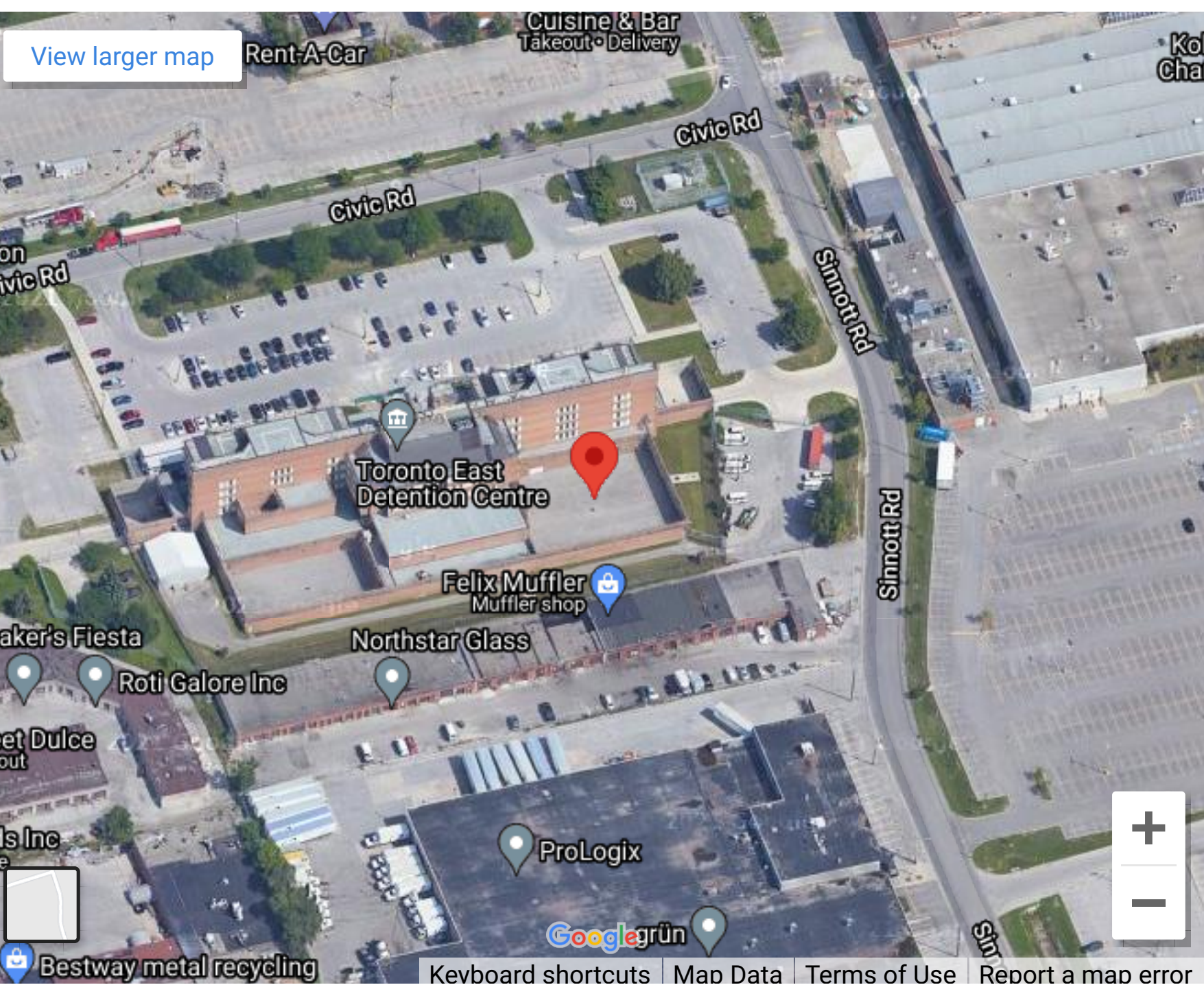


# PRISON DISPATCHES

## TORONTO EAST DETENTION CENTRE



Toronto East Detention Centre (TEDC) is a maximum security prison in Scarborough with an operating capacity of 473.<sup>1</sup> Opened in 1977, the prison for men is operated by the Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General and contains inmates from across the region who are awaiting trial (as of 2019, 71% of provincial prisoners in Ontario are in pretrial detention), waiting to be transferred to another facility, or serving sentences under 60 days.<sup>2,3</sup>

According to a 2016 report, 16% of prisoners at TEDC was held in segregation—the second highest rate in Ontario—with an average length of solitary confinement at 23 days. In 2014, an inmate named Shane Garry committed suicide in a TEDC segregation cell.<sup>4</sup>

TEDC also holds immigration detainees sent by the Canada Border Services Agency. Those inmates not criminally judged but could be detained indefinitely. In 2016, a man held by the Border Services Agency died inside TEDC, prompting criticism from human rights organizations.<sup>5,6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Interim Report of the Independent Reviewer of the Ontario Ministry of Correctional Services' Compliance with the 2013 Jahn Settlement Agreement and the Terms of the Consent Order of January 16, 2018 Issued by the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario." *Ontario Human Rights Commission*, February 1, 2019. [Link](#)  
<sup>2</sup> "Reports on Correctional Services and Court Operations: Annual Report 2019." *Office of the Auditor General of Ontario*, December 4, 2019. [Link](#)  
<sup>3</sup> "Correctional Services: Facilities — Detention Centres." *Ministry of the Solicitor General*. [Link](#)  
<sup>4</sup> "Segregation in Ontario." *Ministry of the Solicitor General*, March 2017. [Link](#)  
<sup>5</sup> Herald, Chris. "Immigration Detainee Dies in Custody at Toronto East Detention Centre." *March 8, 2016*. [Link](#)  
<sup>6</sup> "Human Rights Groups React to News of Another Death in Immigration Detention." *Canadian Council for Refugees*, March 8, 2016. [Link](#)

### MARCH 2020

COVID-19 quickly begins to spread across Canada.

The Ontario government suspends all in-person visits with family and friends while allowing professional visits from legal counsel. Intermittent inmates who serve weekend sentences are given temporary absence of custody to reduce jail populations. [Global News](#)

The Ontario Parole adjourns in-person hearings without the technical capacity to transition to video. Parole hearings are the only path to early release. [Toronto Star](#)

The Ontario Parole boards begins to hold hearings in electronic or written form. [CBC](#)

The Ministry of the Solicitor General reports early release for people considered low risk and have under 30 days on their sentences through longer-term temporary absences. [CBC](#)

### APRIL 2020

The Ministry of the Solicitor General ends unnecessary inmate transfers between jails. [New Market Today](#)

After workers at several institutions refuse work due to lack of PPE access, the Ministry of Solicitor General makes masks and temporary checks are mandatory for all visitors and staff in provincial jails. [CBC](#)

### MAY 2020

An inmate in pretrial detention at TEDC reports that access to toiletries is unpredictable at the jail and hand sanitizer is not widely available due to the alcohol content. Defence lawyers are working to get clients on remand out on bail. Some people's court dates are delayed in wake of reduced court capacity during the pandemic. [CBC](#)

### JULY 2020

A coalition of legal and health organizes writes an open letter to the Solicitor General asking for more transparency about releases and entries into the system, more data about COVID-19 tests and cases in prison, and the availability of PPE. The group has filed a freedom-of-information request. The group argues that existing information about testing inside prisons is incomplete and difficult to navigate, and that the lack of information about racial and gender breakdown can mask systemic inequalities. [TVO](#)

"We are very concerned that there is no public information available about the current data related to COVID-19 testing and positive diagnoses in Ontario correctional facilities. This leaves families fearing for the well-being of their loved ones and relying on sporadic local media reports for information about outbreaks. The lack of public information about how people in Ontario jails are being tested before they are released creates a challenge for discharge planning, especially for Indigenous people returning to remote communities. It also raises concerns about the accountability of the Ministry to the community whose safety is at the core of its mandate." [Open Letter to Sylvia Jones, Solicitor General from a coalition of legal and health organizations](#)

### SEPTEMBER 2020

An inmate at TEDC tests positive for COVID-19. [City News](#)

### OCTOBER 2020

Prisoners in a pretrial detention unit at TEDC go on hunger strike in response to human rights violations and poor living conditions called "oppressive, cruel, and unusual punishment." An organizer of the strike reveals that people in his unit have only received 20 minutes of fresh air over 12 days. [Toronto Prisoners Rights Project](#)

Prisoners on hunger strike are placed on lockdown without access to phone calls or showers for several days. Guards are reported to instigate violence, though prisoners remain peaceful. [Toronto Prisoners Rights Project](#)

Prisoners place hunger strike on pause after discussions with the Deputy Superintendent. The institution agrees to work with inmates on issues including more access to yard time, acquire sports equipment, better accommodate religious needs like providing access to an elder for Indigenous inmates, work on providing Halal food, properly clean showers and the bathroom to remove black mold. However, the administration refuses to stop rectal examinations or designating certain cells as Security Threat Group, as demanded by striking prisoners. [Toronto Prisoners Rights Project](#)

### DECEMBER 2020

Three inmates test positive for COVID-19. [Toronto Star](#)

After filing a freedom of information request, Aboriginal Legal Services Toronto and the Black Legal Action Centre finds that only 645 people were released from jail between March 16 and July 22, contrary to the claims of the Ministry of the Solicitor General that jail population reduced by more than 30%, or 2400 people, in the spring. The vast majority of the early releases came from the suspension of weekend sentences. Only 40 people close to the end of their sentences were granted early release and 137 granted parole. Though jails do have lower populations than before the pandemic, this largely comes from lower arrest rates and fewer people being held for bail—areas outside the Ministry's control. The Ministry's claims about lower jail had been used in court to oppose individual's bail applications. [Toronto Star](#)

A total of five inmates with positive COVID-19 cases are confirmed at TEDC. [CTV](#)

Advocacy groups call on the government to prioritize vaccination for people in prisons and jails. [Toronto Star](#)

### JANUARY 2021

"We are being deprived of our most important rights and liberties at the Toronto East Detention Centre. Covid 19 restrictions and overall staff negligence are becoming too much to handle for the inmate population." "We haven't received clean clothes in over 3 weeks. We don't receive proper cleaning supplies or disinfectant or gloves or any PPE - nothing." "I speak on the behalf of the inmate population that we desperately seek intervention." [Statements from TEDC inmates](#)

Ontario's jail population, which dropped to 70% of pre-pandemic rates in the early months of the pandemic, rises to 85% of pre-pandemic population at 7090. [Toronto Star](#)

Map navigation

[About](#)