

NY widens testing eligibility as social distancing hits snag

May 18 2020, by Michael R. Sisak and Marina Villeneuve



People enjoy warm weather during the coronavirus pandemic in Central Park Saturday, May 16, 2020, in New York. (AP Photo/Frank Franklin II)

New York City residents who flouted social distancing restrictions for a night on the town got the mayor's wrath Sunday. The city's embattled

health commissioner is staying on the job. Gov. Andrew Cuomo played the part of a model patient, getting swabbed for coronavirus on live TV as he announced all people experiencing flu-like symptoms are now eligible for testing.

Meanwhile, two more state regions—Western New York and the Capital District—have met criteria to move into the first phase of reopening but still need to hire several hundred more people for contact tracing programs.

In the first phase, construction, agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, manufacturing and wholesale trade businesses are allowed to reopen and [retail stores](#) can provide curbside or in-store pickup or drop-off.

Here are the latest coronavirus-related developments in New York:

SATURDAY NIGHT FERVOR

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio admonished people seen crowding outside bars Saturday night—many with drinks in hand but no masks on their faces—for putting lives in danger. Officials may shut down establishments that break distancing rules, de Blasio said.

City bars and restaurants have been restricted to takeout and delivery since mid-March, when coronavirus cases started to soar, but some in Manhattan violent social distancing arrests involving people of color, the city this week eased distancing enforcement by no longer having police break up small groups of people or confront citizens failing to wear a mask.



People relax in marked circles for proper social distancing at Domino Park in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn during the current coronavirus outbreak, Sunday, May 17, 2020, in New York. (AP Photo/Kathy Willens)

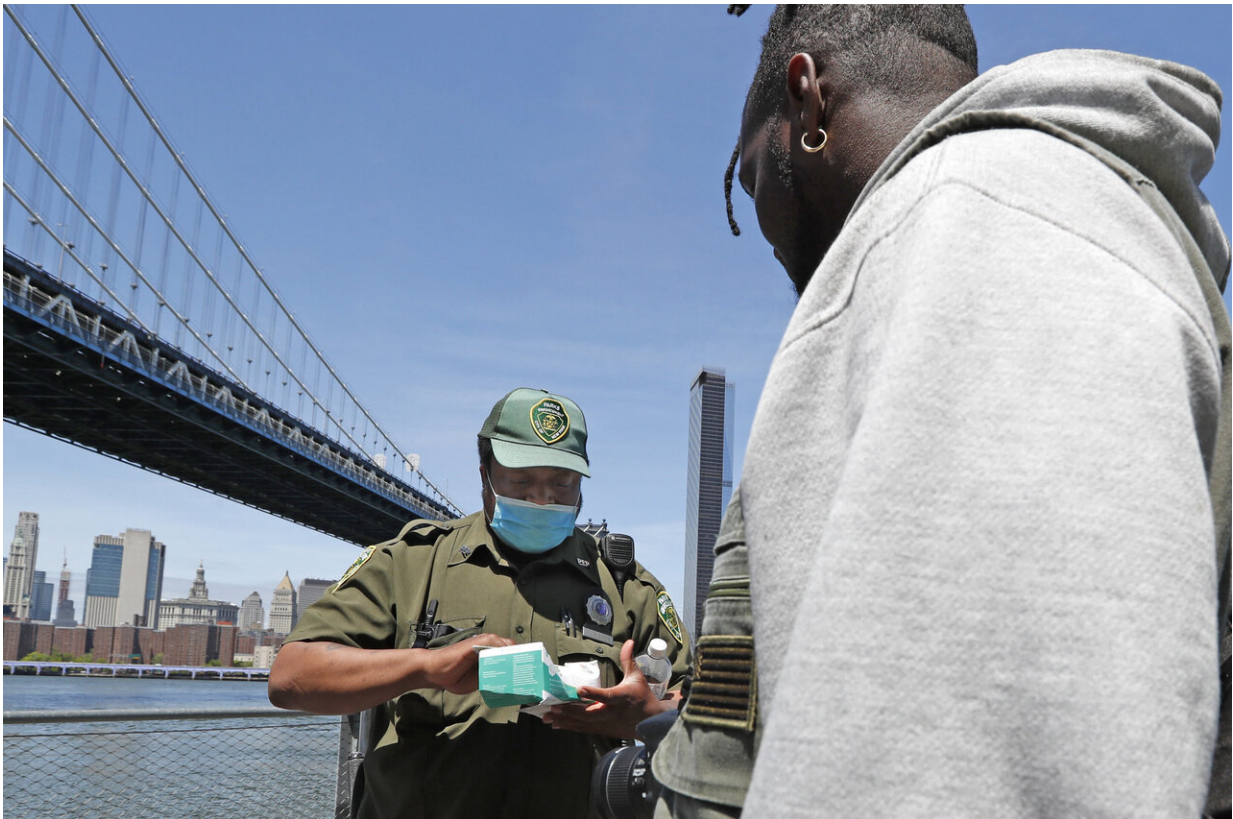
As the weather heats up, though, more and more New Yorkers are flocking to [public spaces](#) and familiar haunts for a sense of normalcy after spending most of the last two months cooped up inside—and not always policing themselves.

Parks, boardwalks and beaches attracted big crowds on Saturday, though city beaches aren't officially open and won't be for Memorial Day weekend.

Other beaches in the region will be open for the holiday, but de Blasio

said opening the city's strands "is not the right thing to do in the epicenter of this crisis."

The city's beaches could be closed off completely to public access if people don't follow social distancing rules, he said. Fences being installed at entrances could be rolled out if beaches—meant now only for nearby residents to exercise—get overcrowded or people violate swimming bans, he said.



A City of New York Parks Enforcement Officer prepares to give a mask to Roberto Hart who was photographing his friend at Brooklyn Bridge Park during the current coronavirus outbreak, Sunday, May 17, 2020, in New York. (AP Photo/Kathy Willens)

De Blasio said beaches could open for wider use sometime in the summer, with lifeguard training over the next few weeks for a possible return to duty.

GLUT OF TESTING CAPACITY

All New Yorkers experiencing flu-like symptoms or other coronavirus signs, such as dry cough or chest pains, are now eligible to be tested, along with people who returning to work as part of phased reopenings, Cuomo said Sunday.

The state is expanding eligibility as it deals with a surplus of testing capacity. Drive-thru and walk-in testing sites are performing about one-third of the 15,000 tests they're capable of each day, Cuomo said.

An agreement with CVS will allow samples to be collected at more than 60 of the chain's pharmacies across the state, Cuomo said. Testing in New York City is being expanded to 123 CityMD walk-in clinics.



New York Police Department School Safety officer Bynoe, right, hands out face masks to women at Brooklyn Bridge Park during the coronavirus pandemic, Sunday, May 17, 2020, in New York. (AP Photo/Kathy Willens)

De Blasio also made an urgent appeal Sunday for blood donations, saying supplies have dwindled to about two days' worth because of blood drive cancellations, which could mean postponing some surgeries.

HEALTH CHIEF TO STAY

De Blasio is standing by his health commissioner after a report she used crass language in a March phone call with a top police commander about

supplies of protective face masks. Several police unions and a congressman called for Dr. Oxiris Barbot's firing.

Barbot has been absent from de Blasio's recent news conferences and her department was bypassed last week in favor of the city's public hospital system to run a contact tracing program, fueling questions about a possible rift.

De Blasio said Sunday that he has spoken with Barbot "to clear the air on some of the recent issues" and that she would remain in the role she's held since 2018.



Kasi Addison chases after her two-year-old son Micah Addison at an outdoor

space adjacent to Brooklyn Bridge Park during the current coronavirus outbreak, Sunday, May 17, 2020, in New York. (AP Photo/Kathy Willens)



Roberto Hart, left, takes a mask from a city of New York Parks Enforcement Officer at Brooklyn Bridge Park during the current coronavirus outbreak, Sunday, May 17, 2020, in New York. (AP Photo/Kathy Willens)



With the Manhattan Bridge as a backdrop, volunteer David Fulton picks up trash from the rocks at Brooklyn Bridge Park during the current coronavirus outbreak, Sunday, May 17, 2020, in New York. Fulton and a group of residents who live nearby occasionally pick up trash to maintain the cleanliness of the park's natural tidal basin. (AP Photo/Kathy Willens)



Wearing protective masks and gloves, volunteers and nearby residents Lauren Caputo, left, and Kevin Kelly pick up trash at Brooklyn Bridge Park during the current coronavirus outbreak, Sunday, May 17, 2020, in New York. Caputo and others who joined them live nearby and say they want to help preserve the tidal basin's habitat. (AP Photo/Kathy Willens)



Volunteer Rob Santos doles out quarts of chilate de pollo (braised chicken in a spicy broth) in the kitchen at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in the Bay Ridge neighborhood of the Brooklyn borough of New York, Tuesday, May 12, 2020, as part of his work for Brooklyn Immigrant Community Support. Many similar ad-hoc groups have started up to provide emergency community support for those in need in the wake of shutdowns due to concerns over the spread of the new coronavirus. They often use GoFundMe campaigns and promote their work on social media platforms like Facebook. (AP Photo/Kathy Willens)



Two women, neither of whom were wearing protective face coverings, sunbathe on a grassy slope at Brooklyn Bridge Park during the current coronavirus outbreak, Sunday, May 17, 2020, in New York. (AP Photo/Kathy Willens)



With the Williamsburg Bridge as a backdrop, Michelle Shurunova jumps rope on a grassy hill at Brooklyn Bridge Park during the current coronavirus outbreak, Sunday, May 17, 2020, in New York. (AP Photo/Kathy Willens)

"We're going to move forward together," de Blasio said.

Barbot caught heat this week for a previously unreported clash with NYPD Chief of Department Terence Monahan, who wanted more masks for officers.

The New York Post, citing an anonymous source, reported Wednesday that Barbot retorted, "I don't give two rats' asses about your cops." The newspaper didn't say what Monahan said to prompt that response.

A health department spokesman said Thursday that Barbot apologized to the chief for her contribution to "a heated exchange between the two where things were said out of frustration, but no harm was wished on anyone."

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Citation: NY widens testing eligibility as social distancing hits snag (2020, May 18) retrieved 24 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-05-ny-widens-eligibility-social-distancing.html>

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