

'Staggering': New York virus death toll rises above 1,200

March 30 2020, by Tom Hays and Marina Villeneuve



The Navy hospital ship USNS Comfort passes under the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge on its way to docking in New York, Monday, March 30, 2020. The ship has 1,000 beds and 12 operating rooms that could be up and running within 24 hours of its arrival on Monday morning. It's expected to bolster a besieged health care system by treating non-coronavirus patients while hospitals treat people with COVID-19. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)

A Navy hospital ship with 1,000 beds arrived Monday in New York City as the number of deaths in the state from the outbreak climbed quickly. Mayor Bill de Blasio said President Donald Trump's suggestion that thousands of medical masks are disappearing from New York City hospitals is "insulting" to front-line medical workers.

The latest coronavirus developments in New York:

SHIP ARRIVES AS TOLL RISES

A Navy hospital ship docked in New York City on Monday as the number of coronavirus-related deaths in the state soared to a "beyond staggering" 1,218.

The 1,000-bed USNS Comfort will be used as a "relief valve," treating non-coronavirus patients while the city's increasingly stressed hospitals handle people with COVID-19, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said.

New York is bracing for an escalation in hospitalizations and deaths in April as the outbreak's projected "apex" closes in. Cuomo noted the statewide death toll has already shot up by 253 in a single day to just over 1,200.

"That's a lot of loss, that's a lot of pain, that's a lot of tears, that's a lot of grief that people all across this state are feeling," the governor said at a briefing in Manhattan.

Most of those deaths are in New York City, the epicenter of the U.S. outbreak. And most of the deaths have occurred in just the past few days. Cuomo said the ultimate number of COVID-19-related deaths will be staggering, then added: "To me, we're beyond staggering already."



The Navy hospital ship USNS Comfort sails into New York, Monday March 30, 2020. The ship has 1,000 beds and 12 operating rooms that could be up and running within 24 hours of its arrival on Monday morning. It's expected to bolster a besieged health care system by treating non-coronavirus patients while hospitals treat people with COVID-19. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)

The massive, white hospital ship pulled into a cruise ship terminal off Manhattan on Monday morning. In addition to the 1,000 beds, the Comfort has 12 operating rooms that could be up and running within 24 hours.

The ship, which was sent to New York City after 9/11 as a respite center for first-responders, is docked just north of a temporary hospital constructed inside the cavernous Jacob K. Javits Convention Center. State and city officials are trying to increase hospital capacity by up to 87,000 beds to handle the outbreak.

"We bring a message to all New Yorkers – now, your Navy is returned and we are with you committed in this fight," said Rear Admiral John Mustin.

There are 9,500 people in New York currently hospitalized for COVID-19, with more than 2,300 in intensive care. In a rare bit of good news, the rapid increase in hospitalizations seems to have slowed down recently, Cuomo said.



The Navy hospital ship USNS Comfort passes lower Manhattan on its way to docking in New York, Monday, March 30, 2020. The ship has 1,000 beds and 12 operating rooms that could be up and running within 24 hours of its arrival on Monday morning. It's expected to bolster a besieged health care system by treating non-coronavirus patients while hospitals treat people with COVID-19. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

The state has more than 66,000 confirmed cases, mostly in New York City.

MEDICAL WORKER DEATHS

Two more New York City health care workers have died of the coronavirus, days after the first confirmed death.

De Blasio announced Sunday the deaths of Freda Ocran, a psych educator at Jacobi Hospital in the Bronx, and Theresa Lococo, a pediatric nurse at Kings County Hospital.

Ocran was previously the head nurse of the psych unit at Jacobi and was working, in part, to support her mother in Africa, de Blasio said.

On March 20, Ocran changed her profile picture on Facebook to include a mantra familiar to people on the front lines of the coronavirus fight: "I can't stay home ... I'm a healthcare worker."

Lococo had worked for the city's hospital system for 48 years, de Blasio said.

Last week, Mount Sinai West emergency room nurse Kious Kelly died Tuesday after a 10-day bout with the virus.



The Navy hospital ship USNS Comfort passes the Manhattan skyline on its way to docking in New York, Monday, March 30, 2020. The ship has 1,000 beds and 12 operating rooms that could be up and running within 24 hours of its arrival on Monday morning. It's expected to bolster a besieged health care system by treating non-coronavirus patients while hospitals treat people with COVID-19. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

MEDICAL MASKS

De Blasio and others criticized Trump for suggesting with no clear evidence that thousands of medical masks are disappearing from New York City hospitals.

At a Sunday briefing, the president told reporters they should be asking, "Where are the masks going? Are they going out the back door?"

Those remarks are "insulting" to [hospital](#) workers on the front lines of the city's coronavirus crisis, de Blasio said Monday.

"It's incredibly insensitive to people right now who are giving their all," he said. "I don't know what the president is talking about."

Hospitals had warned staff early on during the outbreak to not take masks home with them, but no evidence has emerged of large-scale looting of supplies.

Kenneth Raske, president of the Greater New York Hospital Association, said in a statement that the workers "deserve better" than the president's comment.



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Cuomo told reporters he didn't know what the president's back-door comment meant.

"If he wants to make an accusation, then let him make an accusation," Cuomo said. "But I don't know what he's trying to say by inference."

BAR BUSTED

Police in New York City have caught the first bar owner to violate a [coronavirus](#) shutdown by running a speakeasy, according to a news report on Monday.

The New York Post said that officers arrested 56-year-old Vasil Pando after they found a dozen people drinking and gambling at a Brooklyn sports bar that was supposed to keep its doors closed during the crisis.

It said Vasil was facing illegal sale of alcohol and other criminal charges. A name for an attorney wasn't listed in court records on Monday.

The report comes a day after Blasio warned of more stringent social-distancing measures, including fines of up to \$500 if they refused police orders to disperse. New Yorkers have "been warned and warned and warned again" and deserve fines "if they haven't gotten the message by now," he said.

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