Immigration Detention and COVID-19 Timeline

Administration Fails to Heed Warnings, Worsens Spread of Coronavirus

February

- 25: Dr. Allen & Dr. Rich, detention medical experts and consultants to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), warn the agency of public health risks of ICE detention facilities

March

- 13: Dr. Allen & Dr. Rich again express concerns to DHS about ICE detention
  - Open letter from medical professionals to ICE urges releases to mitigate COVID-19 harms
- 15: The immigration judges union, ICE trial attorney union, and the American Immigration Lawyers Association call for the closure of immigration courts to prevent coronavirus spread
- 17: Human Rights First, Physicians for Human Rights, and Amnesty International USA write to DHS and ICE leadership urging release of asylum seekers and immigrants due to coronavirus threat
- 19: A Bergen County sheriff’s officer tests positive for COVID-19; statement says no ICE detainees were exposed
  - First employee at ICE facility tests positive for coronavirus (Elizabeth Detention Center, Elizabeth, NJ)
- 20: DHS medical experts/whistleblowers write to Congress, White House Task Force, urge releases from ICE detention to prevent coronavirus spread
  - ICE officials concede during briefing to House Committee on Oversight that ICE has “no contingency plan for coronavirus treatment if local hospitals become overwhelmed and cannot treat detainees”
- 22: Inmates test positive for coronavirus at New Jersey jail also housing ICE detainees
- 22: Former Acting ICE Director Jon Sandweg writes recommending release of “thousands of nonviolent, low-risk detainees currently in ICE custody,” explaining that “ICE can reduce the overcrowding of its detention centers, and thus make them safer, while also putting fewer people at risk”
- 24: First ICE detainee tests positive for coronavirus (Bergen County Jail, Hackensack, NJ)

April

- 3: Medical and human rights experts continue to call for release of ICE detainees
- 10: Reports of guards at privately-owned Otay Mesa Detention Center denying masks to detainees if they refuse to sign a form absolving the company of liability should they become infected
- 17 “Acting [ICE] Director Albence state[s] that ‘[their] review… has been completed…’ ICE doesn’t plan to release any other detainees to slow the spread of coronavirus.”
  - Public health experts continue to call for releases from ICE detention
- 23: Judge orders population reduction in ICE detainees at Adelanto, California facility

Human Rights First
FACT SHEET: JUNE 2020

- 25: Guard at a private detention facility used to jail immigrants in Monroe, Louisiana dies after contracting COVID-19 (Richwood Correctional Facility, Monroe, LA)
- 28: Second guard at Richwood Correctional Facility dies after contracting COVID-19
- 30: Miami judge orders ICE to reduce population in three Florida detention centers to allow for social distancing (Krome Detention Center, Broward Transitional Center, Glades County Detention Center)

May

- 6: First detainee dies from coronavirus (Otay Mesa Detention Center, San Diego, CA)
- 13: Acting DHS Secretary Chad Wolf says “What we’re not going to do is release all of the detainees in our care.”
- 14: Elizabeth Detention Center guard reported to have died from COVID-19
  ICE transfers 16 detainees from Krome Detention Center to Broward Transitional Center, where they test positive for COVID-19 an hour later
- 15: Class action suit filed demanding release of all detainees at Elizabeth Detention Center due to unsafe conditions during pandemic
- 26: ICE denies its transfer policy is contributing to spread of COVID-19
- 27: “ICE admits to transferring detainees with COVID-19, says it can’t test everybody”
- 28: Five percent one-day increase in positive cases in ICE detention
- 31: ICE transfers of detainees have led to outbreaks in detention centers in five states - Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Ohio, and Texas

June

- 1: 1,461 detainees have tested positive for COVID-19 out of 2,781 tested overall (52.5%); 44 ICE employees at detention centers positive for COVID-19, 123 other ICE employees test positive