

# Changes in federal, provincial and territorial custodial populations during the COVID-19 pandemic, July to September 2020

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The Canadian courts and correctional systems have taken steps to reduce the size of the correctional institution population during the COVID-19 pandemic, while balancing public safety concerns. Measures include the temporary or early release of people in custody who are considered at low risk to reoffend; extended periods for parole appeal deadlines and access to medical leave privileges; and alternatives to custody while awaiting trials, sentencing and bail hearings.

During the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a historic decline in the number of adults in Canadian correctional institutions. In May and June 2020, however, the declines slowed, and, from July to September, the average daily count of adults in custody edged up by about 1% every month.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented many health and safety challenges for Canadians. Correctional institutions are particularly at risk of COVID-19 outbreaks because of the close proximity of their populations, lack of physical distancing, the movement of individuals in and out of facilities, and the challenge of meeting new heightened cleaning and hygiene requirements.

Publicly available data from [Correctional Service Canada \(CSC\)](#) show that 1,361 inmates at federal correctional institutions had tested positive for COVID-19 as of March 3, 2021. The vast majority (96%) of federal inmates who tested positive have recovered, while approximately 4% were still active cases at the time of collection, and five inmates had died.

The federal, provincial and territorial correctional programs have been working closely with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), as well as provincial and territorial health authorities, to implement measures to ensure the continued health, safety and well-being of employees and people in custody and to maintain safe and secure environments (see note to readers). In January 2021, CSC began the first phase of vaccinations of some older, medically vulnerable inmates in federal institutions and is working with PHAC and the provinces and territories to ensure that CSC health care and frontline workers are prioritized for vaccination in the first phase of vaccination programs.

## **Number of adults in custody has been slowly rising since July 2020**

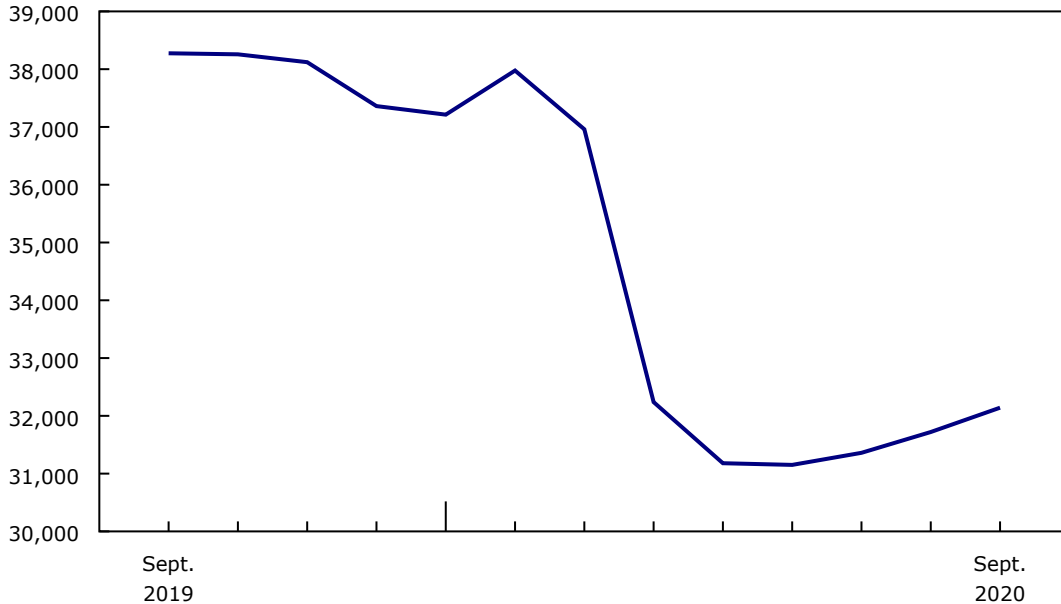
During the early months of the pandemic, there was an unprecedented 15% decline in the average number of adults in federal, provincial and territorial custody on any given day, falling from 37,976 in February to 32,238 in April. Historically, monthly changes in counts rarely exceed 1%.

The declines in the adult custodial population slowed in May and June, and, from July to September, the average daily count rose by about 1% every month.



**Chart 1**  
**Total federal, provincial and territorial adult custodial population, September 2019 to September 2020**

average daily count



**Note(s):** Counts are based on the average number of adults in federal, provincial and territorial custody (includes sentenced custody, including intermittent sentences when in; remand; and other temporary detention) per day for each month. Data for Quebec for April, May and June 2020, as well as data for total federal custody from Correctional Service Canada for May 2020, have been revised. Therefore, April, May and June 2020 figures for the total adult custodial population and the total provincial and territorial adult custodial population, as well as the total federal custody figure for May 2020, have been revised.

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

While the data in this release quantify the magnitude of change, they cannot show the extent to which special safety measures implemented during the pandemic, such as temporary or early release or alternatives to custody, contributed to declines in custody counts.

### Federal custodial population declines steadily from March to September

In Canada, the administration of correctional services is a shared responsibility between the federal, provincial and territorial governments.

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 those serving indeterminate prison sentences and dangerous offenders.

The average daily count of adults in federal custody declined steadily during the first six months of the pandemic, falling from 13,957 in March to 12,761 in September—an overall decrease of 9% (see note to readers for counting differences between federal and provincial or territorial correctional systems).

## **Provincial and territorial adult custodial population rises every month from June to September**

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 (individuals awaiting trial or sentencing).

The number of adults in provincial or territorial custody (including those in remand awaiting trial or sentencing, and those in sentenced custody) fell by over one-quarter (-26%) during the early stages of the pandemic, declining from 24,085 in February to 17,802 in May. Most of this decline occurred from March to April (-19%).

In June, however, the number of adults in provincial or territorial custody edged up by 1%. From July to September, the average daily count of adults in provincial or territorial custody increased every month, rising 6% overall to 19,380 people.

By September, the average daily count of adults in provincial or territorial custody had returned to pre-pandemic levels (the average daily count in February 2020) in Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Yukon, and Nunavut.

## **Provincial and territorial remand population continues to increase from June, while sentenced custody population continues to trend downward**

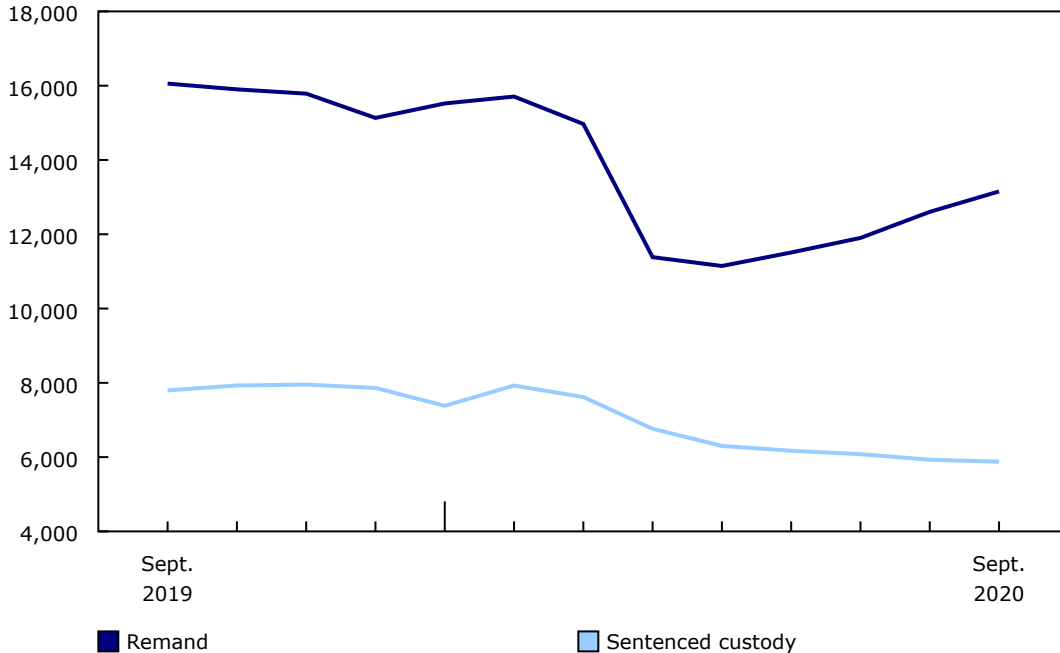
Trends in the adult provincial and territorial custodial population from February to September 2020 were driven by changes in the remand population.

After falling by almost one-quarter from March to April (-24%), the number of adults in remand edged down in May (-2%) but then started to increase in June (+3%). The remand population increased every month from July to September—rising 10% overall.

**Chart 2**

**Total remand and sentenced custody adult populations in provincial and territorial correctional programs, September 2019 to September 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, May and June 2020 data for Quebec were revised; therefore, the total provincial and territorial remand and sentenced custody figures for April, May and June were revised.  
**Source(s):** Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Adult Corrections Key Indicator Report.

In every province and territory except the Northwest Territories, the remand population continued to increase from July to September. In fact, by September, the number of adults in remand exceeded pre-pandemic levels in Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and Nunavut.

The number of adults in sentenced custody also declined, albeit at a slower pace, falling by about 1/10 (-11%) from March to April. However, as the remand population began to steadily increase in June, the number of adults in sentenced custody continued to trend downward, decreasing 3% from July to September.

The sentenced custody population continued to decline in all but five jurisdictions from July to September—Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan, Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. By September, the number of adults in sentenced custody remained below pre-pandemic levels in every province and territory except Newfoundland and Labrador and Yukon.

**Number of adult women in provincial or territorial custody has grown at a faster pace compared with men since July**

The historic decline in the provincial and territorial adult custodial population was more pronounced for women than men during the early stages of the pandemic. The average daily count of women in provincial or territorial custody declined by over two-fifths (-41%), falling from 2,147 in February to 1,258 in May. The number of men in provincial or territorial custody fell by one-quarter (-25%) over the same period, declining from 21,938 to 16,544.

The pace of change in adult custodial populations from February to May was consistent for both women in remand (-44%) and sentenced custody (-36%), as well as for men in remand (-27%) and sentenced custody (-19%).

In June, there were more women (+6%) and men (+3%) in remand compared with a month earlier, but fewer in sentenced custody (-1% for women and -2% for men).

From July to September, the number of women (+12%) in provincial or territorial custody grew at a faster pace compared with men (+5%).

Over the same period, the pace of change for the number of women in remand (+15%) was faster compared with men (+10%), while the number of men in sentenced custody fell by 4%, compared with a 4% increase for women.

### **Note to readers**

*The Canadian courts and correctional systems have taken steps to reduce the size of the correctional institution population since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, while balancing public safety concerns.*

*Some protective measures implemented by correctional institutions to reduce COVID-19 transmission include providing personal protective equipment to staff, increasing access to hygiene and cleaning supplies for people in custody and correctional staff, and increasing physical health screening at intake.*

*Other measures include suspending inter-regional and international transfers of people in custody, as well as in-person visits to correctional facilities. There has been greater use of technology to support video visitation with family and, in some cases, court appearances.*

*Furthermore, protocols have been implemented for assessment, testing and seclusion of people in custody suspected or confirmed to have a communicable disease.*

*Data on the number of active COVID-19 cases in Canada are publicly available on the [Government of Canada website](#). Correctional service programs are continuing to manage custodial institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic, and Statistics Canada will continue to provide data on custodial populations on a regular basis.*

### **Data Source**

*Statistics Canada's Adult Corrections Key Indicator Report (KIR) collects data from all adult correctional service programs in Canada that provide an average daily count of people in federal, provincial and territorial custody, for each month of the year. To do this, correctional services generally take a count of people in custody every day, 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 people 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.*

*Average count data for total federal custody from CSC were revised for May 2020; therefore, May figures for the total adult custodial population, as well as total federal custody figures, were revised.*

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

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

**Table 1**  
**Average daily counts of adults in custody, by jurisdiction, February to September 2020**

	February 2020	March 2020	April 2020	May 2020	June 2020	July 2020	August 2020	September 2020
<b>Total custody</b>	<b>37,976</b>	<b>36,960</b>	<b>32,238</b>	<b>31,180</b>	<b>31,151</b>	<b>31,360</b>	<b>31,720</b>	<b>32,141</b>
Total federal custody	13,891	13,957	13,720	13,378	13,141	12,992	12,829	12,761
Total provincial and territorial custody	24,085	23,003	18,518	17,802	18,010	18,368	18,891	19,380
Newfoundland and Labrador	310	295	205	194	187	284	316	332
Prince Edward Island	114	107	80	82	94	109	115	115
Nova Scotia	440	371	260	255	268	283	307	325
New Brunswick	450	459	358	333	358	384	402	417
Quebec	4,381	4,223	4,079	3,969	3,955	3,949	3,940	3,961
Ontario	8,269	7,748	5,859	5,703	5,811	5,924	6,138	6,315
Manitoba	2,238	2,179	1,775	1,623	1,688	1,763	1,805	1,804
Saskatchewan	1,984	1,953	1,531	1,477	1,537	1,637	1,734	1,771
Alberta	3,384	3,264	2,482	2,369	2,370	2,327	2,418	2,582
British Columbia	2,193	2,101	1,630	1,509	1,474	1,424	1,418	1,445
Yukon	56	46	38	41	39	42	45	55
Northwest Territories	143	139	116	133	112	119	120	107
Nunavut	122	119	105	115	118	122	135	151

**Note(s):** Counts are based on the average number of adults in federal, provincial and 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 because of rounding. Data for Quebec for April, May and June 2020, as well as data for total federal custody from Correctional Service Canada for May 2020, have been revised. Therefore, April, May and June 2020 figures for the total adult custodial population and the total provincial and territorial adult custodial population, as well as the total federal custody figure for May 2020, have been revised.

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

**Table 2**  
**Percent changes in average daily counts of adults in custody, by jurisdiction**

	February to June 2020	June to July 2020	July to August 2020	August to September 2020
	% change			
<b>Total custody</b>	<b>-18</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Total federal custody	-5	-1	-1	-1
Total provincial and territorial custody	-25	2	3	3
Newfoundland and Labrador	-40	52	11	5
Prince Edward Island	-17	15	5	1
Nova Scotia	-39	6	8	6
New Brunswick	-20	7	5	4
Quebec	-10	0	0	1
Ontario	-30	2	4	3
Manitoba	-25	4	2	0
Saskatchewan	-23	7	6	2
Alberta	-30	-2	4	7
British Columbia	-33	-3	0	2
Yukon	-31	8	7	24
Northwest Territories	-22	6	1	-11
Nunavut	-3	3	11	12

**Note(s):** Counts are based on the average number of adults in federal, provincial and 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 because of rounding. Data for Quebec for April, May and June 2020, as well as data for total federal custody from Correctional Service Canada for May 2020, have been revised. Therefore, April, May and June 2020 figures for the total adult custodial population and the total provincial and territorial adult custodial population, as well as the total federal custody figure for May 2020, have been revised.

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

**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](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; [STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca)).