

# More testing sheds light on how virus is spreading in US

March 2 2020, by Carla K. Johnson

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A person wearing a mask walks past a sign banning visitors at the Life Care Center in Kirkland, Wash., near Seattle, Monday, March 2, 2020. Dozens of people associated with the facility are reportedly ill with respiratory symptoms or hospitalized and are being tested for the COVID-19 virus. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

An increase in testing for the coronavirus began shedding light Monday on how the illness has spread in the United States, including among nursing home residents in one Washington state facility.

U.S. health officials updated the number of COVID-19 cases to 91 in 10 states after Oregon and Illinois announced new diagnoses. Seattle officials announced four more deaths, bringing the total in the U.S. to six.

King County Executive Dow Constantine declared an emergency and said the county was buying a hotel to be used as a hospital for patients who need to be isolated. He said the facility should be available by the end of the week.

"We have moved to a new stage in the fight," he said.

Vice President Mike Pence met with the nation's governors and pledged to continue updating them by teleconference on a weekly basis.

The nursing home cases especially troubled health care experts because of the vulnerability of sick and [elderly people](#) to the illness and existing problems in nursing facilities.

"It's going to be a disaster," said Charlene Harrington, who studies nursing homes at the University of California at San Francisco. Infection is already a huge problem in U.S. nursing homes because of a lack of nurses and training.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the case count includes 45 infections among people who were on the Diamond Princess cruise ship, which is one more than previously reported. It also includes people who tested positive after returning from travel to outbreak areas in other parts of the world, their close contacts, and what appear to be

infections from community spread—people who did not travel and did not have known contact with other infected people.



A person wearing a mask walks past a sign banning visitors at the Life Care Center in Kirkland, Wash., near Seattle, Monday, March 2, 2020. Dozens of people associated with the facility are reportedly ill with respiratory symptoms or hospitalized and are being tested for the COVID-19 virus. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

The CDC recently broadened its guidelines for who should be tested for the [new virus](#) to include people with symptoms but without a travel history to virus hot zones.

More testing will bring more confirmed cases, experts said, but they cautioned that does not mean the virus is gaining speed. Instead, the testing is likely to reveal a picture of the virus' spread that was previously invisible.

In Seattle, schools and one skyscraper closed, but health experts cautioned that closures can have downsides.

On Monday, the F5 technology company said it was closing its 44-story tower in downtown Seattle after learning an employee had been in contact with someone who tested positive for coronavirus. The employee tested negative, but company spokesman Rob Gruening said the tower was closed as a precaution.

More than 10 schools in the Seattle area were closed for deep cleaning over virus concerns, although the city-county public health department said it was not yet recommending school closures or cancellation of activities.

Closing schools or large gatherings are what's called social distancing, the idea that distancing people will reduce spread.

"The evidence for these measures are not as strong as we would like it to be," Jennifer Nuzzo of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security cautioned Monday during a webinar.

Measures such as school closures have been used during flu outbreaks, and the new coronavirus isn't acting exactly like flu. Moreover, they have downsides.





A sign at the entrance of the Life Care Center is shown in Kirkland, Wash., near Seattle, Monday, March 2, 2020. Dozens of people associated with the facility are reportedly ill with respiratory symptoms or hospitalized and are being tested for the COVID-19 virus. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

"Maybe it makes people more likely to stay at home. Maybe it doesn't if people re-congregate elsewhere," Nuzzo said.

Closing schools also leaves [health care workers](#), first responders and others without child care, making it difficult for them to come to work.

On Capitol Hill, negotiations on a bipartisan, emergency \$7 billion to \$8 billion measure to battle the virus are almost complete, according to both Democratic and GOP aides. The measure appears on track to be

unveiled as early as Tuesday, and the hope is to speed it quickly through both House and Senate by the end of the week.

The measure would finance both federal and state response efforts, fund the [federal government](#)'s drive to develop and produce a vaccine, and offer Small Business Administration disaster loans to help businesses directly affected by the virus crisis.

At the Pentagon, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Mark Milley, told reporters that the COVID-19 outbreak has had little impact on the U.S. military. "Right now the overall broad impact to the U.S. uniformed military is very, very minimal. That's not to say it's zero," he said.

U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams discussed the virus Monday during a stop in Connecticut, where he was touring the state public health laboratory.

"Caution, preparedness, but not panic," Adams said. "That's how we're going to successfully navigate this coronavirus situation."

Adams and state Public Health Commissioner Renee Coleman-Mitchell urged the public to take precautions such as washing hands, elbow "bumping" instead of hand shaking and getting flu shots. They said flu shots would decrease the number of people hospitalized because of flu and free up space, if needed, to treat patients sickened by the [coronavirus](#).

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