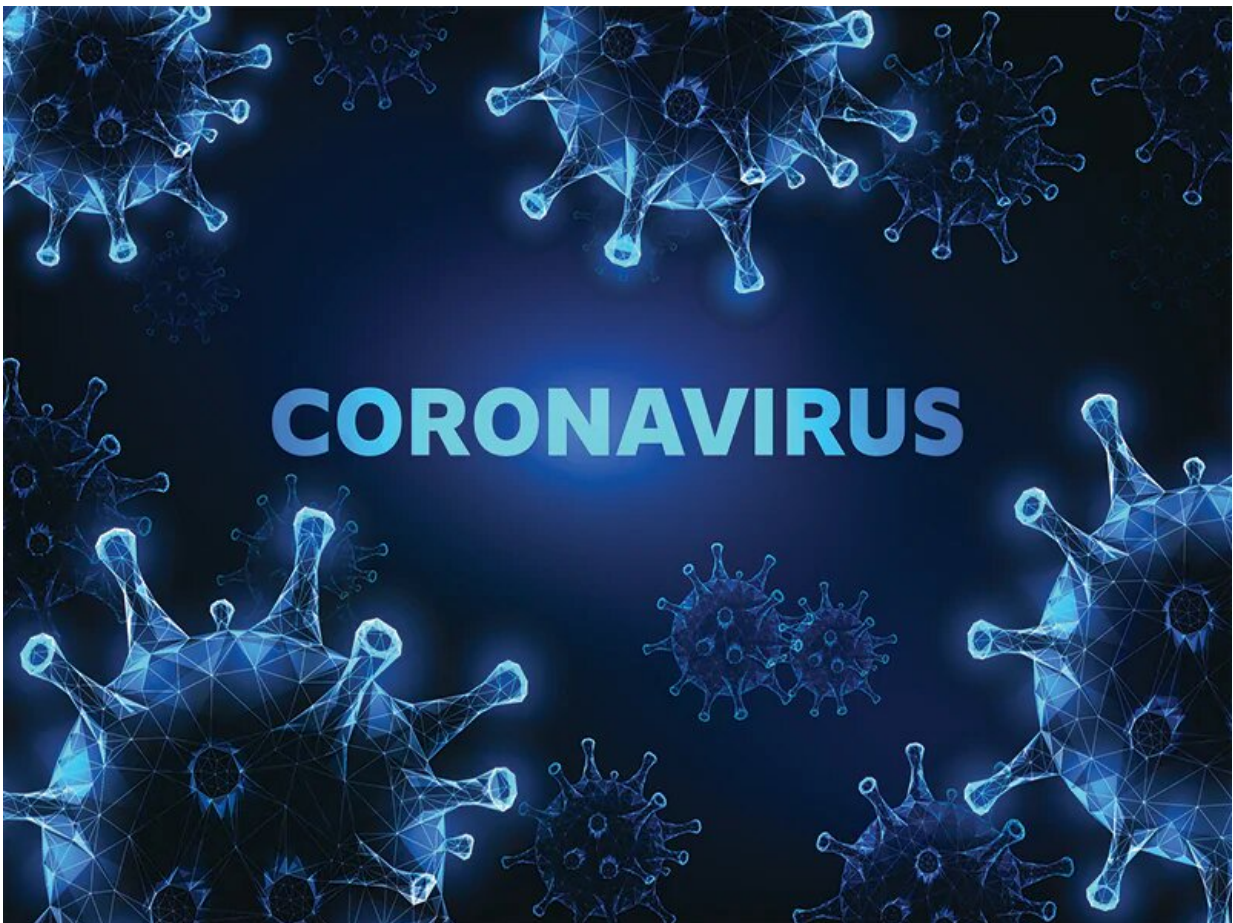


# New coronavirus guidelines discourage gatherings of 10 or more

March 17 2020, by Robin Foster and E.j. Mundell

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The Trump Administration on Monday ramped up its coronavirus "social

distancing" advisory to now discourage gatherings of 10 or more people.

Hours later, about 7 million people in the San Francisco Bay Area were ordered to shelter in their homes. Residents were instructed to only leave for "essential" reasons, such as going grocery shopping, going to the bank, using gas stations and going to pharmacies, *CNN* reported. By far the strictest social distancing measure in the United States at this point, the order mirrors many of those already in place across Europe.

"We know these measures will significantly disrupt people's day to day lives, but they are absolutely necessary," San Francisco Mayor London Breed said in a statement. "This is going to be a defining moment for our city, and we all have a responsibility to do our part to protect our neighbors and slow the spread of this virus by staying at home unless it is absolutely essential to go outside."

For now, the federal government only recommends less drastic measures for the rest of the country.

"This afternoon we're announcing [new guidelines](#) for every American to follow over the next 15 days," President Donald Trump said during an afternoon briefing.

In addition to advising against group gatherings of more than 10 people, Trump also discouraged eating and drinking at restaurants, bars and food courts, and any discretionary travel.

The prior advisory had discouraged gatherings of 50 or more people. However, Dr. Deborah Birx, a virologist and [coronavirus](#) task force coordinator, explained that newer models of the virus' spread now implicate people who might not even show symptoms as a significant source of "silent" infections.

A computer modeling report from researchers at Imperial College London that predicted 2 million American deaths unless stringent social distancing measures were enacted may have convinced U.S health officials to take the extraordinary step, the *New York Times* reported.

According to Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases, all Americans need to limit their contact with others to slow the rate of new infections.

"The worst is yet ahead for us," Fauci warned, and the crisis could continue into the summer. "It's how we respond [now] to that challenge that will determine what the ultimate endpoint is going to be."

But there was some encouraging news on the supply of COVID-19 infection testing kits.

Adm. Brett Giroir, who is leading the Department of Health and Human Services' efforts in coordinating coronavirus testing, said that a rollout of test kits has entered "a new phase," as commercial labs with highly efficient, automated systems ramp up their services. Giroir said 1 million tests are now available, 2 million more should be ready over the next week, and 5 million more a week later.

## **States mobilize**

State officials across America had already begun to enact even tougher restrictions to try to slow the spread of coronavirus on Sunday, as the country's case count reached passed 4,466, with 87 deaths, *CNN* reported.

Illinois, Ohio, Massachusetts, Washington state, California and New York City all enacted measures that essentially force bars, clubs and restaurants to close, the *Associated Press* reported.

On Saturday, the Trump administration expanded a 30-day ban on travel from Europe to include residents from the United Kingdom and Ireland, beginning late Monday.

And in a Saturday press conference, Pence hinted that restrictions on domestic travel in coronavirus hotspots might come as well.

A "broad range of measures" are under consideration, Pence told reporters. "But no decisions have been made yet," *U.S. Today* reported.

On Friday, Trump took a step many political and health care experts had been urging him to do, declaring the U.S. coronavirus crisis a [national emergency](#).

Hours later, the House passed a bill worked out with the Trump administration that will direct billions toward helping sick workers and steadying a faltering economy. The bill would allow for two weeks of paid sick leave and up to three months of family and medical leave for those affected by the crisis, the *Times* reported.

## **Aid to states**

The announcement of a national emergency, nearly unprecedented in American history, immediately frees up more than \$50 billion in federal funds to help states control the spread of COVID-19 before it overwhelms hospitals and health care systems.

"Through a very [collective action](#) and shared sacrifice and national determination, we will overcome the threat of the virus," Trump said at a White House press briefing, flanked by top officials engaged in the coronavirus fight.

As well as delivering a huge funding boost, the national emergency

declaration also greatly broadens the powers of the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), Alex Azar. The HHS can now bypass regulations that might otherwise hem in a hospital's ability to reach peak performance as critically ill cases flood in.

The president also said his administration is doubling down on testing for COVID-19. Experts, including Fauci, have already called the slow rollout of such tests a system failure.

Now, there's "a new partnership with the private sector to vastly accelerate and test for the coronavirus," Trump said Friday.

He said drug giant Roche received fast-track approval for a test that could soon boost supplies by 500,000 units. Other deals are in place that could raise the national test kit supply by 5 million test units "within a month," Trump said.

Beyond that, Trump and health officials said that Google will soon create a new website that will let any American describe his or her symptoms online and, if applicable, be directed to the nearest drive-through testing site.

Stores such as Walmart, CVS and Walgreens will set aside part of their parking lots for drive-through testing.

## **Crisis is changing lives**

In the meantime, the public lives of Americans have come to a halt, as the coronavirus pandemic prompted officials across the country to close, cancel or postpone any event or activity that might foster the spread of COVID-19.

At least a dozen states have shuttered all public schools. Meanwhile,

Broadway went dark, Disney World and Disneyland were closed, March Madness was canceled, and most professional sports leagues postponed their seasons, the *Washington Post* reported.

Cases in Washington state spiked to 904 by Tuesday. In New York state, Gov. Andrew Cuomo has turned a New York City suburb into a "containment zone." Schools and houses of worship in the city of New Rochelle will be closed for two weeks. A cluster of more than 196 cases there could be the largest in the nation, and National Guard troops were ordered to help clean public spaces and deliver food during the containment period, the *AP* reported.

In California, Gov. Gavin Newsom said all gatherings of more than 250 in that state should be postponed.

California, Washington state and New York now have the highest number of coronavirus cases in the United States, the *Times* reported. New York has 950, Washington state now has 904 cases and California has 392.

## **Cases spread worldwide**

As of Tuesday, the WHO had reported more than 173,344 cases of coronavirus worldwide, including over 7,019 deaths, the majority of which have occurred in China, where the outbreak began.

Internationally, hopes of containing the coronavirus are fading fast.

In Asia, South Korea and Iran are each battling major outbreaks of COVID-19. In Europe, Italy has ordered a travel lockdown of the entire country, some 60 million people, as it tries to contain a major outbreak of COVID-19. By Tuesday morning, the case count in that country had passed 27,000, the *Times* reported.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on the [new coronavirus](#).

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