

As virus rages in US, New York guards against another rise

July 12 2020, by Jennifer Peltz, Michael R. Sisak and Marina Villeneuve



In this May 27, 2020, file photo, medical personnel work in the emergency department at NYC Health + Hospitals Metropolitan in New York. As coronavirus rages out of control in other parts of the U.S., New York is offering an example after taming the nation's deadliest outbreak this spring—but also trying to prepare in case another surge comes. (AP Photo/John Minchillo, File)

As coronavirus rages out of control in other parts of the U.S., New York is offering an example after taming the nation's deadliest outbreak this spring—while also trying to prepare in case another surge comes.

New York's early experience is a ready-made blueprint for states now finding themselves swamped by the disease. It could also come in handy at home, as the region readies for a potential second wave of infection that experts predict will likely come at some point.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo has offered advice, ventilators, masks, gowns and medicine to states dealing with spikes in cases and hospitalizations and, in some places, rising deaths. Some [health care workers](#) are heading to other states to help fight the virus, reciprocating the influx that gave New York hospitals some much-needed relief just months ago.

At the same time, the Democratic governor has ordered travelers from more than a dozen states to quarantine for 14 days, while urging New Yorkers not to let up on wearing masks or social distancing.

Yet with the virus tearing through the South and West, Cuomo warned Friday it would eventually rear up again in New York.

"We're doing everything we can," he told WAMC radio, but "I can feel it coming."

A widely cited University of Washington model doesn't project spikes—at least through its Nov. 1 time frame—in New York, New Jersey or Connecticut, whose Democratic governors have coordinated on traveler quarantines and, earlier, some shutdown policies. But that doesn't mean the densely populated tri-state area is in the clear.



In this April 13, 2020, file photo, a patient arrives in an ambulance cared for by medical workers wearing personal protective equipment due to COVID-19 concerns outside NYU Langone Medical Center in New York. As coronavirus rages out of control in other parts of the U.S., New York is offering an example after taming the nation's deadliest outbreak this spring—but also trying to prepare in case another surge comes. (AP Photo/John Minchillo, File)

"We expect the virus to return in all of those states," said Dr. Christopher Murray, head of the university's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. "The question is one of timing."

As cases spiked in March and April, New York became the nation's [coronavirus](#) nightmare, with New York City at the crux of it. Statewide, over 18,000 COVID-19 patients were in hospitals at one point in April.

Daily deaths peaked at 799 in April, and have totaled over 24,000.

Now, as states from Florida to Texas to California see new confirmed cases soar, hospitals fill up and daily death tolls hit new records, numbers have dropped precipitously in the tri-state region. New York reported five new deaths statewide Sunday, when hospitals were caring for a total of about 800 coronavirus patients.

While New York has been gradually reopening, it also has been quietly preparing to handle another surge if it comes.



In this April 1, 2020, file photo, a medical personnel wears personal protective equipment while working at the Samaritan's Purse field hospital in New York's Central Park. As coronavirus rages out of control in other parts of the U.S., New York is offering an example after taming the nation's deadliest outbreak this

spring—but also trying to prepare in case another surge comes. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)

After health workers in New York and elsewhere grappled with shortages of masks, gowns and other [protective gear](#) this spring, Cuomo said he would order hospitals to have a 90-day supply on hand. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said the city would build its own reserve of ventilators, protective equipment and coronavirus test kits, identifying local suppliers and manufacturers rather than looking to federal authorities or global markets.

"We've learned a tough lesson that we have to create, and we have to protect ourselves," said de Blasio, a Democrat, who also said the city would stockpile as many as 18 million shelf-stable meals.

Others are preparing, too.

Mount Sinai Hospital expanded from 94 intensive-care beds to 235 and converted an atrium and lobby into wards for less-critical patients at the height of the crisis. Now, it's developing a coronavirus playbook of sorts, so clinicians will have how-tos immediately at hand, said Dr. Roopa Kohli-Seth, who oversees intensive care.



In this June 26, 2020, file photo, diners eat al fresco due to COVID-19 concerns in the West Village in New York. As coronavirus rages out of control in other parts of the U.S., New York is offering an example after taming the nation's deadliest outbreak this spring—but also trying to prepare in case another surge comes. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)

New York's nursing homes, which lost more than 6,400 residents to the virus, have set up wings to separate infected residents. They're now required to test staffers weekly and have at least a two-month supply of protective gear. And they are no longer accepting recovering COVID-19 patients from hospitals, as the state initially directed them to do. They admitted over 6,300 patients before Cuomo reversed the policy under pressure May 10.

"We know how to fight this virus now. We have the resources," said Stephen Hanse, who heads an association of New York nursing homes.

The health care system overall is better prepared now, said Dr. W. Ian Lipkin, a Columbia University epidemiology professor.

"The difference now is we know the capacity of this virus to rapidly spread to cause disease, its impact on the health care system and our needs in terms of testing, personal protective equipment, ventilators—all the other things we didn't know six months ago," said Lipkin, who is working with the city to test hundreds of thousands of people a week.



In this March 25, 2020, file photo, patients wear personal protective equipment while maintaining social distancing as they wait in line for a COVID-19 test at Elmhurst Hospital Center, in New York. As coronavirus rages out of control in

other parts of the U.S., New York is offering an example after taming the nation's deadliest outbreak this spring—but also trying to prepare in case another surge comes. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)

New York has taken reopening relatively slowly—and braked, postponing the resumption of indoor restaurant service in New York City, after cases began surging elsewhere. Thousands of contact tracers have been hired to try to keep the virus in check. And mask-wearing has been widespread in the nation's biggest city since a city recommendation and subsequent state requirement in April, while some other states have only recently started telling residents to don masks in public.

Still, with more New Yorkers getting out and about and riding mass transit, and police taking a hands-off approach to enforcing mask and distancing rules after several violent clashes caught on video, experts worry it's inevitable case numbers will spike.

"I'm not sure how long this progress is going to hold," said Dr. Irwin Redlener, the director of the Pandemic Resource and Response Initiative at Columbia University.



In this April 9, 2020, file photo, workers wearing personal protective equipment bury bodies in a trench on Hart Island in the Bronx borough of New York. As coronavirus rages out of control in other parts of the U.S., New York is offering an example after taming the nation's deadliest outbreak this spring—but also trying to prepare in case another surge comes. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)

Rob Griffin, a professor of emergency management at the University of Albany, said the state needs to spell out rules for any future shutdowns, "so you don't have to make a decision on the fly."

Some experts have said New York didn't move quickly enough early on. New York City's massive public school system closed March 16, and a statewide stay-at-home order took effect March 22.

If such measures had been implemented by March 8, Columbia University researchers estimate about 17,500 lives could have been saved.

To New York City's elected public advocate, Jumaane Williams, the city and state responses to the crisis were frustratingly blind to foreseeable inequities.

The city's Black and Hispanic residents were hospitalized and died of the virus at more than twice [the rates](#) of whites and Asians, and people from very poor neighborhoods at twice the rate of residents of wealthy areas.



In this May 27, 2020, file photo, a medical worker wearing personal protective equipment cleans gurneys in the emergency department intake area at NYC Health + Hospitals Metropolitan, in New York. As coronavirus rages out of

control in other parts of the U.S., New York is offering an example after taming the nation's deadliest outbreak this spring—but also trying to prepare in case another surge comes. (AP Photo/John Minchillo, File)



In this July 8, 2020, file photo, Stephane Labossiere, right, with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, hands out masks and printed information about free COVID-19 testing in Brooklyn being offered by NYC Health + Hospitals, in New York. As coronavirus rages out of control in other parts of the U.S., New York is offering an example after taming the nation's deadliest outbreak this spring—but also trying to prepare in case another surge comes. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan, File)



In this June 25, 2020, file photo, arriving travelers walk by a COVID-19 travel advisory sign in the baggage claim area of Terminal B at New York City's LaGuardia Airport. As coronavirus rages out of control in other parts of the U.S., New York is offering an example after taming the nation's deadliest outbreak this spring—but also trying to prepare in case another surge comes. (AP Photo/Kathy Willens, File)



In this June 12, 2020, file photo, a nurse gestures for a patient as on-campus staff working on the grounds of the Hebrew Home at Riverdale are tested for COVID-19 by nasal swab before they can begin their shifts, in the Bronx borough of New York. As coronavirus rages out of control in other parts of the U.S., New York is offering an example after taming the nation's deadliest outbreak this spring—but also trying to prepare in case another surge comes. (AP Photo/John Minchillo, File)



In this April 17, 2020, file photo, a patient is prepared to be loaded into the back of an ambulance by emergency medical workers outside Cobble Hill Health Center in the Brooklyn borough of New York. Cuomo also ordered nursing homes to accept recovering coronavirus patients to free up hospital beds, a move since blamed for the rapid spread of the disease in those facilities. More than 6,400 people have died of coronavirus in New York nursing homes, and the policy was later rescinded—though state officials argued it was employees who were causing the outbreaks. (AP Photo/John Minchillo, File)



In this April 1, 2020, file photo, medical worker transports a patient at Mount Sinai in New York. As coronavirus rages out of control in other parts of the U.S., New York is offering an example after taming the nation's deadliest outbreak this spring—but also trying to prepare in case another surge comes. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer, File)



In this May 27, 2020, file photo, medical personnel wearing personal protective equipment frequent the employee respite facilities at NYC Health + Hospitals Metropolitan in New York. As coronavirus rages out of control in other parts of the U.S., New York is offering an example after taming the nation's deadliest outbreak this spring—but also trying to prepare in case another surge comes. (AP Photo/John Minchillo, File)

Williams feels New York's shutdown was too slow and limited, leaving too many workers—many of them people of color—obliged to commute to jobs that might not have been able to provide [protective equipment](#). That can't happen again, the Democrat said.

"The big thing, for me, is to shut down swiftly, open up slowly and make sure there's an infrastructure for communities we know are going to be

impacted the most," Williams said. "We learned lessons that we didn't need to learn, and hopefully other people will, too."

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