

# Top health officials warn against reopening as millions more Americans go out

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Even as the country's top health officials testified to Congress on

Tuesday about the dangers of reopening too quickly, a new report shows millions more Americans are now venturing out in public.

About 25 million more people went out on an average day last week than did during the six weeks of the U.S. lockdown, a *New York Times* analysis shows.

From March 20, when states began urging people to stay home, to April 30, when many states started easing those restrictions, 43.8 percent of U.S. residents stayed home, the *Times* analysis showed.

But last week, only 36.1 percent of Americans stayed home. The biggest drop in share of people staying home was in Michigan, where stay-at-home orders are actually still in place, the analysis showed.

But during testimony delivered remotely on Tuesday to the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, Dr. Anthony Fauci warned of the dangers of that trend, the *Times* reported.

While more than 82,000 Americans have already perished from COVID-19, Fauci cautioned that the number is likely higher and will spike even more if some parts of the country reopen prematurely, the *Times* reported.

"If that occurs, there is a real risk that you will trigger an outbreak that you may not be able to control," Fauci testified. That could result not only in "some suffering and death that could be avoided, but could even set you back on the road to trying to get economic recovery."

During his testimony, Fauci also advised against schools reopening in the fall, the *Times* reported.

"The idea of having treatments available or a vaccine to facilitate reentry

of students into fall term would be something that would be a bit of a bridge too far," he said, explaining that "the drug [remdesivir] that has shown some degree of efficacy was modest and in hospitalized patients" only. And remdesivir alone will not be enough to fight COVID-19, he added.

Fauci is one of three top health officials who have begun to quarantine themselves to some degree after being exposed to two White House aides who have been diagnosed with COVID-19.

The other officials are Dr. Robert Redfield, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and Dr. Stephen Hahn, commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the *Washington Post* reported.

As of Wednesday morning, U.S. coronavirus cases neared 1.4 million and the death toll passed 82,000, according to the *Times*.

## **Serious illness in kids**

Meanwhile, troubling news has emerged from New York City: More than 50 children have contracted a new, serious inflammatory syndrome that seems to be linked to COVID-19 infection. Three of those patients, two grade schoolers and a teenager, have died, the *Times* reported. None of them were known to have any preexisting condition.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Tuesday directed the state's hospitals to prioritize COVID-19 testing for children showing symptoms of the condition, now known as "pediatric multi-system inflammatory syndrome, *CBS News* reported.

"We have been behind this virus every step of the way and even as we are now beginning to see the numbers on the decline, the virus is still

surprising us," Cuomo said in a statement, *CBS News* reported. "Initially, we thought COVID-19 didn't affect children, and now we're dealing with a disturbing issue where we have about 100 cases of an inflammatory disease in children that seems to be created by the virus."

A small number of cases have been reported in other states, including California, Louisiana and Mississippi, the *Times* reported. At least 50 cases have been reported in European countries, including Britain, France, Italy, Spain and Switzerland.

These troubling developments followed more bad news on the economy last week.

Last Friday, the federal government's monthly jobs report showed a staggering 14.7 percent of Americans are now unemployed.

A total of 20.5 million jobs were lost during the country's April lockdown, and not since the Great Depression has the unemployment rate been so high, the *Times* reported Friday.

That was not the only bad economic news delivered in recent days: On Thursday, the weekly jobless claims report showed that another 3.2 million jobless claims were filed last week. That brought the total unemployed since the nation's economy was first curtailed by social distancing measures in mid-March to a historic 33 million.

## **Health cost of reopening**

While reopening parts of the U.S. economy will undoubtedly start to help some Americans get their jobs back, an internal report from the Trump administration predicted that reopening will come at a cost: 200,000 new coronavirus cases and 3,000 deaths *every day* by the end of May.

Troubling predictions came from more than one source: A forecasting model from University of Washington researchers also raised its projections to more than 134,000 American deaths from COVID-19 by early August, the *Times* reported.

All of the numbers illustrate a grim fact: Even though the country has essentially been in lockdown for the past seven weeks, the coronavirus prognosis hasn't really changed.

Even as reopening plans proceed, polling shows that many Americans oppose the reopening of restaurants, retail stores and other businesses.

A *Post*-University of Maryland survey, released last week, found that many Americans have been making trips to grocery stores and 56 percent say they are comfortable doing so. But 67 percent say they would be uncomfortable shopping at a retail clothing store, and 78 percent would be uncomfortable eating at a sit-down restaurant.

Meanwhile, a new analysis finds inadequate levels of testing for the coronavirus in 60% of states, many of which are reopening after weeks of lockdown.

The analysis, conducted by the *Associated Press*, uses a 2% testing rate per month—a rate advised by federal officials that many public health experts still feel falls short.

## **Promise of remdesivir, vaccine by January**

There has been one note of good news: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved emergency use of the first drug that seems to boost recovery among COVID-19 patients.

Remdesivir, Gilead Sciences' intravenous antiviral medication, is to be

used for hospitalized patients with "severe disease," such as those who need supplemental oxygen or ventilators to breathe, the *AP* reported.

The FDA based its decision on the results of a government study that showed remdesivir shortened the time to recovery by 31% for COVID-19 patients in the hospital, the *AP* reported.

The search for a vaccine also got some welcome news. The White House has announced an initiative to produce a COVID-19 vaccine that could be available nationwide by January.

Trump has said it is not too optimistic to try to produce roughly 300 million doses of vaccine in eight months, enough for all Americans, the *Post* reported.

Even the shorter timeline still means there would be no full protection from the new coronavirus until after most Americans are likely to have returned to work or school.

## **To reopen or not to reopen**

Meanwhile, social distancing orders remain a patchwork across the United States, with some states reopening and others holding off until at least mid-May.

Cuomo has said that three upstate regions of his state might partially reopen this weekend, but New York City will probably not be able to reopen until June.

State officials have laid out a plan under which each of 10 regions must meet thresholds in seven health-related areas before any reopening could begin. The areas that has met those benchmarks, he said, were the Finger Lakes, which includes Rochester; the Southern Tier, which borders

Pennsylvania; and the Mohawk Valley, west of Albany, the *Times* reported.

But New York City has only met four of the seven benchmarks, Cuomo added, Mayor Bill de Blasio said that nonessential businesses in the city would probably stay closed until at least June, the *Times* reported.

In preparation for reopening, the state will implement the "most aggressive" antibody testing program in the country and has issued an executive order requiring all New Yorkers to wear a mask or face covering when they cannot maintain social distancing in public, *CBS News* reported.

According to a *Times* tally, the top five states in coronavirus cases as of Wednesday are: New York with over 347,700 cases; New Jersey with nearly 141,000; Illinois with more than 83,000, Massachusetts with more than 79,000; and California with over 71,000.

## **Nations grapple with pandemic**

In Asia, where the coronavirus first struck, several countries are finally returning to a new normal but clusters of cases have been cropping up.

In China, public officials said they plan to test all 11 million residents in the city of Wuhan by the end of next week in the hopes they can extinguish any remaining cases of coronavirus in the pandemic's original epicenter, the *Post* reported

Meanwhile, South Korean officials said they do not plan to revive strict social distancing rules, despite a spike in coronavirus cases linked to nightclubs in Seoul, the *AP* reported.

The Asian country had loosened many of its restrictions last week, but it

has seen roughly 30 new cases each day in the past several days. Health officials there said they would maintain relaxed social distancing rules if the country's daily jump is below 50 and the number of untraceable cases account for less than 5% of all confirmed cases.

Elsewhere, the situation remains challenging. On Wednesday, the United Kingdom's coronavirus death count neared 33,000, the second-highest in the world, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally. Britain has now surpassed Italy, Spain and France for COVID-19 deaths in Europe.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced in a televised address on Sunday that the country will impose a mandatory two-week quarantine on travelers arriving by air, to try to avert a new wave of infections after the government slightly relaxed the rules of the country's seven-week lockdown, the *Times* reported.

But British soccer fans did get a bit of good news when the government announced Monday that the English Premier League, the world's richest confederation of soccer teams, may resume its season June 1, albeit amid heavy restrictions, the *Post* reported.

Brazil looks like it could become the next hotspot in the [coronavirus](#) pandemic. By Wednesday, the South American country had reported more than 12,461 deaths and more than 178,000 confirmed infections, according to the Hopkins tally.

Cases are also spiking in Russia: As of Wednesday, that country reported the world's second-highest number of COVID-19 cases, the Hopkins tally showed. Russia now has 242,271 cases, surpassing both Britain and Spain. Only the United States has more cases.

Worldwide, the number of reported infections neared 4.3 million on Wednesday, with more than 292,000 deaths, according to the Hopkins



tally.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on the [new coronavirus](#).

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