New York virus toll doubles in 72 hours as hot spots spread

April 2 2020, by Robert Bumsted, Angela Charlton and Mark Sherman

People wearing a protective face mask wait at a pedestrian crossing Thursday, April 2, 2020, in Tokyo. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

New York rushed to bring in an army of medical volunteers as the statewide death toll from the coronavirus doubled in 72 hours to more than 1,900, while the global number of people diagnosed with the illness edged closer to 1 million on Thursday.

As hot spots flared around the U.S. in places like New Orleans and Southern California, the nation's biggest city was the hardest hit of them all, with bodies loaded onto refrigerated morgue trucks by gurney and forklift outside overwhelmed hospitals.

The wail of ambulances in the otherwise eerily quiet streets of the city became the heartbreaking soundtrack of the crisis.

"It's like a battlefield behind your home," said 33-year-old Emma Sorza, who could hear the sirens from severely swamped Elmhurst Hospital in Queens.
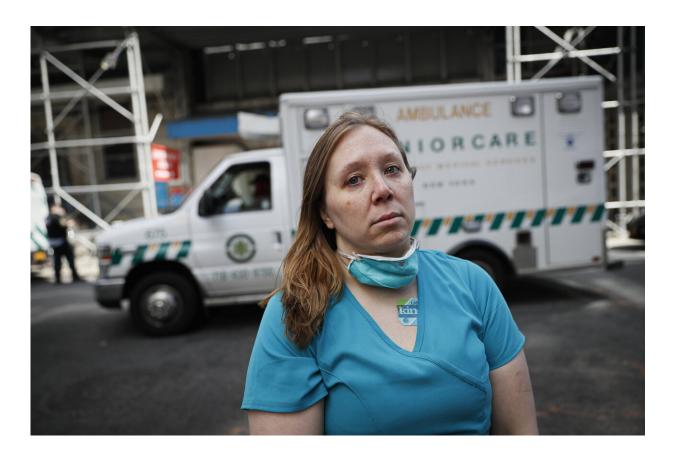
And the worst is yet to come.

"How does it end? And people want answers," New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said. "I want answers. The answer is nobody knows for sure."

President Donald Trump acknowledged that the federal stockpile is nearly depleted of personal protective equipment used by doctors and nurses and warned of trying times to come.

"Difficult days are ahead for our nation," he said. "We're going to have a couple of weeks, starting pretty much now, but especially a few days from now that are going to be horrific."

Registered Nurse Elizabeth Schafer, 36, of South St. Paul, Minn., stands for a portrait before entering Beth Israel Mount Sinai Hospital for her second day volunteering to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, Wednesday, April 1, 2020, in New York. Schafer left her home in the Midwest to volunteer in New York where she says the situation inside the hospital is grim. "I took an oath as a nurse to do no harm and just go where I was needed," Schafer said. "I told my students, you step up to the plate when you're needed as a nurse, all the time, no matter what. And so right now, you either go to the West Coast or the East Coast as a nurse. And so here I am." (AP Photo/John Minchillo)

Altogether, close to 940,000 people around the world have contracted the virus, according to a tally being kept by Johns Hopkins University. More than 47,000 people have died from the virus, which was first found in China late last year.

The real figures are believed to be much higher because of testing shortages, differences in counting the dead and large numbers of mild cases that have gone unreported.

Asian stocks were meandering Thursday after a White House warning that as many as 240,000 Americans might die in the pandemic sent Wall Street tumbling. The Dow Jones Industrial Average lost more than 970 points, or over 4%.

Meanwhile, European nations facing extraordinary demand for intensive-care beds were putting up makeshift hospitals, unsure whether they will find enough healthy medical staff to run them. London was days away from unveiling a 4,000-bed temporary hospital built in a huge convention center.

In this Wednesday, April 1, 2020, photo, a municipal worker sprays disinfectant at a school to help curb the spread of the new coronavirus in Dakar, Senegal. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. (AP Photo/Sylvain Cherkaoui)

Spain reported a record 864 deaths in one day Wednesday, for a total of more than 9,000, while France registered 509 deaths for more than 4,000 deaths in all.

In Italy, with the most deaths of any country at more than 13,000, morgues overflowed with bodies and caskets piled up in churches, although experts drew hope that the spread was already slowing in the country.

Meanwhile, Israel's health minister, who has had frequent contact in recent weeks with Prime Minister Netanyahu and other top officials, was diagnosed with the illness, the Health Ministry announced Thursday.

Scientists offered more evidence Wednesday that the coronavirus can be spread by seemingly healthy people who show no clear symptoms, leading the U.S. government to issue new guidance warning that anyone exposed to the disease can be considered a potential carrier.

Supporters of the minor opposition People's Party wear face masks to help protect against the spread of the new coronavirus during a campaign for the 2020 South Korean National Assembly election in Seoul, South Korea, Thursday, April 2, 2020. For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)

Many countries are now modeling their response to the virus in part after China, which in January closed off an entire province home to tens of millions of people in what at the time was an unprecedented lockdown. The government says the measures have been a success, with nearly all new cases of the virus imported from abroad.

People in Wuhan, once the epicenter of the crisis, are starting to return to work. They are being tracked by a smartphone app that shows if they are symptom free. The app is required to board a subway, check into a hotel or just enter the city.

Walking into a subway station Wednesday, Wu Shenghong, a manager for a clothing manufacturer, used her phone to scan a barcode on a poster that triggered her app. A green code and part of her identity card number appeared on the screen. A guard wearing a mask and goggles waved her through.

Graffiti that reads "COVID 19" is pictured behind a locked gate in Philadelphia's Fishtown section Wednesday, April 1, 2020. (Tim Tai/The Philadelphia Inquirer via AP)

If the code had been red, that would tell the guard that Wu was confirmed to be infected or had a fever or other symptoms and was awaiting a diagnosis. A yellow code would mean she had contact with an infected person but hadn't finished a two-week quarantine, meaning she should be in a hospital or quarantined.

More measures to control the spread of the virus rolled out Wednesday in the U.S. Under growing pressure, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis belatedly joined his counterparts in more than 30 states in issuing a statewide stay-home order. The governors of Pennsylvania, Nevada and Mississippi took similar steps.

The U.S. has recorded more than 216,000 infections and more than 5,100 deaths, with New York City accounting for about 1 out of 4 dead.

More than 80,000 people have volunteered as medical reinforcements in New York, including recent retirees and health care professionals taking a break from their regular jobs. A Navy hospital ship has docked in the harbor, a convention center has been turned into a hospital, and the tennis center that hosts the U.S. Open is being converted to one.

In this Wednesday, April 1, 2020, photo, a municipal worker sprays disinfectant in a mosque to help curb the spread of the new coronavirus in Dakar, Senegal. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. (AP Photo/Sylvain Cherkaoui)

Those arriving to help have found a hospital system near the breaking point.

"It's hard when you lose patients. It's hard when you have to tell the family members: 'I'm sorry, but we did everything that we could,'" said nurse Katherine Ramos of Cape Coral, Florida, who has been working at New York Presbyterian Hospital. "It's even harder when we really don't have the time to mourn, the time to talk about this."

Cuomo said projections suggest the crisis in New York will peak at the end of April, with a high death rate continuing through July.

The strain facing some of the world's best health care systems has been aggravated by hospital budget cuts over the past decade in Italy, Spain, France and Britain. They have called in medical students, retired doctors and even laid-off flight attendants with first aid training.

Mariachi player Aurelio Reyes wears a homemade face mask, before playing at El Mariachi Plaza in the Boyle Heights area of Los Angeles on Wednesday, April 1, 2020. Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti has recommended that the city's 4 million people wear masks when going outside amid the spreading coronavirus. Garcetti on Wednesday said people in the nation's second-largest city who are performing essential tasks such as food shopping should wear homemade, non-
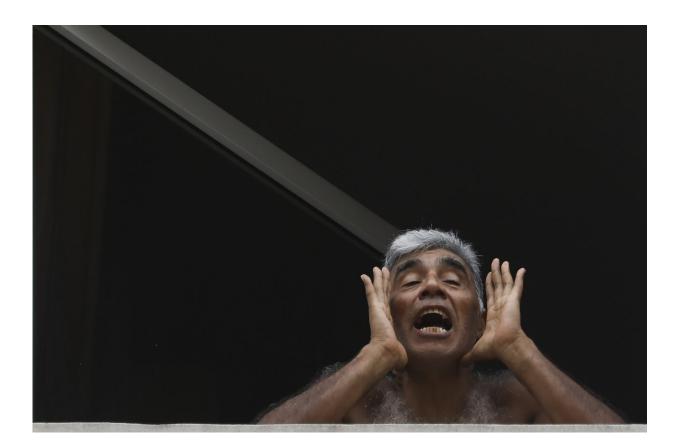
medical face coverings, or even bandannas. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)

In this April 1, 2020 photo, a passenger scans a QR code to get his green pass at a subway station in Wuhan in central China's Hubei province. Life in China post-coronavirus outbreak is ruled by a green symbol on a smartphone screen. Green signifies the "health code" that says the user is symptom-free. It is required to board a subway, check into a hotel or enter Wuhan, the city where the global pandemic began. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

Marcelo Gomez shouts to the press about poor living conditions at a hotel where he is being quarantined by the government in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Wednesday, April 1, 2020. The government placed many Argentines returning from vacation into single hotel rooms where they are not allowed to leave. Many of them are denouncing what they describe as bad treatment, insufficient cleaning conditions, poor food, and no information on how long they will be forced to stay. (AP Photo/Natacha Pisarenko)

A police officer wearing protective gear against the spread of the new coronavirus, stands guard outside the mayor's office, in the historic center of Mexico City, Wednesday, April 1, 2020, where many businesses have temporarily closed. Mexico's government has broadened its shutdown of "non essential activities," and prohibited gatherings of more than 50 people as a way to help slow down the spread of COVID-19. (AP Photo/Marco Ugarte)

Medical staff of a mobile unit take samples from a woman to test for Covid-19, at the Santa Maria della Pieta' hospital complex, in Rome, Wednesday, April 1, 2020. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. (Cecilia Fabiano/LaPresse via AP)

A coronavirus patient is transferred from a hospital that was full to capacity to another hospital by members of the medical staff of Klinicare in Brussels, Wednesday, April 1, 2020. The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms for most people, but for some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness or death. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)

People line up to get their temperature checked before being allowed into a bus to return to their provinces in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Wednesday, April 1, 2020. The Argentine government ordered a forced lock down to help contain the spread of the new coronavirus. (AP Photo/Natacha Pisarenko)

The staffing shortage has been worsened by the high numbers of infected personnel. In Italy alone, nearly 10,000 medical workers have contracted the virus and more than 60 doctors have died.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. But for others, especially older adults and people with health problems, it can cause severe symptoms like pneumonia.

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