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**Monday, October 10, 2022**

**HADAR AVIRAM**

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***FESTER: Carceral Permeability and  
California's COVID-19 Correctional Disaster***

(University of California Press, 2024)

Even against the backdrop of pandemic mismanagement in the United States, the COVID-19 disaster in California's prisons stands out as the worst medical prison catastrophe in the state's history. Three-quarters of the state's prison population was infected; 256 incarcerated people and 50 staff members died. Socio-legal scholar Hadar Aviram and data scientist Chad Goerzen's forthcoming book *FESTER* exposes the COVID-19 correctional experience through hundreds of first-person accounts, months of courtroom observations, years of carefully collected quantitative COVID-19 data, and a wealth of policy documents. Against the backdrop of decades of systemic vulnerabilities of overcrowding and abysmal healthcare, the book recounts the suffering that COVID-19 and its mismanagement wrought behind bars--the fruit of neglect, incompetence, fearmongering, sabotage, and dehumanization. *FESTER* illuminates the lack of control over county jails; the uphill battle to prioritize prisons as vaccine sites, and the struggle to vaccinate the custodial staff; the harms of zero-sum thinking in light of the transmissivity between prisons and their surrounding communities; how efforts to litigate on behalf of incarcerated people are thwarted by judicial deference to disingenuous, responsibility-shirking behavior by the state; and how our fear of the optics of releasing people convicted of violent crimes--sometimes decades ago--endanger not only the oldest and most frail people behind bars, but also everyone in California. *FESTER* bears witness to the immense suffering we bring on ourselves and our fellow humans through dehumanization, fear, and ignorance, and stands as a monument for a brave coalition of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, family members and loved ones, advocates and activists, doctors and journalists, who worked to shed light on one of the Golden State's correctional system's darkest times.

The related paper is available at the Center.

**PLACE** Philip Selznick Seminar Room, 2240 Piedmont Avenue  
**TIME** 12:45 – 2:00pm.  
**INFO** <https://www.csls.berkeley.edu>