

Louisiana virus cases surge; Edwards plans primetime address

March 23 2020, by Melinda Deslatte



Street performer Eddie Webb looks around the nearly deserted French Quarter looking to make money in New Orleans, Sunday, March 22, 2020. With much of the city already hunkered down due to the coronavirus pandemic, Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards issues a shelter-in-place order to take effect starting Monday at 5:00 PM. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

The number of Louisiana residents confirmed to be infected with the coronavirus spiked Monday to nearly 1,200 people, and the virus's death toll in the state grew dramatically overnight, in a troubling trend that had Gov. John Bel Edwards enacting a statewide "stay at home" order and planning a televised plea for people to comply.

At least 34 residents have died from the COVID-19 disease caused by the virus, according to Louisiana's health department, up from 20 confirmed deaths a day earlier.

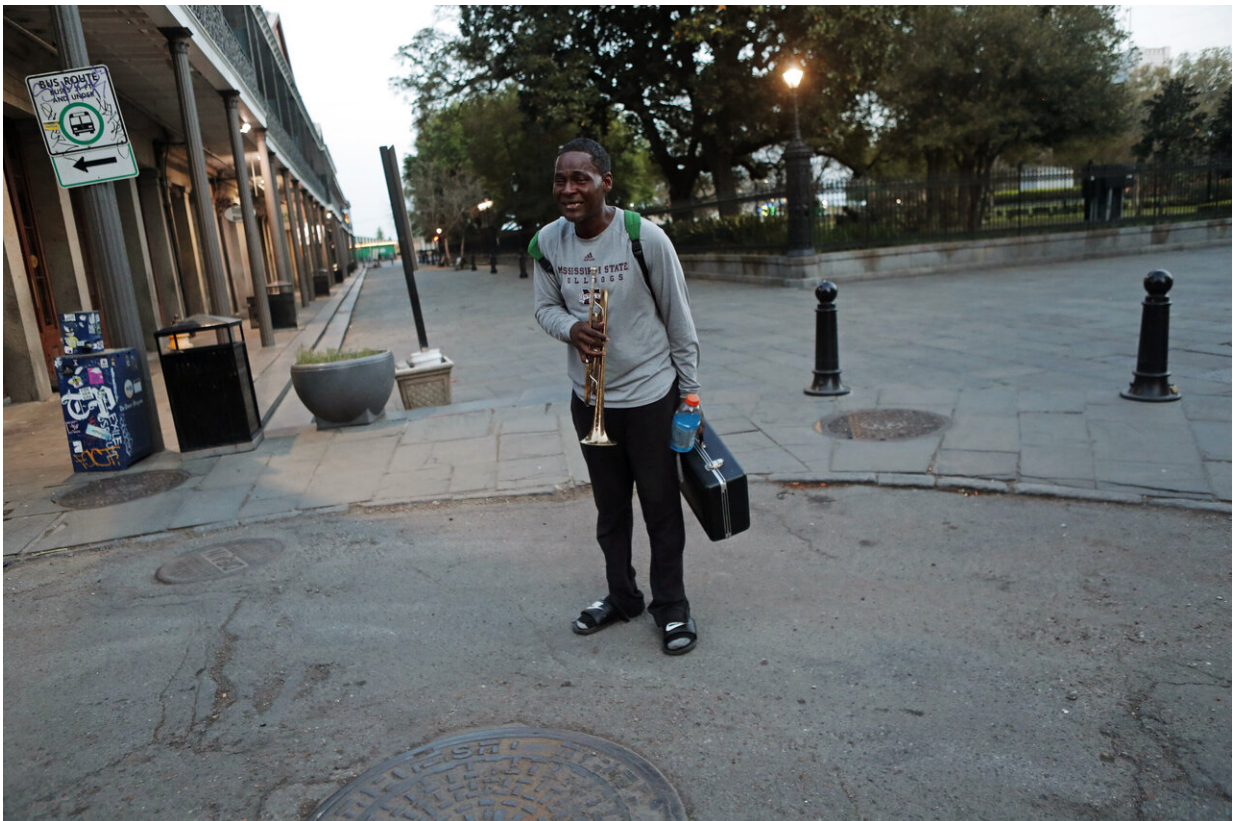
Edwards ordered his state's 4.6 million residents to voluntarily stay at home starting at 5 p.m. Monday unless they need to carry out essential tasks such as getting food or medicine. First responders and workers in grocery stores, pharmacies, doctors' offices and other critical operations are exempt from the directive, which will remain in effect until at least April 12.

The Democratic governor planned a prime-time, statewide TV broadcast Monday night to talk about Louisiana's response to the coronavirus. The state has one of the highest per-capita rates of confirmed infection, with the outbreak spreading so rapidly that Edwards has warned that Louisiana is on a trajectory similar to Italy's, with [health care facilities](#) at risk of being overwhelmed within the next week.

The virus has spread to at least 41 of the state's 64 parishes, according to the health department figures. The epicenter of the state's outbreak remains in the New Orleans region, which accounts for 25 of the deaths. Residents of the Baton Rouge area and in north and central Louisiana also have died from the virus.

Louisiana joins New York and Georgia in leading the nation in the number of nursing homes with coronavirus cases, a federal report shows. At least seven homes in each of the three states have confirmed or

suspected coronavirus cases, according to Sunday's report from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Current or suspected cases of COVID-19 have been found in at least four nursing homes in each of three other states: Washington, Illinois and New Jersey.



A street musician asks to play music for money in the nearly deserted French Quarter in New Orleans, Sunday, March 22, 2020. With much of the city already hunkered down due to the coronavirus pandemic, Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards issues a shelter-in-place order to take effect starting Monday at 5:00 PM. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)

This coronavirus causes only minor flu-like symptoms in most people, who recover in a matter of weeks. But it is highly contagious and can

cause severe illness or death in higher numbers among the elderly and people with underlying [health problems](#).

Of the Louisiana residents who have died from COVID-19, nine lived at Lambeth House, a New Orleans [retirement home](#) and nursing facility, state health officials said. Forty-two people from Lambeth House have tested positive for the [coronavirus](#). A second cluster of cases has been identified at a Donaldsonville retirement and nursing home, with five infections identified Monday, the health department said.

"We continue to be in daily contact with Lambeth House and in daily contact with any other facility that has people with symptoms. We even start at the point of symptoms. We want to be very cautious and watchful here," said Dr. Alexander Billioux, Louisiana assistant secretary of health.

Even as Edwards and public [health](#) officials called on people to stay home, one pastor refused to comply with a ban on gatherings of more than 10 people. A Baton Rouge area church held services for more than 1,800 people Sunday, many of them brought in on buses, according to WVLA-TV. Edwards described that as disappointing.

"We need everybody to embrace these mitigation measures and to be part of the solution, not part of the problem," the governor said.

Meanwhile, the leader of the Catholic Church in New Orleans, Archbishop Gregory Aymond, announced Monday that he had tested positive for COVID-19, saying in a statement that he had "very mild symptoms" and had self-quarantined.

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