

NY airports, hospitals under pressure as virus cases mount

March 21 2020, by Michael Hill and Michael R. Sisak



A screen displays a message thanking health care workers during the coronavirus outbreak, in a sparsely populated Times Square, Friday, March 20, 2020, in New York. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is ordering all workers in non-essential businesses to stay home and banning non-essential gatherings statewide. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)

The Federal Aviation Administration briefly suspended flights to New York City-area airports on Saturday because of coronavirus-related staffing issues as the number of confirmed cases in New York state soared above 10,000.

State officials said they're scouring the globe for desperately needed medical supplies and scouting field hospital locations in the New York City area. The Federal Emergency Management Agency has declared a major disaster in the state, freeing up access to billions of dollars in relief funding.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo said the state is seeking to quickly boost hospital capacity from around 50,000 beds to 75,000 beds statewide. The state has already hospitalized 1,600 people due to the outbreak, he said.

The state is looking to see whether Manhattan's spacious Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, normally home to the auto show and other big events, could be suitable for 1,000 requested beds supplied by FEMA in a "tent configuration" with equipment and staff.

Possible locations for temporary hospital structures built by the Army Corps of Engineers include Stony Brook University and SUNY College at Old Westbury on Long Island, and the Westchester County Center north of the city. Sites will be reviewed Saturday, he said.



A screen displaying a messages thanking healthcare workers due to COVID-19 concerns is displayed in a sparsely populated Times Square, Friday, March 20, 2020, in New York. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is ordering all workers in non-essential businesses to stay home and banning gatherings statewide. "Only essential businesses can have workers commuting to the job or on the job," Cuomo said of an executive order he will sign Friday. Nonessential gatherings of individuals of any size or for any reason are canceled or postponed. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)

"Everything that can be done is being done," Cuomo said.

The effects of the disease, known as COVID-19, are being felt everywhere from hospitals to the airports.

In an alert posted online Saturday, the FAA advised air traffic controllers to "stop all departures" to Kennedy, LaGuardia, Newark and other airports in the region because of staffing issues at a regional air-traffic control center on Long Island.

The halt, which also affected Philadelphia International Airport, was lifted after about 30 minutes. Initially air traffic controllers were warned it could last several hours.

Air-traffic controllers at Kennedy had been operating from an alternate location on airport property this week after an FAA technician assigned to the airport's control tower tested positive for COVID-19. In a statement, the FAA said that the technician hadn't been to work since March 11 and that the tower was being cleaned as a precaution.



Artists perform under a billboard displaying information on COVID-19 in a sparsely populated Times Square, Friday, March 20, 2020, in New York. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is ordering all workers in non-essential businesses to stay home and banning gatherings statewide. "Only essential businesses can have workers commuting to the job or on the job," Cuomo said of an executive order he will sign Friday. Nonessential gatherings of individuals of any size or for any reason are canceled or postponed. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)

Meanwhile, hospitals are facing dwindling equipment and supplies, including ventilators and masks, with an expected surge of coronavirus patients looming.

Officials have identified 2 million face masks that can be sent to hot spots, Cuomo said, and apparel companies are pivoting to make masks. One million masks are being sent to New York City hospitals Saturday, and 500,000 to Long Island. And with hospital gowns in short supply, the state is trying to obtain gown material for apparel makers, he said.

The state is also rounding up critically needed ventilators from around the state and purchasing 6,000 to deploy to the most critical areas, Cuomo said. And they are investigating whether multiple patients can be served by a single ventilator.

"We are literally scouring the globe looking for medical supplies," Cuomo said.



A screen displaying messages concerning COVID-19 is seen in a sparsely populated Times Square, Friday, March 20, 2020, in New York. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is ordering all workers in non-essential businesses to stay home and banning gatherings statewide. "Only essential businesses can have workers commuting to the job or on the job," Cuomo said of an executive order he will sign Friday. Nonessential gatherings of individuals of any size or for any reason are canceled or postponed. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)



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The state also will immediately conduct trials of an experimental treatment with hydroxychloroquine and Zithromax.

The malaria drug hydroxychloroquine has been touted by President Donald Trump as a possible answer-in-waiting to the outbreak, though

many experts caution more testing needs to be done. Cuomo said the Food and Drug Administration is sending 10,000 doses to the state.

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