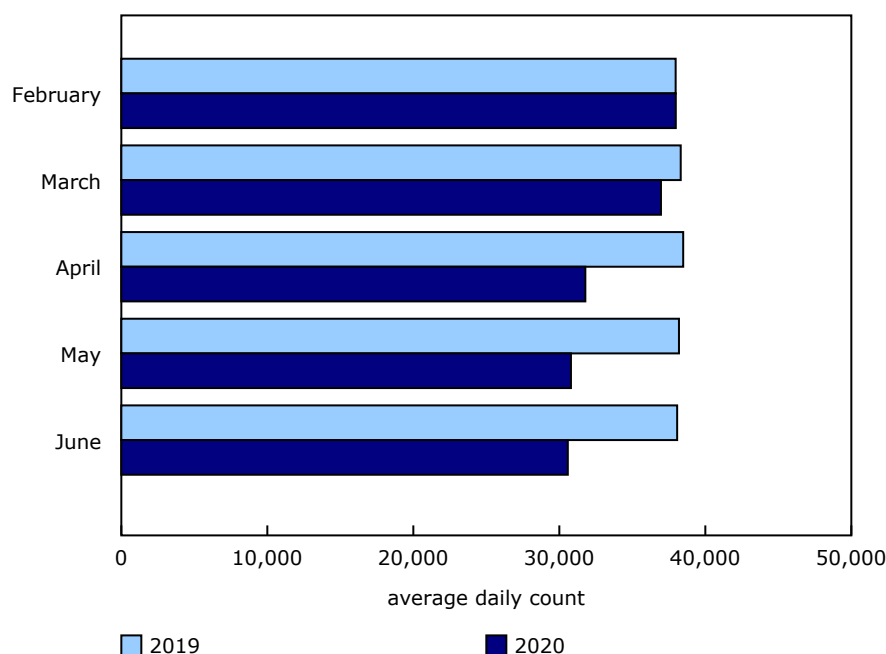
Reducing the number of persons held in correctional institutions is also seen as a preventive measure for reducing public health risk. Some of the steps taken by the Canadian courts and correctional systems to reduce the size of the population living in correctional institutions since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic include: temporary or early release of persons in custody who are considered low-risk to re-offend; extended periods for parole appeals deadlines and access to medical leave privileges; and alternatives to custody while awaiting trials, sentencing and bail hearings.

Adult custodial population in Canada declines by 19% from February to May, then edges down from May to June

There was an average of 37,976 adults in federal and provincial/territorial custody on any given day in February 2020. In March, when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared mid-month, there were 3% fewer people in custody across Canada and by May, the count was down 19% from February to 30,795. In June, however, the average daily count edged down (-1%) from the previous month.



Chart 1
Total adult custodial population by year (2019 and 2020) and month (February to June)



Note(s): Counts are based on the average number of adults in federal and provincial/territorial custody (includes sentenced custody (including intermittent sentences when in), remand and other temporary detention) per day for each month. April data for Quebec were revised, therefore the total adult custodial population figure for April is revised.

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Adult Corrections Key Indicator Report.

The overall decrease in the correctional population from February to May is unprecedented. Typically, correctional population average daily counts tend to be stable over time, with slight variations occurring over longer periods. For example, from 2014/2015 to 2018/2019, the average change in monthly average daily counts of adults in custody was under 1% at the federal level and just over 1% at the provincial/territorial level.

While the current high-level data provide evidence of the magnitude of change during COVID-19, they cannot indicate the extent to which temporary and early release or alternatives to custody contributed to these unprecedented declines in custody counts. More detailed data are being collected from correctional service programs that will later allow for a more comprehensive picture of the impacts of COVID-19 on the reduction of custodial populations in Canada.

Federal custodial population declines from March to June

In Canada, the administration of correctional services is a shared responsibility between the federal, provincial and territorial governments. The CSC is responsible for the federal system and has jurisdiction over adults (18 years and older) serving custodial sentences of two years or more, including all persons serving indeterminate prison sentences, and those designated as dangerous offenders.

The average count of adults in federal custody steadily declined from March to June, decreasing by 2% each month. The monthly count declined from 13,957 in March to 13,141 in June, an overall decrease of 6%. In comparison, monthly counts of the federal custodial population in 2019/2020 were very stable, with an average monthly change of less than 0.5% per month (see note to readers for counting differences between federal and provincial/territorial corrections).

Provincial/territorial custodial population edges up in June

After three consecutive months of unprecedented declines, there was a slight increase in the provincial/territorial custodial population in June. From February to May, the average count of adults in provincial/territorial custody fell from 24,085 adults to 17,320, a 28% decline. Most of this decrease occurred from March to April (-21%), with smaller declines from February to March (-4%) and April to May (-4%). However, from May to June, the count of adults in provincial/territorial custody edged up 1% to 17,439 people.

Provincial and territorial correctional service programs are responsible for adults serving custodial sentences that are less than two years (including those on intermittent sentences, to be served typically on weekends, with intermittent releases to the community on weekdays), as well as those who have been remanded in custody (those individuals awaiting trial or sentencing).

Although all 13 provincial and territorial correctional service programs in Canada reported fewer adults in custody from February to May, there were differences in the levels of change from May to June 2020. In 7 of the 13 jurisdictions (Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Nunavut), the average daily count of adults in custody increased. In 5 jurisdictions (Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec, British Columbia, Yukon and the Northwest Territories) the count declined from May to June, while in Alberta there was no change reported.

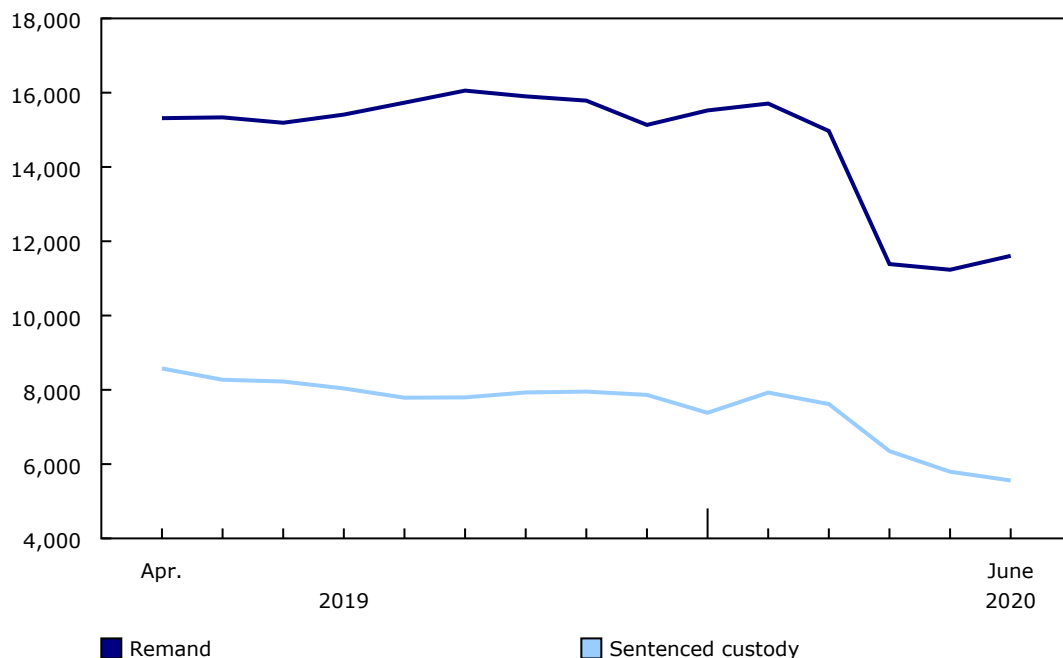
Provincial/territorial remand population begins to increase in June, while the sentenced custody population continues to decline

The slight increase in the provincial/territorial custodial population in June was due to an increase in the remand population (those awaiting trial or sentencing) and the continued decline in the sentenced population.

After remaining fairly stable for most of 2019/2020, both the remand (-28%) and sentenced custody (-27%) populations in adult provincial and territorial corrections fell sharply from February to May. From May to June, the remand population increased 3%, whereas the sentenced custody population (-4%) continued to decrease.

Chart 2
Total remand and sentenced custody adult populations in provincial/territorial correctional programs, April 2019 to June 2020

average daily count



Note(s): Counts are based on the average number of adults in sentenced custody and remand per day for each month. April data for Quebec were revised, therefore the total provincial/territorial remand and sentenced custody figures for April are revised.
Source(s): Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Adult Corrections Key Indicator Report.

Since 2004/2005, the provincial and territorial adult remand population has been gradually increasing as a share of the overall custodial population in the provinces and territories. The remand population accounted for almost two-thirds (65%) of adults in provincial/territorial custody in 2019/2020. This proportion does not take into account those in federal custody.

Provincial/territorial female and male custodial populations both edge up in June

The custodial population of females in provincial/territorial custody declined by 43%, from a count of 2,147 in February to 1,231 in May. This was almost double the rate of decline for the male custodial population, which fell 27% from a count of 21,938 to 16,089. In June, however, both male (+1%) and female (+2%) custodial populations increased from the previous month.

From February to May, the female custodial population declined at a faster pace than the male custodial population in most jurisdictions. In June, however, custodial population changes reversed in seven provinces and territories, as counts increased. In four of these seven provinces/territories (New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan) the female population increased at a faster pace than the male custodial population. Conversely, in Prince Edward Island, the male population increased at a faster pace than the female population in June. In Nova Scotia and Nunavut, the male custodial population increased while the female population decreased.

In five provinces and territories, custodial populations declined in June. In Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec and British Columbia, the female custodial population continued to decline at a faster pace than the male custodial population. In the Northwest Territories, the male custodial population declined at a faster pace than the female custodial population, and in Yukon, the male custodial population remained stable while the female population declined. In Alberta, both the male and female population counts had minimal changes in June.

The rates of change of custodial populations from February to May were consistent for both the female remand (-44%) and sentenced custody (-40%) populations, as well as the male remand (-27%) and sentenced custody (-26%) populations. In June, both the female (+6%) and male (+3%) remand populations increased, while the sentenced custody populations declined for both females (-6%) and males (-4%).

Table 1
Average daily counts of adults in custody, by jurisdiction and by month (February to June 2020)

	February 2020	March 2020	April 2020	May 2020	June 2020	April to May 2020	May to June 2020	February to June 2020
	number					percent change		
Jurisdiction								
Total federal custody	13,891	13,957	13,720	13,475	13,141	-2	-2	-5
Total provincial or territorial custody	24,085	23,003	18,061	17,320	17,439	-4	1	-28
Newfoundland and Labrador	310	295	205	194	187	-5	-4	-40
Prince Edward Island	114	107	80	82	94	3	16	-17
Nova Scotia	440	371	260	255	268	-2	5	-39
New Brunswick	450	459	358	333	358	-7	7	-20
Quebec	4,381	4,223	3,622	3,487	3,383	-4	-3	-23
Ontario	8,269	7,748	5,859	5,703	5,811	-3	2	-30
Manitoba	2,238	2,179	1,775	1,623	1,688	-9	4	-25
Saskatchewan	1,984	1,953	1,531	1,477	1,537	-4	4	-23
Alberta	3,384	3,264	2,482	2,369	2,370	-5	0	-30
British Columbia	2,193	2,101	1,630	1,509	1,474	-7	-2	-33
Yukon	56	46	38	41	39	7	-5	-31
Northwest Territories	143	139	116	133	112	15	-16	-22
Nunavut	122	119	105	115	118	10	3	-3

Note(s): Counts are based on the average number of adults in federal and provincial/territorial custody (includes sentenced custody (including intermittent sentences when in), remand and other temporary detention) per day for each month. Figures may not add to totals due to rounding. April data for Quebec were revised, therefore the total provincial/territorial custody figure for April is revised.

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Adult Corrections Key Indicator Report.

Note to readers

Some protective measures implemented by correctional institutions to reduce COVID-19 transmission include: providing personal protective equipment to staff; increased access to hygiene and cleaning supplies for persons in custody and correctional staff; increased physical health screening at intake; the suspension of inter-regional and international transfers of persons in custody; the suspension of in-person visitors to correctional facilities; and, the increased use of technology to support video visitation with family and in some cases court appearances. Further, protocols for assessment, testing and seclusion of persons in custody suspected or confirmed to have a communicable disease have been implemented.

Statistics Canada's Adult Key Indicators Report (KIR) collects data from all adult correctional service programs in Canada that provide an average daily count of persons in federal and provincial/territorial custody, for each month of the year. To do this, in general, correctional services take a count of persons in custody each day of the month and it is averaged over the number of days in that month. At the federal level, the monthly numbers represent the counts at the mid-point of each month as reported by Correctional Service Canada (CSC) and include persons in custody on temporary absence. Given that the federal March counts were taken mid-month, they do not reflect the full impact of COVID-19, as measures to address the pandemic began to be implemented in the second half of the month.

Data on the sex of the federal custodial population are not collected as part of the KIR administered to CSC and are therefore not included.

April average count data for Quebec were revised, therefore April figures for the total adult custodial population, as well as total provincial/territorial custody figures (including remand and sentenced custody counts) are revised.

As correctional service programs are continuing to manage custodial institutions amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Statistics Canada will continue to provide KIR data on custodial populations on a more frequent basis.

There may be differences in jurisdictional operations, custodial populations and implementation of measures to address COVID-19 among correctional services programs resulting in differences in the relative decreases in custodial populations. Caution should be used in making any jurisdictional comparisons.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3313](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).