

As Utah COVID-19 cases increase, Weber County Jail has a new outbreak

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Jul 28, 2021

A prisoner at the Utah State Prison in Draper receives a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine on Tuesday, July 27, 2021.

https://www.standard.net/police-fire/as-utah-covid-19-cases-increase-weber-county-jail-has-a-new-outbreak/article_f2e9afa2-2be7-50e0-9a24-a30e2d479430.html

OGDEN — As coronavirus cases boom again in Utah, Weber County is experiencing its share, including resumption of trouble at a prior COVID-19 hot spot, the Weber County Jail.

In 2nd District Judge Cristina Ortega's online courtroom Wednesday, numerous cases were stricken from the calendar because there would be no video feed from the jail — inmate quarantines made the appearances impossible.

The jail has had 43 cases in the past week or so, said Lt. Joshua Marigoni, the Weber County Sheriff's Office's corrections spokesperson. "We're just like the community around us," Marigoni said.

According to Utah Department of Health data, as of Wednesday afternoon, Weber County overall has had 814 new cases in the past two weeks, classifying the area as a "very high" incidence level, like most other populous counties in the state.

The department reported 843 new cases statewide Wednesday and six deaths. Also, 350 people are hospitalized with COVID, straining capacities and medical staffs.

The coronavirus is an especially acute matter in jails and prisons because of the confined spaces and lack of social distancing. The Weber and Davis county jails last year reconfigured cell blocks to allow for quarantine areas for new inmates and isolation places for those who tested positive.

"We're just going back to the same things we were doing; actually, we never stopped," Marigoni said. "It's a Tetris game trying to keep people away from each other."

Of the jail's latest COVID cases, there have been no hospitalizations and most inmates have had mild symptoms, Marigoni said.

Contract suppliers are administering coronavirus vaccine to any inmates who request it, he said. The jail conducted four vaccination clinics in May, offering shots to the approximately 650 inmates. Marigoni said Wednesday that 43% of inmates chose to be vaccinated at that time.

The Davis County Jail, which had a better experience than the Weber lockup in dodging high case rates in 2020, has not had a surge of cases this summer, Sheriff's Office spokesperson Stephanie Dinsmore said. In fact, there were no positive cases as of Wednesday, she said, adding that 73% of the jail population is vaccinated.

Dozens of inmates at the Utah State Prison in Draper received vaccine shots in a mobile clinic Tuesday. The prison system has had more than 3,300 COVID-19 cases since the beginning of the pandemic, according to the Utah Department of Corrections.

The virus's Delta variant is spreading fastest in areas with low vaccination rates, health officials say. Meanwhile Wednesday, Utah Supreme Court Chief Justice Matthew Durrant issued an order requiring court personnel and visitors to wear masks in counties where virus transmission is high.

A court system news release said the order is in response to updated mask guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the sharp increase in Utah cases, and the increasing volume of people who are compelled to come to court now that in-person hearings and jury trials have resumed.

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