

ACLU of Utah calls for universal vaccine access for incarcerated people

The civil rights group says some jails have done better with vaccine distribution than others.

By Sara Tabin

April 28, 2021, 4:55 p.m.

<https://www.sltrib.com/news/2021/04/28/aclu-utah-calls-universal/>

People being held in Utah jails have unequal access to vaccines based on where they are incarcerated, according to the ACLU of Utah.

The ACLU is calling for universal vaccine access for incarcerated people throughout the state by May 4. “While some county officials and local health departments have shown a commitment to safeguarding the health of incarcerated people by distributing vaccines in county jails, other counties have fallen short,” the ACLU said in a news release. “The result is inconsistent vaccine access. Thus, the health and safety of incarcerated individuals is largely determined by the initiative of county officials and local health departments.”

Since incarcerated people rely on the government for healthcare, government officials have a moral and constitutional duty to care for people in their custody and keep them safe, the news release says. Incarcerated people are particularly vulnerable to COVID because they can’t social distance. People in Utah prisons have the virus at 4.5 times the average rate and people in jails have faced similarly high infections, according to the ACLU.

The state estimates that there have been 3,890 total cases in detention facilities, leading to 96 hospitalizations and 17 deaths.

The Utah Department of Corrections, which runs the state’s two prisons, said it had given out nearly 1,700 vaccines as of April 12.