

# A Utah inmate with COVID-19 has died as the virus spreads through the prison

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An 82-year-old inmate who had tested positive for the coronavirus died at the Draper prison Wednesday morning, prison officials said.

He is the first incarcerated person in Utah to die after testing positive for the virus.

Prison officials noted that the man had other "complicating comorbidities" that likely contributed to his death, and said a medical examiner will determine his cause of death.

The inmate tested positive Friday, as part of mass testing after an inmate in the Oquirrh 5 unit complained of symptoms and subsequently was determined to have the virus.

Prison officials said the man was found dead in the Oquirrh 5 unit early Wednesday. They said he reported no symptoms prior to his death.

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The Oquirrh area, prison officials have said, is where the "most medically vulnerable" inmates live, and where they have taken the greatest precautions to keep the virus out. Officials said Wednesday that medical officials will continue to "heavily monitor" this area as they react to the virus spreading within the facility.

Prison officials did not release the name of the man who died, but said family members had been notified.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Utah, which sued prison officials in April over their coronavirus response, expressed frustration Wednesday, saying the prison and parole still haven't been doing enough to keep inmates safe, or release those that are medically vulnerable.

"This was preventable," said Sara Wolovick, an ACLU Equal Justice Works fellow. "This is precisely why we sued back in April. This is what we were trying to prevent."

The ACLU's lawsuit didn't go far, however. The Utah Supreme Court dismissed the litigation, saying the group didn't have proper legal standing to bring it to court. Wolovick didn't rule out the possibility that

the ACLU will sue again, saying the prison still hasn't taken the proper steps to respond appropriately to an outbreak that has spread throughout both its facilities.

Wolovick said she didn't know if the man who died had sought an early release, but said there are still elderly inmates and medically vulnerable people incarcerated who should be considered for release. She said the ACLU tried to ask prison officials to release some inmates on medical furlough so they would not be housed in communal living facilities, but the Department of Corrections didn't respond to that request.

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases have exploded at the Utah State Prison over the past few weeks. There have now been 572 confirmed cases at the Draper facility, according to the prison, and 22 at the Gunnison facility.

The initial outbreak at the prison began in October, and was believed to be tied to a medic who treated several inmates who later tested positive. While that outbreak was contained to one area, the virus has spread to almost every other housing unit — including Oquirrh 5, Promontory, Lone Peak and in at least three blocks of the Wasatch facility. Positive cases have also been reported in at least two housing units at the Gunnison facility.

Family members of those incarcerated told The Salt Lake Tribune that their loved ones have been calling them in tears, saying they feel sick and haven't been able to get any medication to ease their pain.

Haylee Powell's husband, who is in the Promontory section, tested positive Tuesday. She said he told her that he's quickly become weak and has had pain in his chest and racking coughs. His bunkmate, he told her, had been curled up in a ball crying in their shared space.

"He's been in there a really long time, 13 years," she said. "He's a pretty tough dude. For him to cry to me, it's pretty serious. I've never heard him cry. If they're all just breaking down, it really says something to me."