

Two states ease lockdowns; US COVID-19 toll passes 50,000

April 24 2020, by Russ Bynum and David Crary



Lonnie Sullivan covers his face with a mask while getting a haircut at The Barber Shop in Broken Arrow, Okla., on Friday, April 24, 2020. The shop was among several allowed to reopen in a loosening of coronavirus-related restrictions. (Matt Barnard/Tulsa World via AP)

Even as the confirmed U.S. death toll from coronavirus rose past 50,000, salons, spas and barbershops reopened Friday in Georgia and Oklahoma with a green light from their Republican governors, who eased lockdown orders despite health experts' warnings.

Though limited in scope, and subject to social-distancing restrictions, the reopening marked a symbolic milestone in the debate raging in the United States – and the world—as to how quickly political leaders should lift economically damaging lockdown orders.

Similar scenarios have been playing worldwide and will soon proliferate in the U.S. as other governors wrestle with conflicting priorities. Their economies have been battered by weeks of quarantine-fueled job losses and soaring unemployment claims, yet health officials warn that lifting stay-at-home orders now could spark a resurgence of COVID-19.

The coronavirus has killed more than 190,000 people worldwide, including—as of Friday—more than 50,000 in the United States, according to a tally compiled by John Hopkins University from government figures. The actual death toll is believed to be far higher.

New cases are surging in Africa and Latin America as outbreaks subside in some places that were hit earlier.

In Oklahoma, Gov. Kevin Stitt authorized personal-care businesses to open, citing a decline in the number of people being hospitalized for COVID-19. Those businesses were directed to maintain social distancing, require masks and frequently sanitize equipment.



Noah Nichols works out at the Rock Fitness Center on Friday, April 24, 2020 in Ringgold, Ga. Gyms, along with hair salons, bowling alleys and tattoo parlors were among the businesses allowed to open on Friday. (C.B. Schmelter/Chattanooga Times Free Press via AP)

Still, some of the state's largest cities, including Norman, Oklahoma City and Tulsa, were opting to keep their bans in place until at least the end of April.

Amy Pembrook and her husband, Mike, reopened their hair salon in the northwest Oklahoma town of Fairview after it had been shuttered for about a month.

"We're super excited about going back, but we have caught a little flack

from people who say it's too early," Amy Pembrook said. "We just said we can live in fear for a long time or we can trust that everything is going to be OK."

With deaths and infections still rising in Georgia, many business owners planned to stay closed despite Gov. Brian Kemp's assurance that hospital visits and new cases have leveled off enough for barbers, tattoo artists, massage therapists and personal trainers to return to work with restrictions.



A woman wearing a face mask, plastic gloves, and a blanket waits to be tested for COVID-19 outside the emergency door at Almenara Hospital in Lima, Peru, Friday, April 24, 2020. (AP Photo/Martin Mejia)

Kemp's timeline to restart the economy proved too ambitious even for President Donald Trump, who said he disagrees with the fellow Republican's plan.

On Friday, Trump signed a \$484 billion bill to aid employers and hospitals under stress from the pandemic—the latest federal effort to help keep afloat businesses that have had to close or scale down. Over the past five weeks, roughly 26 million people have filed for jobless aid, or about 1 in 6 U.S. workers.

Without a tried-and-tested action plan for how to pull countries out of coronavirus lockdown, the world is seeing a patchwork of approaches. Schools reopen in one country, stay closed in others; face masks are mandatory in some places, a recommendation elsewhere.

Kids still attend soccer practice in Sweden while they are not even allowed outside in Spain. As governments and scientists fumble around, still struggling with so many unknowns, individuals are being left to take potentially life-affecting decisions.



Emmy Homer, right, gets a pedicure from Thuy Ho at BA Nail & Spa in Broken Arrow, Okla., on Friday, April 24, 2020. The shop was among several allowed to reopen in a loosening of coronavirus-related restrictions. (Matt Barnard/Tulsa World via AP)

In Georgia, David Huynh had 60 clients booked for appointments at his nail salon in Savannah, but a clothing store, jewelry shop and chocolatier that share a street corner with his downtown business, Envy Nail Bar, remained closed.

"The phone's been staying ringing off the hook," Huynh said. "We've probably gotten hundreds of calls in the last hour."

Four women clutching face masks were waiting outside when the salon opened for the first time since March 26.

"Yes, I am ready to get my nails fixed," said Alina Davis, a police officer for the local school system, who kept working throughout the crisis.

Meanwhile, Nikki Thomas is overdue for a visit to her hair stylist, but she's barely ventured outside her house in the six weeks since she's been working from home. She had no plans to change that now just because of Kemp's decision.



A healthcare worker looks on in one of the intensive care units where coronavirus patients are treated at the Ramon y Cajal hospital in Madrid, Spain, Spain, Friday, April 24, 2020. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)

"It's obviously extremely stupid and I'm simultaneously exhausted and so angry I can barely see straight," Thomas, 40, said in a phone interview.

The gradual reopenings come as coronavirus testing continues to lag across the United States. To date, according to data compiled by the COVID Tracking Project, just under 4.7 million people have been tested in the country of 330 million people.

A lack of tests and supplies has hampered the U.S. effort from the beginning. About 193,000 people were tested on Thursday. That's an increase from the two-week daily average of 163,000, but far less than what public health experts estimate is needed to get a handle on the virus.

Researchers at Harvard have estimated a minimum of 500,000 daily tests are needed, and possibly much more, in order to safely reopen the economy.



A customer wears personal protective equipment while riding an MTA bus as it operates without fees, Friday, April 24, 2020, in the Bronx borough of New York. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)

In Michigan, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer lengthened her stay-at-home order through May 15, while lifting restrictions so some businesses can reopen and the public can participate in outdoor activities like golf and motorized boating during the coronavirus pandemic.

Michigan has nearly 3,000 deaths related to COVID-19, behind only New York and New Jersey among U.S. states.

New York reported its lowest number of daily COVID-19 deaths in weeks on Friday. The state recorded 422 deaths as of the day

before—the fewest since March 31, when it recorded 391 deaths. More than 16,000 people have died in the state from the outbreak.

In Denver, Mayor Michael Hancock extended the city's stay-at-home order and non-essential business closures through May 8 just as Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, a fellow Democrat, prepared to relax some statewide restrictions next week.



Mourners carry the coffin of a Guinean man, who died of COVID-19 and who the family did not wish to identify by name, during a funeral at the cemetery of Evere, Belgium, Friday, April 24, 2020. Shops and restaurants in Belgium remain closed and weddings and funerals are limited in number during a partial lockdown to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo)



Staff of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government urge people to go home from the Kabukicho entertainment district in the Shinjuku Ward in Tokyo, Friday evening, April 24, 2020. Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expanded a state of emergency to all of Japan from just Tokyo and other urban areas as the virus continues to spread. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)



In this Monday, March 9, 2020, photo, students wearing masks to help stop the spread of the new coronavirus, participate in the visual arts mock exam for Diploma of Secondary Education (DSE) at the CCC Ming Kei College in Hong Kong. Hong Kong's university entrance examinations have started with social-distancing measures. More than 52,000 students are expected to sit for the city's Diploma of Secondary Education exams over the next month. (AP Photo/Kin Cheung)



A man wears a mask to protect against the spread of the coronavirus as he walks along the Trocadero square close to the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Friday, April 24, 2020. France continues to be under an extended stay-at-home order until May 11 in an attempt to slow the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. (AP Photo/Michel Euler)



Mason Lambert, 5, looks up at the rain as he leaves the house with his grandmother Karen Lambert, in car at left, and mother Emilie Lambert, right, for his daily outing to one of the few public parking areas still open by the sea during the coronavirus shutdown, Friday, April 24, 2020, in Narragansett, R.I. (AP Photo/David Goldman)



Muslim men attend a Friday prayer despite concerns of the new coronavirus outbreak, at a mosque during the first day of the holy fasting month of Ramadan in Lhokseumawe, in the religiously conservative province of Aceh, Indonesia, Friday, April 24, 2020. During Ramadan, which begins Friday, faithful Muslims normally fast during the day and then congregate for night prayers and share communal meals. (AP Photo/Zik Maulana)



People going to work some wear masks to protect against the spread of the coronavirus ride a subway early morning in Paris, Friday, April 24, 2020. France continues to be under an extended stay-at-home order until May 11 in an attempt to slow the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. (AP Photo/Michel Euler)



Ultra-Orthodox Jews keep social distancing during a morning prayer next to their houses as synagogues are closed following the government's measures to help stop the spread of the coronavirus, in Bnei Brak, Israel, Friday, April 24, 2020. (AP Photo/Oded Balilty)



A construction worker passes a mural by artist Casper Cruse, showing a woman with a face mask holding a heart in the colors of the dutch flag as a statement of support for those suffering from the effects of the coronavirus, in The Hague, Netherlands, Friday, April 24, 2020. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)



A woman walks past a man begging for alms in a street in downtown Barcelona, Spain, Friday, April 24, 2020, as the lockdown to combat the spread of coronavirus continues. (AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti)

Health officials in Colorado ordered the immediate closure of a Walmart in Aurora, a Denver suburb, after three people connected to the store died after being infected with the [coronavirus](#) and at least six employees tested positive.

In France, the government is leaving families to decide whether to keep children at home or send them back to class when the nationwide lockdown, in place since March 17, starts to be eased May 11.

In Spain, parents face a similarly knotty decision: whether to let kids get

their first fresh air in weeks when the country starts Sunday to ease the total ban on letting them outside.

The slowing of Spain's horrific outbreak, which has killed more than 22,500 people, made the prospect of letting kids out feasible. For the first time Friday, Spanish health authorities counted more people recovering from the disease in a 24-hour span than new infections.

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