

# Lawyers warn of Covid jail 'crisis'

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THE Criminal Lawyers Association of the NT has written to Corrections warning of a "potential crisis" facing prisoners due to the Territory's Covid-19 outbreak.

CLANT president Chrissy McConnell said court cases were regularly brought to a screeching halt when prisoners were categorised as "Covid red" or placed into isolation "for undetermined periods of time, which is unacceptable and unsustainable".

"CLANT understands that fresh custodies in Darwin are often transferred directly to the prison and placed in isolation for a period of time prior to being given access to a lawyer or appearing in court," she said.

"How long that is, is also unclear and does not appear to be being communicated to the court or legal representatives and on that basis, potentially the prisoners themselves."

Ms McConnell said the situation left judges with no alternative but to adjourn proceedings in the prisoner's absence, "most likely without their knowledge, to an uncertain date in the future in the hope that they will be able to appear at that time".

"This also means that people are being denied the opportunity to have bail applications heard which if successful would obviate the need for that person to enter the prison system at all," she said.

A spokeswoman for Corrections said prisoners who tested positive were isolated from the general population and "receive the appropriate care and supervision".

"NT Correctional Services has a number of processes in place so prisoners can still access justice services including RAT testing prior to court appearances and video or audio conferencing," she said.

"However, at times there may be some delays if a prisoner has tested positive and in supervised isolation."