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# Most women in 1 Louisiana prison dorm have COVID-19

By JANET McCONNAUGHEY May 7, 2020 GMT

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Most of the woman in a Louisiana prison dormitory have tested positive for COVID-19, and three-quarters of the infected women showed no symptoms, state figures show.

The dormitory is located at the Elayn Hunt Correctional Center in St. Gabriel. The women were sent to Hunt from an adjacent facility, the Louisiana Correctional Women’s Institute, which was flooded in 2016, forcing officials to send the women prisoners to facilities across

the state, said Department of Corrections spokesman Ken Pastorick.

He said 39 women fell ill with the disease caused by the novel coronavirus so the rest of the women housed at Hunt — 155 who did not have symptoms — were also tested. Of those who did not have symptoms, 117 were infected.

According to information on the department of corrections website, 41 women's prison staffers have been diagnosed with COVID-19 at Hunt and at the Jetson Center for Youth, which also holds some of the women displaced by the 2016 flood. The website did not break down the number of infected staffers specifically at Hunt nor did it indicate total staffing. Pastorick said he would check on the total number of staffers and whether all were tested.

Little data exists to compare with Hunt's figures.

The Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office reported Monday that tests for 775 inmates showed 130 had COVID-19 and 621 didn't, with results not yet in for 24. Another 5 inmates refused to be tested and are quarantined, according to the statement from Sheriff Marlin Gusman and compliance director Darnley Hodge. They said 70 of 358 sheriff's office employees have the virus with 35 test results pending.

In Tennessee, the state has ordered tests for all inmates and staff after 53% of the 2,444 inmates at a privately run prison tested positive for the coronavirus, officials said Friday.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the percentage of infected people who never show symptoms in the general public. In mid-April, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the U.S. government's top expert on the coronavirus, said a "guesstimate" is that at least 25% and no more than 50% are never or only mildly ill.

For most people who do get ill, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms. For others, the virus causes serious disease and can be fatal.

Nearly 29,700 people in Louisiana have tested positive for the coronavirus, and 1,991 have died, according to state health department data released Monday. The number hospitalized as of Monday was 1,502, with 220 of them on ventilators. The true number of infections is thought to be far higher.

Asked about measures to prevent the outbreak's spread, Pastorick wrote in an email Thursday, "The Department has provided each inmate two cloth face masks, which are cleaned and sanitized each day. Inmates have also been provided additional soap, and hand sanitizer is available at the prisons. In addition, frequent sanitation of each DOC facility continues daily, in an effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19."

Other prisons have tested only inmates with symptoms. The women's dorm residents make up 64% of the 299 diagnosed at prisons statewide.

The state Department of Health "cannot comment on the health of individuals at correctional facilities," a department statement emailed by spokesman Kevin Litten said. "We continue to work closely with the CDC and believe that additional guidance is forthcoming concerning asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic residents who live in congregate settings."

The prison update came as the state Department of Health reported that nearly two-thirds of the state's nursing homes -- 176 of 279 -- have reported at least two related cases of COVID-19. More than 3,100 of their patients became ill from the virus and 688 have died, the department said.

It said 87 of 157 other adult residential facilities licensed by the department have reported such clusters, with nearly 420 cases and 50 deaths.

Oklahoma announced plans last week to test all of its nursing home and long-term care residents and workers. About 40% of Oklahoma's COVID-19 deaths have been residents of such facilities. West Virginia also has ordered tests of everyone who lives or works in nursing homes.

Some of Louisiana's nursing homes and other "congregate care" facilities have begun intensive testing, and the expectation of 200,000 federal test kits this month should allow more, said Dr. Alex Billioux, the health department's assistant secretary for public health.

"We now have evidence of significant spread through asymptomatic people in those facilities," he said.

The department is working on guidelines, said Billioux.

"There is an open question about how often we need to go back and retest people who tested negative," he said, adding that could be as often as twice a week.

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This story was first published on May 4, 2020. It was updated on May 6, 2020 to correct the

number of women who tested positive for the virus. The AP erroneously reported that 192 of the women in that dorm tested positive for the disease. That figure also included women at a separate facility and has been removed from the story. **The total number of women who tested positive at the dormitory was 156 out of 194.** The last paragraph of the story also included figures from the separate facility and has been removed.

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