

# Thai prisons holding democracy activists drive record Covid figures

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## Kingdom reported over 4,800 infections on Thursday, with more than half in two Bangkok prisons

Thailand reported its largest one-day rise in coronavirus infections on Thursday, with more than half coming from two Bangkok prisons where prominent democracy activists are being detained.

The kingdom is battling a [third wave of the virus](#) that has forced the government to impose restrictions on movement, rules on mask-wearing and close public spaces.

There was alarm this week when an activist at the forefront of Thailand's democracy movement announced she had tested positive for Covid-19 five days after she was released on bail from a Bangkok jail.

On Thursday, Thailand reported more than 4,800 infections – its highest single-day increase – which included more than 2,800 cases found in two prisons in the capital, according to Taweessin Visanuyothin, a spokesperson for Thailand's Covid-19 taskforce.

A corrections department official, Weerakit Harnpariphan, confirmed that another activist held at a Bangkok jail, [Panupong "Mike" Jadnok](#), had also tested positive and had been sent to the prison hospital. The young student leader was detained on multiple royal defamation charges for his alleged role in a protest movement last year that included calls to reform the once-unassailable monarchy.

Weerakit said Bangkok's two prisons had tested "100%" of their inmates but did not say when the testing period had begun.

Panupong's lawyer, Noraset Nanongtoom, said he would file a bail request via video conferencing for the student leader, who has asthma. "If the court does not allow an inquiry through video conferencing and does not grant bail, Mike will have to return to face a Covid-19 epidemic in prison," Noraset said on Facebook.

Panupong is among more than 80 democracy activists facing charges of lese-majesty over last year's protest movement. At its peak, [tens of thousands of protesters flooded Bangkok's streets](#) calling for the resignation of Thailand's prime minister, Prayuth Chan-ocha, and reforms to the powerful monarchy – once a taboo topic.

One of the activists involved, Somyot Prueksakasemsuk, who was released on bail in late April, said there was no transparency on the virus behind bars. "We are really angry and we would like them to take moral responsibility," he said.

Thailand has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world – a result of its harsh drugs laws.

On 25 April, the corrections department said only 10 new cases had been found at Bangkok Remand prison but cases jumped to 1,794 this week after the protest leaders raised the alarm. The department has not since announced new figures for other prisons around the country.

“The Thai government needs to be forthright about the Covid-19 outbreaks in its prison system and how it intends to avoid disastrous consequences for those held,” Human Rights Watch’s Brad Adams said. “It seems they got caught sleeping at the switch.”

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