

Reopened schools in New York City not seeing COVID case spikes

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(HealthDay)—Three weeks after becoming the first big urban area to

reopen public schools since the pandemic began, New York City is *not* seeing a feared surge in cases among students and staff.

Instead, [health officials](#) are seeing a surprisingly small number of COVID-19 cases, *The New York Times* reported.

Of 15,111 staff members and students tested randomly in the first week of its testing regimen, the city has gotten back results for 10,676. There were only 18 positives: 13 staff members and five students, the *Times* reported. Even better, when officials put mobile testing units at schools near the Brooklyn and Queens neighborhoods that have had new outbreaks, only four positive cases surfaced in more than 3,300 tests conducted since the last week of September, the newspaper said.

New York City is facing fears of a second wave of the virus fueled by local spikes in Brooklyn and Queens, and officials have closed more than 120 [public schools](#) as a precaution, the *Times* reported.

Still, the sprawling system of 1,800 public schools is a bright spot as the city tries to recover from a pandemic that has killed more than 20,000 people and severely weakened its economy.

When the city reopened its school system in September, roughly half of the city's students opted for hybrid learning, where they are in the building some days, but not others. The approach has enabled the city to keep class sizes small, the *Times* reported.

"That data is encouraging," said Paula White, executive director of Educators for Excellence, a teachers group. "It reinforces what we have heard about schools not being super spreaders."

Things are not going as well in other parts of the country, however. Last week, at least 20 states set record seven-day averages for infections, and

a dozen hit record hospitalization rates, according to health department data analyzed by the *Washington Post*.

The jump in cases and hospitalizations has been followed by a more modest rise in COVID-19 deaths, most likely due to better [patient care](#) from now-seasoned medical workers. The widespread use of powerful steroids and other treatments has also lowered mortality rates among people who are severely ill, the *Post* reported.

Still, experts caution that most Americans remain vulnerable to COVID infection and the virus will likely spread more easily as colder weather sends more people indoors, where they might be exposed to larger amounts of the virus in poorly ventilated spaces.

"Inevitably, we're moving into a phase where there's going to need to be restrictions again," David Rubin, director of PolicyLab at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, told the *Post*.

Second COVID vaccine trial paused

A second [coronavirus vaccine trial](#) has been paused after an unexplained illness surfaced in one of the trial's volunteers.

Johnson & Johnson, which only began a phase 3 trial of its vaccine last month, did not offer any more details on the illness and did not say whether the sick participant had received the vaccine or a placebo. The trial pause was first reported by the health news website *STAT*.

While Johnson & Johnson was behind several of its competitors in the vaccine race, its candidate has an advantage in that it doesn't need to be frozen and it could be given in one dose instead of two, the *Times* reported. The J&J vaccine is also the focus of the largest COVID-19 vaccine trial, with a goal of enrolling 60,000 volunteers.

"Adverse events—illnesses, accidents, etc.—even those that are serious, are an expected part of any clinical study, especially large studies," the company said in a statement. "We're also learning more about this participant's illness, and it's important to have all the facts before we share additional information."

"It's actually a good thing that these companies are pausing these trials when these things come up," Dr. Phyllis Tien, an infectious disease physician at the University of California, San Francisco, a vaccine trial site for both Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca, told the *Times*. "We just need to let the sponsor and the safety board do their review and let us know their findings."

Johnson & Johnson is not the first company to pause a coronavirus vaccine trial. Two participants in AstraZeneca's trial became seriously ill after getting its vaccine. That trial has been halted and has not yet resumed in the United States.

Two companies working on antibody cocktails

Regeneron Pharmaceuticals Inc. is seeking emergency approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for an experimental antibody cocktail given to Trump shortly after he was diagnosed with COVID-19.

Hours before the company made the announcement, Trump proclaimed in a video released by the White House that the drug had an "unbelievable" effect on his recovery from coronavirus infection, the *Post* reported. While there is no hard evidence yet proving the drug's effectiveness in humans, it has shown promise in treating mild cases of the new coronavirus, the *Post* reported.

Regeneron said in its statement that it could initially produce doses of the antibody cocktail for 50,000 patients, and then ramp production up

to doses for 300,000 patients in the next few months if granted emergency authorization.

The U.S. government first inked a contract with Regeneron back in July, and has promised to distribute initial doses of the treatment at no cost if it is approved, the *Post* reported.

Regeneron isn't the only company developing an antibody cocktail to battle COVID-19 infection: Eli Lilly and Co. has also announced that it is seeking emergency use authorization from the FDA for a similar cocktail. But on Tuesday, the company announced it has paused a trial of its antibody cocktail for safety concerns and did not divulge any further details about the reason for the pause, the *Post* reported.

COVID continues to spread around the globe

By Monday, the U.S. coronavirus case count passed 8.1 million while the death toll passed 219,500, according to a *Times* tally.

According to the same tally, the top five states in coronavirus cases as of Monday were: California with over 878,000; Texas with nearly 869,000; Florida with nearly 755,000; New York with over 489,000; and Illinois with more than 348,800.

Curbing the spread of the coronavirus in the rest of the world remains challenging.

Several European countries are experiencing case surges as they struggle with a second wave of coronavirus infections and hospital beds begin to fill up, the *Post* reported.

In England, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has instituted a three-tier lockdown in a bid to slow a startling spike in coronavirus cases across

the country. In the past three weeks, new coronavirus cases have quadrupled and there are now more COVID-19 patients hospitalized than before the government imposed a lockdown back in March, the *Post* reported.

Addressing the nation this week, Johnson warned Britons that the country's rise in cases was "flashing like dashboard warnings in a passenger jet."

Things are no better in India, where the coronavirus case count has passed 7.5 million, a Johns Hopkins tally showed.

More than 114,600 coronavirus patients have died in India, according to the Hopkins tally, but when measured as a proportion of the population, the country has had far fewer deaths than many others. Doctors say this reflects India's younger and leaner population.

Still, the country's public health system is severely strained, and some sick patients cannot find hospital beds, the *Times* said. Only the United States has more coronavirus cases.

Meanwhile, Brazil passed 5.2 million cases and had over 153,600 deaths as of Monday, the Hopkins tally showed.

Cases are also spiking in Russia: The country's coronavirus case count has passed 1.4 million. As of Monday, the reported death toll in Russia was over 24,000, the Hopkins tally showed.

Worldwide, the number of reported infections passed 40 million on Monday, with over 1.1 million 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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