

Virus fight stalls in early hot spots New York, New Jersey

March 28 2021, by Marina Villeneuve and Mike Catalini



In this March 9, 2021, file photo, people enjoy the warming weather and a view of lower Manhattan at Liberty State Park in Jersey City, N.J. A year after becoming a global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, New York and New Jersey are back atop the list of U.S. states with the highest rates of infection. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig, File)

A year after becoming a global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, New York and New Jersey are back atop the list of U.S. states with the highest rates of infection.

Even as the vaccination campaign has ramped up, the number of new infections in New Jersey has crept up by 37% in a little more than a month, to about 23,600 every seven days. About 54,600 people in New York tested positive for the virus in the last week, a number that has begun to inch up recently.

The two states now rank No. 1 and 2 in new infections per capita among U.S. states. New Jersey has been reporting about 647 new cases for every 100,000 residents over the past 14 days. New York has averaged 548.

The situation in New York and New Jersey mirrors a national trend that has seen case numbers inch up in recent days. The U.S. is averaging nearly 62,000 cases a day, up from 54,000 two weeks ago.

Asked Sunday what's going wrong in the U.S. as cases rise, President Joe Biden told reporters: "Based on what I'm hearing, apparently people are letting their guard down." Biden said he hopes to have a better sense of the situation after a meeting with his White House pandemic team on Monday.

Neither New York nor New Jersey is experiencing anything like what they saw last spring, when hospitals—and morgues—were overflowing. And like the rest of the country, both are in a much better place than in January, at the peak of the pandemic's winter spike.



In this May 19, 2020, file photo, New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy wears a mask during his daily coronavirus news conference at the War Memorial in Trenton, N.J. A year after becoming a global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, New York and New Jersey are back atop the list of U.S. states with the highest rates of infection. Murphy said in recent days that he is hitting pause on further loosening of the rules because of New Jersey's resurgence. (Chris Pedota/The Record via AP, Pool)

But the lack of improvement or even backsliding in recent weeks has raised concerns that the states are opening too quickly and people are letting down their guard too much, just as potentially more contagious variants of the virus are circulating more widely.

"When we're seeing leveling off of cases or increase, that's when it's a

time to rethink policies," said Roy Gulick, chief of the infectious diseases division at Weill Cornell Medical College and New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center.

In February, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo allowed the state's largest stadiums to host sporting events and concerts again, albeit at only 10% of normal capacity. New York City movie theaters have been allowed to reopen. Restaurants can now operate at 50% capacity in New York City and 75% capacity elsewhere in the state. Indoor fitness classes have resumed, too.



Customer drink at the outdoor tables at The Spring Lounge, Friday, March 26, 2021, in the Little Italy neighborhood of in New York. A year after becoming a global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, New York and New Jersey are back atop the list of U.S. states with the highest rates of infection. (AP

Photo/Mary Altaffer)

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy has led a similar reopening, with the state's restaurants also allowed to operate at half capacity and barbers, salons and other personal care businesses resuming trade.

That's happened in other parts of the country, too.

Utah, Alabama, Arkansas and Indiana will end mask mandates in early April, joining states including Arizona, Texas, Mississippi, Montana and Iowa that have eliminated face covering requirements in recent weeks. Some states are allowing businesses to operate at full capacity.

But in Illinois, the state public health director on Friday emphasized the need to keep wearing masks and socially distancing amid an increase in cases and hospitalizations. The single-day total of confirmed and probable cases of the illness topped 3,000 Friday for the first time in seven weeks, and hospitalizations have jumped 15% in the past five days.



A pedestrian wears his mask below on his chin as he walks past a street art depiction on Dr. Anthony Fauci, Friday, March 26, 2021, in the East Village neighborhood of New York. A year after becoming a global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, New York and New Jersey are back atop the list of U.S. states with the highest rates of infection. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)

Murphy said in recent days that he is hitting pause on further loosening of the rules because of New Jersey's resurgence.

The number of people hospitalized with the virus in New York has plateaued around 4,600 since mid-March. New Jersey hospitals are reporting about 2,200 virus patients—up by roughly 300 in the past couple of weeks.

"They're spreading more quickly and our vaccination rates are improving every week, but they are certainly not where we want them to be," said Bruce Farber, chief of infectious diseases and public health and epidemiology for Northwell Health.

Experts cite several potential factors, including the spread of [potentially more contagious variants](#) in the densely populated region.

"Is there something different that's happening in this part of the country compared to some other parts of the country?" asked Dr. Ed Lifshitz, the medical director of New Jersey's communicable disease service within the state Health Department. "And the answer is probably yes."



People enjoy lunch hour in Union Square, Friday, March 26, 2021, in New York. A year after becoming a global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic,

New York and New Jersey are back atop the list of U.S. states with the highest rates of infection. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has questioned whether Cuomo is easing restrictions "for political reasons," despite cause for concern. The governor is facing calls for his resignation over sexual harassment allegations.

But then de Blasio himself announced that 80,000 more city employees would no longer work from home, starting in May.

New York City's Public Advocate Jumaane Williams urged New York to pause reopening plans.

"I ask the governor to stick to the science, trust the experts, and pause the planned reopenings now, before they take effect and more are infected," Williams said.

Experts worry the public is getting the message that increased vaccination means the state is in the clear, even though only a fraction of the public has completed a full course. Vaccines lessen the risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19, but scientists are still studying how well they prevent the spread of the virus.



In this March 18, 2021, file photo, Pharmacist Mia Yu fills a syringe with the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine at a pop up site at Commonpoint Queens The Hub in partnership with the UJA- Federation of New York. Vaccines lessen the risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19, but scientists are still studying how well they prevent the spread of the virus. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer, File)



In this Feb. 24, 2021, file photo, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, left, watches as Pastor Darryl Frazier, second from left, and State Sen. Leroy Comrie get a COVID-19 vaccine before the opening of a mass vaccination site in the Queens borough of New York. A year after becoming a global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, New York and New Jersey are back atop the list of U.S. states with the highest rates of infection. Vaccines lessen the risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19, but scientists are still studying how well they prevent the spread of the virus. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig, Pool, File)



In this March 18, 2021, file photo, pharmacist Ambar Keluskar inoculates a patient with the first dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine at a pop up site at Commonpoint Queens The Hub in partnership with the UJA- Federation of New York. Vaccines lessen the risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19, but scientists are still studying how well they prevent the spread of the virus. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer, File)



In this Jan. 21, 2021, file photo, Mary Jenkins, left, received the COVID-19 vaccine in Paterson, N.J. A year after they became a global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, New York and New Jersey are back atop the list of U.S. states with the highest rates of infection. Vaccines lessen the risk of severe illness or death from COVID-19, but scientists are still studying how well they prevent the spread of the virus. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig, File)



Diners sit at outdoor tables at a restaurant on the Lower East Side Neighborhood of New York, Friday, March 26, 2021. A year after becoming a global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, New York and New Jersey are back atop the list of U.S. states with the highest rates of infection. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)



In this March 5, 2021, file photo, Kathryn Denmet, center, and Brian Haver leave the IFC Center after viewing a screening on "Mank" in New York. A year after becoming a global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, New York and New Jersey are back atop the list of U.S. states with the highest rates of infection. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer, File)



A visitor to the Lower East Side neighborhood of Manhattan poses for a photo without wearing a mask in front of a graffiti mural, Friday, March 26, 2021, in New York. A year after becoming a global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, New York and New Jersey are back atop the list of U.S. states with the highest rates of infection. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)



People line up outside the Blink Fitness gym, Friday, March 26, 2021, on the Lower East Side neighborhood of New York. A year after becoming a global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, New York and New Jersey are back atop the list of U.S. states with the highest rates of infection. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)



Shoppers at the Union Square farmers market wear masks to protect against the coronavirus, Friday, March 26, 2021, in New York. A year after becoming a global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, New York and New Jersey are back atop the list of U.S. states with the highest rates of infection. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)



Pedestrians walk past a poster hanging in at a NYU building encouraging the use of masks to protect against the coronavirus, Friday, March 26, 2021, in New York. A year after becoming a global epicenter of the coronavirus pandemic, New York and New Jersey are back atop the list of U.S. states with the highest rates of infection. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)

"To allow larger groups to gather, to give the message to the public that we're over the worst and that we can go back to normal is a mistake," Farber said.

Stony Brook University professor and neuroepidemiologist Sean Clouston said growth in new cases is concentrated in younger people, who can't get vaccinated in New York unless they have specific health conditions or certain jobs. He said their infection rates could drop once

they're eligible, too.

© 2021 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: Virus fight stalls in early hot spots New York, New Jersey (2021, March 28) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-03-virus-stalls-early-hot-york.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.