

Virus spikes could emerge weeks after US economic reopenings

May 14 2020, by Carla K. Johnson, Michelle R. Smith and Tim Sullivan



An elderly man recovers from a respiratory illness in a special section built for COVID-19 patients at the INERAM, a hospital specializing in respiratory diseases, in Asuncion, Paraguay, Wednesday, May 13, 2020. Paraguay is one of the least hit countries by COVID-19, with 11 deaths confirmed by the Health Ministry. (AP Photo/Jorge Saenz)

U.S. states are beginning to restart their economies after months of paralyzing coronavirus lockdowns, but it could take weeks until it becomes clear whether those reopenings will cause a spike in COVID-19 cases, experts said Wednesday.

The outbreak's trajectory varies wildly across the country, with steep increases in cases in some places, decreases in others and [infection rates](#) that can shift dramatically from neighborhood to neighborhood.

"Part of the challenge is although we are focused on the top-line national numbers in terms of our attention, what we are seeing is 50 different curves and 50 different stories playing out," said Thomas Tsai, assistant professor at the Harvard Global Health Institute. "And what we have seen about COVID-19 is that the story and the effect is often very local."

A handful of states started easing their lockdowns about two weeks ago, allowing reopenings by establishments ranging from shopping malls in Texas to beach hotels in South Carolina to gyms in Wyoming. Sparsely populated Wyoming, which has some of the lowest infection numbers in the United States, plans to reopen bars and restaurants Friday. Georgia was one of the first states where some businesses were allowed to open their doors again, starting April 24 with barber shops, hair salons, gyms, bowling alleys and tattoo parlors.



A man has his beard trimmed at a barber in Christchurch, New Zealand, Thursday, May 14, 2020. New Zealand lifted most of its remaining lockdown restrictions from midnight Wednesday as the country prepares for a new normal. Malls, retail stores and restaurants are all reopening Thursday in the South Pacific nation of 5 million, and many people are returning to their workplaces. (AP Photo/Mark Baker)

But it may be five to six weeks from then before the effects are known, said Crystal Watson of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security.

"As we saw early in the year, epidemics of COVID-19 start slow and take some time to build and become evident," Watson said in an email.

The outbreak's trajectory can vary greatly around the country, according

to an Associated Press analysis of confirmed cases. For instance, steep increases in daily new cases are occurring in Hennepin County in Minnesota and Fairfax County in Virginia, while in others, such as Bergen County, New Jersey, and Wayne County, Michigan, there's been a steady decline.

The AP analyzed case counts compiled by Johns Hopkins University, using a rolling seven-day average to account for day-to-day variability in test reporting.

In Geneva, meanwhile, a top World Health Organization official warned that it's possible the new coronavirus may be here to stay.



A worker passes a sign at a restaurant along the River Walk that has reopened in

San Antonio, Wednesday, May 13, 2020. Many restaurants and stores that were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic have reopened with some restrictions. (AP Photo/Eric Gay)

"This virus may never go away," Dr. Michael Ryan said at a press briefing. Without a vaccine, he said, it could take years for the global population to build up sufficient levels of immunity.

"I think it's important to put this on the table," he said. "This virus may become just another endemic virus in our communities" like other previously novel diseases, such as HIV, which have never disappeared, but for which effective treatments have been developed.

It can take three to five days for someone newly infected with the coronavirus to feel sick, and some [infected people](#) won't even have symptoms. Since testing is mostly reserved in the U.S. for those with symptoms, it can take two weeks or so—the time for one group of people to spread the virus to another—to have enough testing data to reflect a surge in cases.



Ford Motor Co., line workers put together ventilators that the automaker is assembling at the Ford Rawsonville plant, Wednesday, May 13, 2020 in Ypsilanti Township, Mich. The plant was converted into a ventilator factory, as hospitals battling the coronavirus report shortages of the life-saving devices. The company has promised to deliver 50,000 by July 4. (AP Photo/Carlos Osorio)

"If you are doing adequate testing, it will take two to three weeks" to spot an increase, Dr. Ashish Jha, director of Harvard's Global Health Institute, said Wednesday as he prepared to speak to a congressional subcommittee on the crisis.

He urged a dramatic increase in testing.

"It was the failure of testing that caused our country to shut down," Jha

said. "We need federal leadership on the level of testing, guidance on whom to test and federal help on the sheer capacity, the number of tests that can be done. We still do not have the testing capacity we need to open up safely."

New coronavirus clusters have surfaced around the world as nations struggle to balance restarting their economies and preventing a second wave of infections.

Authorities in the Chinese city of Wuhan, where the pandemic first began late last year, reportedly are pressing ahead to test all 11 million residents for the virus within 10 days after a handful of new infections were found.



A lone security officer walks past a map of America in the main terminal of

Denver International Airport as it gets back to life with the easing of restrictions to check the spread of the new coronavirus Wednesday, May 13, 2020, in Denver. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)



Staff members of tournament wearing face masks work on the 10th hole during the first round of the KLPGA Championship at the Lakewood Country Club in Yangju, South Korea, Thursday, May 14, 2020. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)



A woman takes walk with a dog in front of the closing signs displayed in a store's window front in Niles, Ill., Wednesday, May 13, 2020. (AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh)



A woman dispenses hand sanitizing lotion at SouthPark Mall, Wednesday, May 13, 2020, in Strongsville, Ohio. Ohio retail businesses reopened Tuesday following a nearly two-month-long shutdown ordered by Gov. Mike DeWine to limit the spread of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Tony Dejak)



A man with his leg in a cast and wearing a protective face mask as a precaution against the spread of the coronavirus, is transported on a dolly, in Havana, Cuba, Wednesday, May 13, 2020. Cuban authorities are requiring the use of masks for anyone outside their homes amid the COVID-19 pandemic. (AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa)



Registered nurse Stephanie Mundo conducts a COVID-19 test at the Abyssinian Baptist Church, Wednesday, May 13, 2020, in the Harlem neighborhood of New York. Churches in low income communities across New York are offering COVID-19 testing to residents in conjunction with Northwell Health and New York State. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)



Guests dine in-house at a restaurant Wednesday, May 13, 2020, in Phoenix. Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey has allowed the reopening of restaurants in-house dining, gyms, spas and community swimming pools since Monday. Professional sports leagues will be allowed to begin practicing in Arizona after the state's current stay-at-home order expires Friday. (AP Photo/Matt York)



People wearing face masks to protect against coronavirus, queue to walk through a disinfecting spray booths aimed to combat the spread of COVID-19, before doing shopping at Alexandra township in Johannesburg, South Africa, Wednesday, May 13, 2020. (AP Photo/Themba Hadebe)



Workers from the SOS Funeral service in protection equipment remove the body of Edgar Silva, 86, who according to relatives had Alzheimer's disease and died at home after two days of fever and difficulty breathing, amid the new coronavirus outbreak in Manaus, Brazil, Tuesday, May 12, 2020. (AP Photo/Felipe Dana)



People walk on the sand on Wednesday, May 13, 2020, in the Venice Beach area of Los Angeles. Los Angeles County reopened its beaches Wednesday in the latest cautious easing of coronavirus restrictions that have closed most California public spaces and businesses for nearly two months.(AP Photo/Ashley Landis)



From left, Patrick Bergmann, Scott Proctor and Logan Perdelwitz prepare acrylic barriers for delivery to a casino at Screaming Images, Wednesday, May 13, 2020, in Las Vegas. The company primarily designed, printed and installed large format signs for sporting and other events, but has started to make acrylic barriers for casinos and other business to use to protect workers and patrons from the spread of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/John Locher)

South Korea confirmed 29 more coronavirus cases over the past 24 hours as it battles a spike in infections linked to nightlife spots in Seoul, threatening the country's hard-won progress in the fight against pandemic.

And Lebanese authorities reinstated a nationwide lockdown for four days beginning Wednesday night after a spike in reported infections and

complaints that social distancing rules were being ignored.

In the U.S., as in many countries, the lockdowns have resulted in catastrophic levels of job losses. The U.S. unemployment rate soared to 14.7% in April, the highest rate since the Great Depression. There are roughly 30 million Americans out of work.

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Citation: Virus spikes could emerge weeks after US economic reopenings (2020, May 14) retrieved 30 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-05-virus-spikes-emerge-weeks-economic.html>

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