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London, November 16 (RHC)-- The UK's dilapidated and overcrowded prisons are a breeding ground for the coronavirus pandemic. Coronavirus infections are reportedly rampant across the UK prison service, but particularly in England and Wales.

According to official figures released by the Ministry of Justice, more prisoners in England and Wales contracted coronavirus in October than in the previous seven months of the pandemic combined. Whilst attention is focused on the health of the PM the coronavirus crisis continues to engulf all sectors of British life, including the prison system.

Throughout the pandemic (and up to October 31), 1,529 prisoners have been infected by Covid-19, equivalent to two percent of the jail population in England and Wales. However, a staggering 883 of these infections occurred in October, during the onset of the so-called second wave of the pandemic.

According to the independent charity, the Prison Reform Trust, the “surge” highlights the vulnerability of detention facilities to the pandemic. The charity’s warning comes on the heels of the reported death of five prisoners from coronavirus in October, the first COVID-19 related prisoner deaths since June.

Hitherto, 32 prisoners and 23 people using the probation service have died after contracting COVID-19.

To put things into perspective, the prison population in England and Wales stands at 79,000 strong. The dramatic rise of coronavirus infections in the prison network in October has elicited a sharp response from the opposition Labor Party.

The shadow justice secretary, David Lammy, issued the following statement: “These figures are very alarming. Rapidly rising coronavirus infections in prisons reflect the government’s wider failure to get control of the virus.” He added: “The lives of staff and inmates are at risk if these outbreaks are not controlled, and there is also a risk of transmission to the wider community.”

For its part, the Ministry of Justice issued a bland statement claiming it is now “routinely testing frontline staff and offenders” to more quickly identify and contain outbreaks.

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