

Record-high numbers of new COVID-19 cases seen in 14 states, Puerto Rico

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(HealthDay)—A new analysis shows that parts of the country that had

been spared the worst of the coronavirus pandemic are now tallying record-high cases of new infections.

Since the start of June, 14 states and Puerto Rico have recorded their highest seven-day average of new coronavirus cases since the pandemic began, data tracked by the *Washington Post* shows: Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Kentucky, New Mexico, North Carolina, Mississippi, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Utah.

At the same time, new predictions from the University of Washington in Seattle show the U.S. coronavirus death toll could now hit 145,000 by August, *NBC News* reported Tuesday. If the prediction bears out, it would mean 30,000 more deaths would occur in the country in the next two months. As of Tuesday, nearly 111,000 COVID-19 deaths have been reported in this country.

And in a confusing twist on the effort to understand how coronavirus spreads, a World Health Organization official said Monday that asymptomatic transmission of COVID-19 seems to be rare. Until now, experts believed that transmission by infected people who did not show any symptoms was a main driver of viral spread.

"From the data we have, it still seems to be rare that an asymptomatic person actually transmits onward to a secondary individual," Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's technical lead for coronavirus response and head of the emerging diseases and zoonoses, said during a media briefing in Geneva.

"We have a number of reports from countries who are doing very detailed contact tracing. They're following asymptomatic cases, they're following contacts and they're not finding secondary transmission onward. It is very rare—and much of that is not published in the literature," she explained.

Van Kerkhove noted that asymptomatic cases of COVID-19 often turn out to be cases of mild disease.

"When we actually go back and we say how many of them were truly asymptomatic, we find out that many have really mild disease," Van Kerkhove said.

As well, Harvard researchers reported that the coronavirus may have been circulating in China as early as late summer or fall 2019, *NBC News* reported. Previously, the pandemic has been traced to a jump from wildlife at a so-called 'wet market' in the city of Wuhan in November or December.

Studies show lockdowns saved millions of lives

Meanwhile, New York City finally reopened its economy on Monday after being the epicenter of the U.S. coronavirus pandemic for months, while a new study showed that stay-at-home orders may have been worth it, preventing nearly 60 million U.S. infections.

That research, published in the *Nature* medical journal, examined how different social distancing policies and measures might have limited the spread of COVID-19, the *Post* reported.

A second study, from epidemiologists at Imperial College London and also published in *Nature*, found the shutdowns saved approximately 3.1 million lives in 11 European countries and dropped infection rates there by an average of 82 percent.

In the first study, researchers at the University of California at Berkeley examined six countries—China, the United States, France, Italy, Iran and South Korea—and estimated how more than 1,700 different interventions, such as stay-at-home orders, business closings and travel

bans, altered the spread of the virus.

The report concluded that those six countries collectively managed to avert 62 million test-confirmed infections, which the researchers estimated would correspond to roughly 530 million total infections, the newspaper said.

Surprisingly, school closures had no significant effect, although the authors said the issue requires further study, the *Post* reported.

Meanwhile, New York City began to ease restrictions that had shut down schools, businesses and much of city life in March and April, the *Associated Press* reported.

"You want to talk about a turnaround, this one, my friends, is going to go in the history books," New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Saturday.

Even as all states have now reopened, public health officials have raised concern about future coronavirus spread following days of protests against police brutality across the country. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said Sunday it was closely monitoring the demonstrations and warned such gatherings could spur coronavirus transmission, *CNN* reported. Some states are already seeing upward trends in new cases.

The protests make it hard to follow social distancing guidelines and "may put others at risk," CDC spokesperson Kristen Nordlund said in a statement, *CNN* reported.

Some good news on the economic front

Last week, new federal data offered signs of hope on the economic front, as jobless numbers fell—from 14.7 percent in April to 13.3

percent in May.

The economy, hit hard by stay-at-home orders and shuttered businesses tied to the coronavirus crisis, ended up adding 2.5 million jobs in May, as some Americans warily crept back to work, *The New York Times* reported.

It was very welcome news: According to the *Times*, the unemployment rate in April was the highest seen since the [federal government](#) began keeping record after World War II.

Many economists expect that unemployment numbers will slow further as states reopen and more employees return to work.

However, none of the good economic news has stopped the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus behind COVID-19.

By Tuesday, the U.S. coronavirus case count had topped 1.9 million as the death toll neared 111,000. And a new review shows that crowded protests against police brutality have occurred in every one of the 25 U.S. communities with the highest concentrations of new COVID-19 cases.

The *AP* analysis also found that some cities—Minneapolis, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles among them—have witnessed protests on multiple days. In some communities, such as Minneapolis where the protests started, the number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 has also been rising, the news agency added.

The close proximity of protesters and their failure in many cases to wear masks, along with police using tear gas, could fuel new transmissions.

Tear gas can cause people to cough and sneeze, as can the smoke from

fires set in some instances, the *AP* said. Both factors can also prompt protesters to remove their masks.

Putting arrested protesters into jail cells can also increase the risk of spread, the *AP* reported.

Remdesivir in short supply, vaccine research continues

But the U.S. government's supply of remdesivir, the only drug known to work against COVID-19, will run out at the end of the month, Dr. Robert Kadlec, a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services official, told *CNN*.

The government's last shipment of the drug will go out the week of June 29. Gilead Sciences, the company that makes remdesivir, is ramping up to make more, but it's unclear how much will be available this summer.

"Right now, we're waiting to hear from Gilead what is their expected delivery availability of the drug as we go from June to July," Kadlec said. "We're kind of not in negotiations, but in discussions with Gilead as they project what the availability of their product will be."

The government has been working to help Gilead "with some of their supply chain challenges in terms of raw materials and being able to accelerate the process," said Kadlec, the HHS assistant secretary for preparedness and response.

He added that it's clear that "whatever the supply may be, there may not be enough for everyone who may need it."

Meanwhile, the search for an effective vaccine goes on. The U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) said in late May that it would provide up to \$1.2 billion to the drug company AstraZeneca to develop a potential coronavirus vaccine from Oxford University, in England.

The fourth, and largest, vaccine research agreement funds a clinical trial of the potential vaccine in the United States this summer with about 30,000 volunteers, the *Times* reported.

The goal? To make at least 300 million doses that could be available as early as October, the HHS said in a statement.

The United States has already agreed to provide up to \$483 million to the biotech company Moderna and \$500 million to Johnson & Johnson for their vaccine efforts. It is also providing \$30 million to a virus vaccine effort led by the French company Sanofi, the *Times* reported.

According to a *Times* tally, the top five states in coronavirus cases as of Tuesday are: New York with 383,591; New Jersey with 164,497; California with over 134,000, Illinois with over 128,800 and Massachusetts with over 103,600.

Nations grapple with pandemic

Elsewhere in the world, the situation remains challenging. On Tuesday, the United Kingdom's coronavirus death count hit 40,680, 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. With Prime Minister Boris Johnson easing lockdown measures, schools across England have reopened amid fierce debate over whether the move is premature, the *Post* reported.

Brazil has become a hotspot in the coronavirus pandemic. By Tuesday,

the South American country had reported over 37,000 deaths and over 707,000 confirmed infections, according to the Hopkins tally. Trump has issued a ban on all foreign travelers from Brazil because of the burgeoning number of COVID-19 cases in that country, *CNN* reported.

President Jair Bolsonaro's government has stopped publishing a running total of coronavirus deaths and infections, the *AP* reported. Critics called the move, which came after official numbers showed Brazil had the third-highest number of deaths and the second-highest number of cases in the world, an attempt to hide the true toll of the disease.

Cases are also spiking wildly in Russia: As of Tuesday, that country reported the world's third-highest number of COVID-19 cases, at over 484,600, the Hopkins tally showed.

One country had good news to report on Monday: New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said she's confident her country has halted the spread of the [coronavirus](#) after the last known infected person in the country recovered, the *AP* reported. It has been 18 days since the last new case was reported in New Zealand.

Worldwide, the number of reported infections passed 7 million on Tuesday, with nearly 407,000 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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