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“LETTING GO DOESN'T MEAN THAT YOU DON'T CARE ABOUT SOMEONE ANYMORE. IT'S JUST REALIZING THAT THE ONLY PERSON YOU REALLY HAVE CONTROL OVER IS YOURSELF.”

-DEBORAH REBER



COVID-19 CASES

	Mar. 20	Mar. 21	Mar. 22	Mar. 23	Mar. 24	Mar. 25	Mar. 26
Minnesota	115	137	169	235	262	287	346
Nebraska	27	42	50	52	61	68	81
Montana	15	27	34	45	51	65	90
Colorado	277	475	591	720	912	1,086	1,430
Wyoming	18	24	26	28	33	49	56
North Dakota	26	28	30	32	36	45	58
South Dakota	14	14	21	28	30	41	46
United States		15,219	33,276	43,963	54,812	69,147	85,996
US Deaths		201	417	560	780	1,046	1,300

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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Business Hours Changed

Several businesses have altered hours of operation due to the COVID-19 virus outbreak. Here are the ones that notified the Independent of their operational changes:

Dairy Queen is currently OPEN from 9:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. for take out and drive-thru. (Sundays we open at 11:30 a.m.)

Dakota Brush is open normal hours: Mon-Thurs 8:30-4:30 And Speedee is still running as well.

Groton UMC is pausing all events until May 10th now.

Groton C&MA Church will not be having personal service until further notice, but there will be a livestream of their service on their facebook page (GrotonCMA) at 10:45 a.m. on Sundays.

The Legion Lounge will be closed until further notice due to the COVID-19 virus. We thank everyone for there business and support.

City Hall, the City Shop and the Community Center are temporarily closed to the public. City Hall and City Shop staff will still be inside the buildings available by appointment only. Check out our website for building permits, utility payments, etc. at www.city.grotonsd.gov

Phone: City Hall 605-397-8422 City Shop 605-397-2690

JVT/NVC – All locations in Aberdeen, Groton and Redfield are temporarily closed to the public. Staff will continue to answer calls, online chats, emails and text messages. A complete list of contact information can be found online at www.jamesvalley.com or call 605-397-2323 should you have questions. Payment drop boxes are available at the Groton (235 E 1st Ave) and Aberdeen (1812 6th Ave SE #1) locations. Free Public WiFi is available 24x7 from the parking lot at all locations.

The Jungle: take out only. Mon-Fri 11-1 and 4-8. Saturday 4-8. Hoping to start delivery in the evening soon.

Subway is open 9:00 AM till 7:00 PM. Carry out only.

The laundromat remains opened. Free wifi access available by appointment and we will have student desks available inside.

The GDI Living Heart Fitness Center. However, if the COVID-19 takes hold in Brown County, we will switch to an appointment only basis at the fitness center. Please call/text Paul at 605/397-7460 for more information.

Samantha's Massage is closed for this week. Will update on a weekly basis.

Love to Travel to your business list. Our office is closed by we can be reached for future travel via email at becah@lovetotravel.com.

Wells Fargo Bank of Groton is temporarily closed.

Dueling Piano's Baseball Fundraiser scheduled for April 4th at the American Legion is cancelled.

The Groton Fireman Fun Night scheduled for April 25th is canceled. If you have already purchased a ticket you will be refunded. Contact the person that sold you the ticket or call Patti Woods. Thank you for your support and stay safe and stay home and enjoy your families!

The Moscow Times INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

We haven't published anything from Russia for a while, and they had an article on the COVID-19 virus affecting them.

In First Address to Nation on the Coronavirus, Putin Holds Back From Stringent Measures

The Russian leader also delayed a vote on constitutional changes that could see him remain in power until 2036.

By Evan Gershkovich and Jake Cordell

Casually reclining in front of an office desk, President Vladimir Putin addressed the nation on the coronavirus pandemic for the first time on Wednesday afternoon — a month after Russia announced its first case.

The Russian leader kicked off the speech by postponing a planned April 22 vote on constitutional changes that could see him remain in the Kremlin until 2036. He did not announce a new date for the vote.

Then he declared a week-long paid national holiday from March 28 — the purpose of which, he said, was to encourage people to remain at home in an effort to limit the spread of the deadly coronavirus.

"Don't think: 'This can't happen to me.' It can happen to anyone," Putin said. "The most important thing is to stay home."

But Putin, to the shock of many observers, did not enforce additional measures that would ensure that Russians remain at home — a step that epidemiologists argue is essential for limiting person-to-person transmission of the highly contagious virus.

"People need to be separated at the very least — and I will underscore that this is at the very least — for two weeks," Vasily Vlasov, an epidemiologist at the Higher School of Economics, told The Moscow Times. "And to ensure that this happens, measures need to be put in place that will actually keep them at home."

As the coronavirus pandemic has spread across the globe, devastating nations from Iran to Italy to the United States, Russia has so far remained largely untouched, according to official statistics. The country has so far only reported 648 official cases of the virus and only three deaths. Last week, Putin said that the situation is "under control."

But in recent days, the official narrative around the danger of the virus to Russia has begun to change.

On Tuesday, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin, who is heading Putin's coronavirus taskforce, told the president that the official figures were likely underestimating the spread of the disease and warned that the country faces a "serious situation." To underline Sobyenin's point, the number of new cases tripled overnight.

Beyond the shifting rhetoric, Russian authorities have also in recent days instituted a host of measures aimed at slowing the spread of the disease.

They have closed all sporting and cultural events, businesses like nightclubs and cinemas and most large gatherings. From Thursday, Moscow residents aged 65 and older will be ordered to self-isolate at home.

In his speech Wednesday, Putin said that only key businesses like banks, pharmacies and supermarkets would be allowed to stay open during the week-long holiday.

But the measures have come piecemeal and are still lagging behind most of the world, said Vlasov.

He pointed to a move by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday to lock India down for three weeks, and Israel's policy of not allowing its citizens to go beyond 100 meters from their homes unless they are visiting an essential shop like a pharmacy or a supermarket.

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"The Russian authorities are heading in the right direction," Vlasov said. "But unfortunately it's all being rolled out very poorly and so the measures will most likely be ineffective."

Populist measures

Putin spent the rest of his speech Tuesday unveiling a package of measures to support the Russian economy and businesses suffering from the double blow of the coronavirus and sinking oil prices after Russia pulled out of a deal with Saudi Arabia limiting energy production earlier this month.

He announced that families eligible for maternity capital will receive an extra 5,000 rubles (\$44.80) per month from the government for each child under 3 years old. Small and mid-sized businesses will receive a six-month tax deferral. And those who lose their jobs or take sick leave will receive payments at minimum wage until the end of the year.

But despite grim economic warnings — the Kremlin's own modelling suggests the Russian economy could shrink by as much as 10% this year in a worst-case scenario — Putin held back from adopting more radical measures to support the economy.

"The measures are really quite muted," said Sofya Donets of Renaissance Capital. "It's not a large amount of additional money, and the measures aren't widespread — they are very concentrated on socially sensitive clusters, like pensioners and families with children."

Other tinkering measures included making banks offer repayment vacations on consumer loans and mortgages if a borrower's income drops significantly, while small businesses will get a six-month deferral on some of their tax bills and no-penalty extensions to their loans.

The Russian president also said that all interest and dividend payments leaving Russia will incur a 15% tax — up from the current 2%.

Tatiana Stanovaya, founder of the political analysis project R.Politik, said that the form and substance of Putin's address stayed true to his history as a populist leader.

"In Russia, the authorities have always been scared to look weak and to instill panic in society," she said. "They are trying to inspire confidence in the people and to make it look like the situation is under control."

But as Vlasov noted, the spread of the disease in Russia may only be in its early stages.

"Either the pandemic is just starting here or it's moving through the population in a mild form," he said. "The second version is less likely. Which means that we have to prepare for an outbreak."

Special Meeting of the SDHSAA is Today, 11 a.m.

*MEETING HELD VIA TELECONFERENCE DUE TO COVID-19

The SDHSAA Board of Directors will have a Special Meeting on Friday, March 27th at 11:00 AM Central. The Board will participate via teleconference, and the meeting audio will be live streamed. The link to the live stream will be active on our website once the meeting begins. (<https://www.sdhsaa.com>)

Call the meeting to order and establish a quorum

Approve the agenda.

Consider 2020 spring sports/activities

- (All-State Jazz Band, Tennis, Track & Field, and Golf) Consider suspended/postponed events
- (Basketball, Visual Arts, Region Music, All-State Band) Adjournment

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Daniel Swartos SDHSAA Executive Director

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Covid-19 Update by Marie Miller

We mark today as the day the US overtook China as the epicenter of this pandemic. We should not have ended up here, but I'm a advocate of dealing with what is, so here we go:

We're at 83,329 total cases in 50 states plus DC and three territories today, an increase of 22% over yesterday. China's case report today is 81,782. So while China has 1 case for every 17,100 people, we're at 1 case for every 4000 people, a rate just under four times higher. And this is with a good month's warning that this was coming. I am unable to find an excuse for this outcome.

We have cases in all 50 states plus DC and 3 territories, PR, GU, and VI. Still leading the pack is NY with 37,269 cases, an increase of 13% over yesterday. I find myself hopeful this is a turnaround in NY; the rate of increase appears to be slowing. Too early yet to say, but there just might be something here. Because hospitalization and death lag diagnosis by a week or two, the number of deaths will continue to rise for a while, but if they've reached a peak and started the downturn, that would be a very good thing.

The top 10 states are still accounting for almost 80% of cases. Highest case reports in addition to NY are from NJ with 6876, CA with 3944, WA with 3207, MI with 2877, IL with 2538, FL with 2477, MA with 2417, LA with 2304, and PA with 1690. We have another 4 states with over 1000 cases, another 9 with over 500 cases, another 20 + DC with over 100 cases, and the remaining 8 states plus 3 territories with less than 100. No one is under 15.

1222 people have died in 41 states, DC, and 2 territories. Again, NY leads with 387. Also in large numbers are WA with 151, LA with 83, NJ with 81, CA with 80, MI with 62, and GA with 56. There are another 12 states with double-digit numbers of deaths and 22 states + DC, PR, and GU in single digits. States and territories which have not yet reported a death include RI, ME, NE, MT, WV, AK, ND, WY, HI, and VI. DE and ID reported their first deaths today. Please note that a death was reported in HI on Monday as due to Covid, but the discovery of a reporting error has returned HI to the "No deaths" column.

I want to believe this is slowing down in NY, but I am not yet seeing experts saying that is so, so I remain reluctant to become too hopeful. They could use a break there. We're seeing serious situations developing in other states; LA comes immediately to mind, but there may well be others I haven't hit on as problem areas yet. There are states like my own SD showing little tendency for exponential growth in cases and 27 states not yet reporting community spread (not from someone who traveled or a contact of one of those cases); but I do not place a high degree of confidence in these "no community spread" designations at this point. Time will tell.

I still do not see the levels of testing we're going to need to bring this thing to a halt. I still do not see the level of case tracking we're going to need to slow this thing down. And I see nowhere near enough of folks taking this seriously.

A friend today recounted the story of an acquaintance who spent a lot of time inveighing against her local authorities for being too "heavy-handed" in enforcing stay-at-home policies. that acquaintance is currently hospitalized with Covid-19 complicated by a heart condition. I take no satisfaction in this outcome, but I do want to run screaming down the street when I hear one of these. I don't have a lot to offer tonight in the way of commentary or new information in addition to the numbers, so I'll sign off with my usual admonition to just, for once in your life, listen to an expert or two. You know what to do. Do it.

Perform one small kindness for someone it doesn't profit you to cultivate. And keep yourself safe.

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Community Update by Groton Area Superintendent Joe Schwan

Dear Families of Groton Area School Students,

Thank you to everyone for their cooperation in receipt of materials on Wednesday, March 25. With your cooperation, we were able to safely and efficiently distribute a lot of material and supplies. As you know by now, the Groton Area School District will remain closed through May 1, 2020. This includes all extra-curricular events, practices, and meetings.

Delivery of the next week's academic materials will take place on Monday, March 30. During this process, we want to ensure that we can be mindful of the recommendations of health officials concerning the size of group gatherings, personal hygiene for clean hands, and social distancing. Only one representative from each family will be permitted to pick up materials and will be asked to take materials for all family members. Nobody that feels ill in any way should be sent to gather materials. We must also request for questions and discussions with staff members be limited during the in-person exchanges and invite those questions via phone call or email. It is possible that not all students will have materials to pick up if all of their content is being provided online.

The following schedule of material pick-up has been established for in-town residents. If possible, we ask that you make every effort to follow the timelines provided. If families are unable to make the established times work, they will not be turned away, but access may be managed if certain times become too busy. Each building will be open for pick-up from 8:00 AM to 10:00 AM. Pick-up from the elementary will be held in the Elementary Commons. Pick-up from the MS/HS will be held in the GHS Gymnasium.

Time: Grade Level

8:00 AM: PreK/JK Grade 6

8:15 AM: K and Grade 7

8:30 AM: Grade 1 and Grade 8

8:45 AM: Grade 2 and Grade 9

9:00 AM: Grade 3 and Grade 10

9:15 AM: Grade 4 and Grade 11

9:30 AM: Grade 5 and Grade 12

9:45 AM: Busses will be loaded with materials for our out-of-town students.

Beginning at 9:45, we will be loading the school buses with materials for every student on a regular bus route whose materials haven't been picked up. The buses will run their normal routes, stopping to drop off all of the materials for the week. We ask that families please respect the 6 foot personal boundaries for our delivery staff by not coming on to the school bus to try and retrieve materials. If you have muddy driveways or driveways that can't otherwise be used by a bus, we are asking that you place a box or plastic tote at the end of your driveway for us to leave your materials in.

Until further notice, we will not be collecting any paper materials for return. This is part of our effort to reduce the amount of materials exchanging hands limiting potential exposure to contaminants. Similarly, materials being sent home will be ready for distribution by Friday and left un-touched until Monday to protect students and families.

In order for students to learn, it is critical that work and activities are completed as assigned. We are making a conscious effort to balance the need for continued learning relative to families' other current needs including parent work schedules.

During the week, staff will be available via email or telephone from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM daily to answer questions, and provide support and assistance to students. There will not be any face-to-face meetings or contacts made during the closure.

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There has been a link added to our website for technical support for our students in grades 6-12 who may be encountering difficulties with their computers.

School Meals – Updated for Week of March 30

The District will continue to offer free lunches to all enrolled students regardless of income eligibility. Meals will be provided to families on Mondays in conjunction with distribution of academic materials. For those families with multiple students, the meals will be distributed from the building of the youngest student. For example, a family with students in grades 3, 4, and 8 will pick up their meals from the elementary. A family with students in grades 7 and 10 would pick up their meals from the high school. Meals for the second half of the week will be served from the elementary from 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM on Wednesday.

We encourage all families to take advantage of this service during this time. Even if your participation is simply a matter of personal convenience, we'd like to help. If you haven't yet signed up for these meals and would like to begin participating, please contact us.

Sincerely,
Joe Schwan Superintendent



This was the scene in downtown Groton at 9 p.m. Wednesday.

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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COVID-19 IN SOUTH DAKOTA

The tests are coming in very fast now with the pending number being reduced in half now. Governor Noem is hoping the pending tests will reach zero by today. There are 125 pending. The negative cases increased from 819 to 1973 with the positive going up from 41 to 46. New cases: Beadle County - 1, Lincoln County - 1, Minnehaha County - 3. Three more are fully recovered.

SOUTH DAKOTA CASE COUNTS

Test Results	# of Cases
Positive*	46
Negative**	1973
Pending***	125

COVID-19 IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Number of Cases	46
Deaths	1
Recovered	16

SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases
Male	26
Female	20

SD COUNTY OF RESIDENCE OF COVID-19 CASES

County	# of Cases
Beadle	14
Bon Homme	1
Brown	2
Brookings	1
Charles Mix	1
Codington	1
Davison	2
Hughes	1
Lincoln	2
Lyman	1
McCook	2
Meade	1
Minnehaha	16
Pennington	1

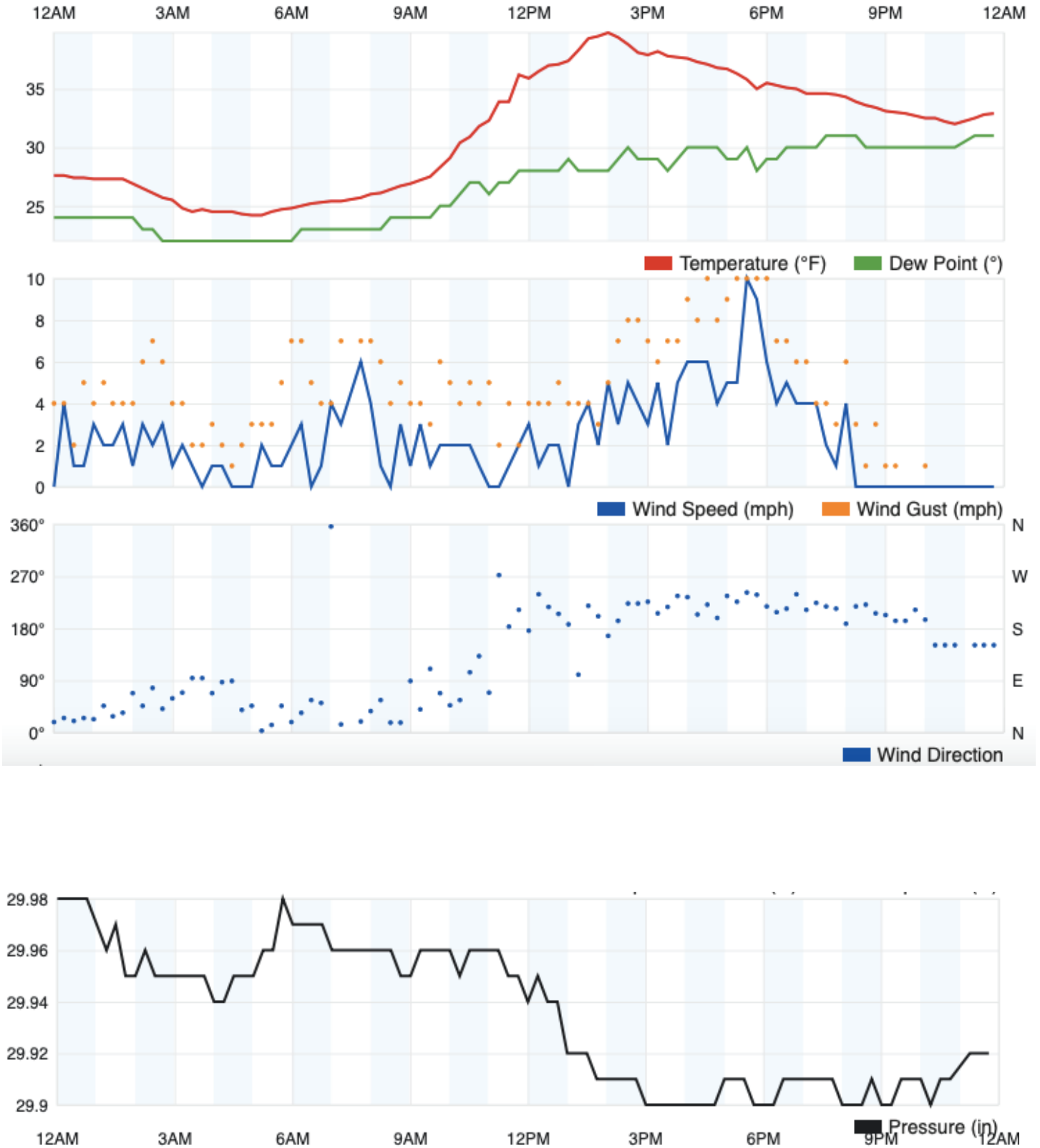
AGE GROUP OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Age Range	# of Cases
0 to 19 years	2
20 to 29 years	8
30 to 39 years	7
40 to 49 years	4
50 to 59 years	14
60 to 69 years	8
70 to 79 years	2
80+ years	1

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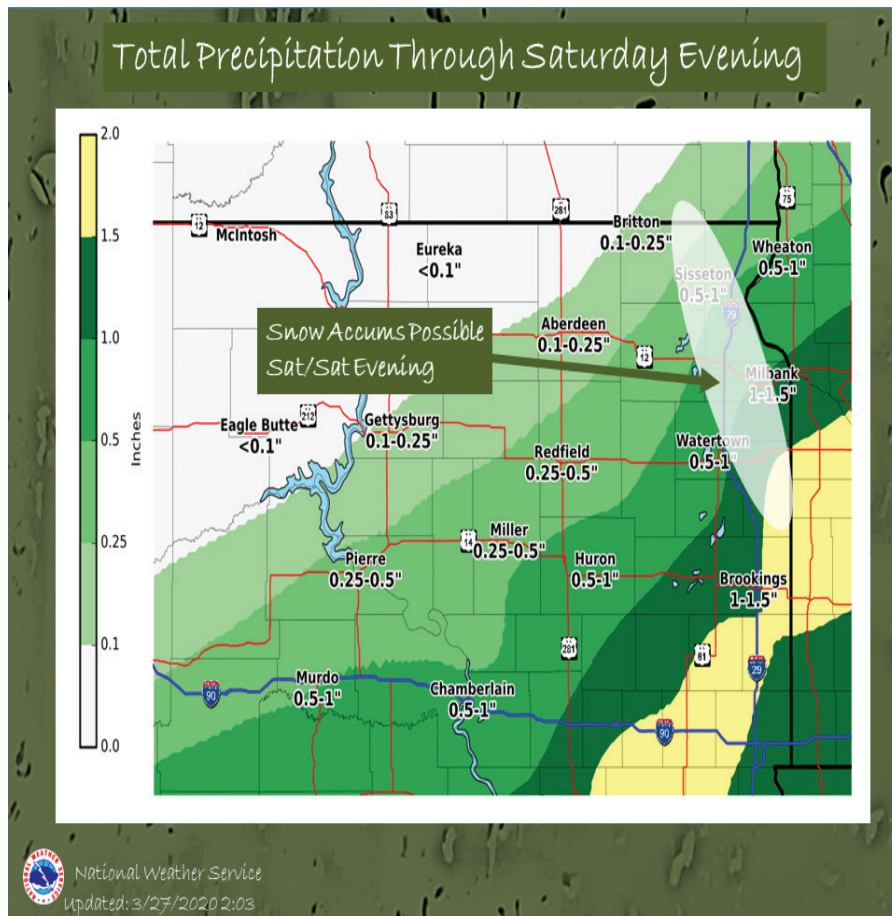
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
				
Patchy Fog then Mostly Cloudy	Rain Likely 60%	Chance Rain/Snow and Patchy Fog then Chance Rain and Breezy 50% 50%	Mostly Cloudy and Blustery then Partly Cloudy	Mostly Sunny
High: 52 °F	Low: 35 °F	High: 46 °F	Low: 29 °F	High: 53 °F



A strong storm will bring widespread rain and some snow to the region, especially Saturday and Saturday evening. The highest probabilities for snow accumulation are over the Sisseton Hills.

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Today in Weather History

March 27, 1993: Rain and rapid snowmelt caused the Big Sioux and Vermillion Rivers to rise to 1 to 8 feet above flood stage March 26th through March 31st, 1993. The worst of the flooding occurred in far southeast South Dakota where large areas of farmland were under water. The floodwaters closed at least four state highways in southeast South Dakota and blocked dozens of smaller roads in the east. Large chunks of ice on the Big Sioux led to many temporary ice jams. The ice jams took out fences and washed out roads. In some areas, the ice had to be pushed off of the streets with tractors.

1890: The middle Mississippi Valley saw a significant tornado outbreak on this day with 24, estimated F2 or stronger tornadoes impacting the area. Tornadoes killed at least 146 people. The most notable of the tornadoes was an estimated F4 that carved a path from the Parkland neighborhood to Crescent Hill in Louisville, Kentucky. This tornado destroyed 766 buildings and killed an estimated 76 to 120 people. Most of the deaths occurred when the Falls City Hall collapsed.

1931: A blizzard struck western Kansas and adjoining states was called the "worst since January 1888". Twenty children, ages seven to fourteen, were stranded in a makeshift school bus for 33 hours during this blizzard.

1946: Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada thawed out as the mercury soared to 74 degrees, their warmest March temperature on record.

1950 - A three day snowstorm in the High Plains Region finally came to an end. The storm produced 34 inches of snow in 24 hours at Dumont, located in the Black Hills of South Dakota, and a total of 50 inches. (David Ludlum)

1964: Great Alaskan earthquake left at least 100 dead in Anchorage, Alaska. The magnitude 9.2 quake is the largest in US history and the second strongest worldwide. Waves reached 103 feet above the low - tide mark.

1984 - The temperature at Brownsville, TX, soared to 106 degrees, and Cotulla, TX, reached 108 degrees, equalling the March record for the U.S. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - The second blizzard in less than a week hit eastern Colorado and western Kansas. Snowfall totals ranged up to 24 inches at San Isabel CO. Winds gusted to 50 mph at Goodland KS. The high winds piled snow into massive drifts, closing roads for days and killing thousands of cattle. Snow drifts thirty feet high were reported in northwest Kansas. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Temperatures rose quickly, then dropped just as rapidly, in the central U.S. Eight cities reported record high temperatures for the date as readings soared into the 80s. In southeastern Colorado, the temperature at Lamar CO reached 91 degrees. Strong southerly winds gusted to 63 mph at Gage OK. Strong northwesterly winds, gusting to 61 mph at Goodland KS, then proceeded to usher much colder air into the area. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in the south central U.S. Two tornadoes were reported, and there were 77 other reports of large hail and damaging winds. Baseball size hail was reported at Willow OK and Bartlesville OK. Twenty-six cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported new record high temperatures for the date, including Yankton SD with a reading of 84 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1994: The Southeastern Palm Sunday Tornado Outbreak occurred on this date. What began as a peaceful Palm Sunday quickly changed to a historic day in weather history when a powerful tornado ripped through southern Alabama and Georgia. By the time the storm was over, 22 people were dead, and 92 were injured. The F4 tornado cut a 50-mile path from Ragland in St. Clair, County Alabama to the Georgia line. The storm touched down near Ragland at 10:51 am. The storm struck Ohatchee than roared across northeastern Calhoun County, passing near Piedmont and hitting Goshen in Cherokee County. The most disastrous damage occurred at Goshen, where the twister struck the Goshen United Methodist Church at 11:37 am. 20 people were killed at the church, which did not hear the tornado warning issued 10 minutes earlier by the National Weather Service in Birmingham. A tornado watch had been released at 9:30 am. Following the tornadoes, Vice President Al Gore pledged to extend NOAA Weatheradio coverage into the areas affected by the twisters, which had previously been unable to receive the alarm signals.

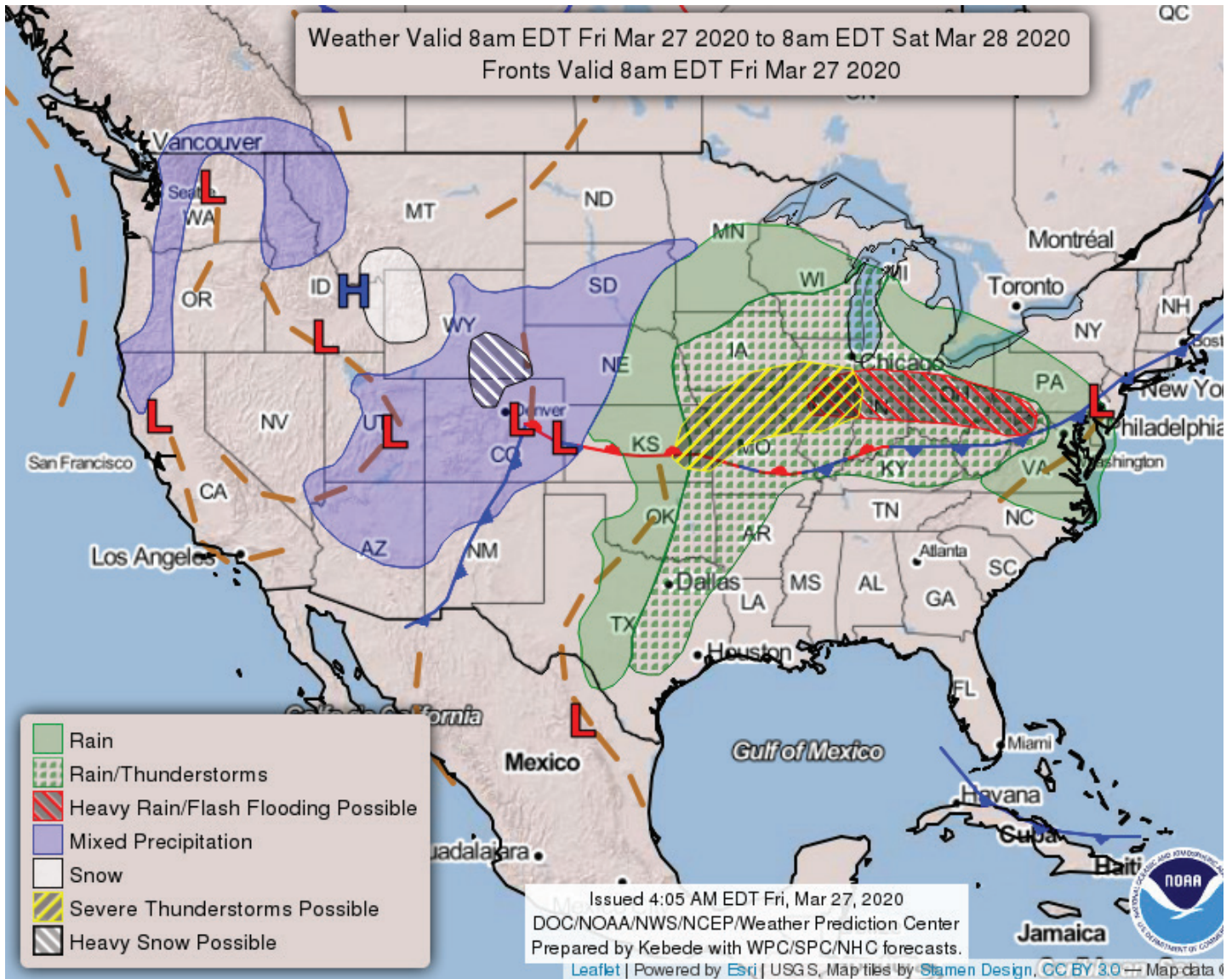
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 40 °F at 1:52 PM
Low Temp: 24 °F at 4:48 AM
Wind: 11 mph at 5:20 PM
Snow

Record High: 83° in 1946
Record Low: -12° in 1913
Average High: 46°F
Average Low: 24°F
Average Precip in March.: 0.92
Precip to date in March.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 1.94
Precip Year to Date: 0.35
Sunset Tonight: 7:56 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:21 a.m.



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WHY WORRY?

A reporter once asked Henry Ford the question, "Do you ever worry?"

"No. I believe that God is managing my affairs. With God in charge, I believe that everything will work out for our best. So, what's there to worry about?"

Worry is like going back and forth in a rocking chair: a lot of motion but no forward movement. It can disturb our thinking, disorganize our work, destroy our health, and steal our life. It has never calmed a fear or brought peace to a troubled heart.

Worry is nothing more than anticipating some calamity or chaos that will probably never come our way. It normally has no substance or power except what we allow it to have as it invades our minds and controls our thoughts and disrupts our lives.

When we allow worry to muddle our minds, we need to call upon God immediately. Immediately! We must ask Him to replace each problem with one of His promises and ask for an extra portion of faith and trust in His goodness and grace. He knows what is in our future and every need that we ever have is under His control.

Prayer: Help me, Father, to increase my faith in You as I learn to trust Your promises and accept Your will. Give me confidence in Your care and concern for my best! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Matthew 6:31-32 So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.

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2020 Groton SD Community Events

- 04/04/2020 Groton Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt - City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
 - **CANCELLED** Dueling Piano's Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion
 - **CANCELLED** Fireman's Fun Night (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
 - 04/25-26/2020 Front Porch 605 Rural Route Road Trip
 - 04/26/2020 Father/Daughter dance.
 - 05/02/2020 Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales, (1st Saturday in May)
 - 05/11/2020 Girls High School Golf Meet at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 05/25/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services
 - 06/05/2020 Athletic Fundraiser at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 06/8-10/2020 St. John's VBS
 - 06/19/2020 SDSU Golf at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 06/20/2020 Shriner's Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 06/22/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Ladies Invitational
 - 06/26/2020 Groton Businesses Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 07/04/2020 Firecracker Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 07/12/2020 Summer Fest/Car Show
 - 07/16/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Pro Am Golf Tourney
 - 07/31-08/04/2020 State American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
 - 08/07/2020 Wine on Nine Event at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 09/12/2020 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Sat. after Labor Day)
 - 09/13/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Couples Sunflower Classic
 - 10/09/2020 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
 - 10/10/2020 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
 - 10/31/2020 Downtown Trick or Treat
 - 10/31/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat
 - 11/14/2020 Groton Legion Annual Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
 - 11/26/2020 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center
 - 12/05/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
 - 12/05/2020 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services
 - 01/--/2021 83rd Annual Carnival of Silver Skates
-
- Bingo every Wednesday 6:30pm at the American Legion Post #39
 - Groton Lions Club Wheel of Meat, American Legion Post #39 7pm (Saturday nights November 30th thru April 11th)
 - Groton Lions Club Wheel of Pizza, Jungle Lanes 8pm (Saturday nights November 30th thru April 11th)
-
- All dates are subject to change, check for updates here
 - Jun 2020 Transit Fundraiser (Thursday Mid-June)

News from the Associated Press

Noem pushes emergency bills, but doctors say it's not enough

By **STEPHEN GROVES** Associated Press

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Gov. Kristi Noem on Thursday said she will pitch legislators on a series of 10 emergency bills to address what she believes will be a months-long fight against the coronavirus, but a leading doctor's group says she is not currently doing enough to stop its spread.

The South Dakota Medical Association criticized Noem on Thursday for not ordering restaurants, bars and other non-essential businesses to close. It also said she should halt all elective procedures to conserve medical supplies.

The Republican governor has resisted ordering businesses to close, instead pushing that decision to county and city officials. The Republican governor is trying to find an approach somewhere between the rosy predictions coming from president Donald Trump and a total lock down on activity. Noem is pitching a series of emergency bills to sustain battle against COVID-19 that she said could last "many months."

The president has said he thinks the economy could be humming again by Easter, which is April 12. Noem disagrees.

"Those who might think that by Easter things will be back to normal, I don't want to discourage them, but I want to be very clear and honest with them," the governor said. "We can't stop this virus. We can slow it down."

Legislators will consider Noem's proposals on Monday in a teleconference meeting.

The emergency legislation covers a range of issues, from possibly pushing local elections back until at least June to creating a fund of about \$11 million for loans to small businesses affected by the pandemic.

"In an effort to provide my team the flexibility it needs to respond to these situations, I'm asking legislators to support a handful of measures that will enable the government to take action to protect public health and reflect the reality of social distancing," Noem said in a statement.

The governor is also pushing to allow the Secretary of Health to put restrictions on group gatherings, add COVID-19 to the list of reasons the Department of Health can petition courts to close businesses, waive in-person teaching requirements and state assessments for schools, extend the grace period for driver's license renewals, allow her to suspend certain statutes during emergencies, and grant counties the authority to pass emergency measures to close businesses.

Senate Majority Leader Kris Langer said lawmakers would hold off on large budget adjustments until the state gets a better picture of the economic damage brought by the global pandemic.

The state reported five new positive tests on Thursday, raising its tally to 46 cases in six counties. Secretary of Health Kim Malsam-Rysdon said that so far, the health care system had not been overloaded but that it was preparing for a surge of patients.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, which can include fever and cough but also milder cases of pneumonia, sometimes requiring hospitalization. The risk of death is greater for older adults and people with other health problems.

The state's health lab has been catching up with a backlog of tests, as commercial labs in the state came online this week. Noem said the state lab will be caught up by Monday.

But the governor's approach will be tested. Noem said the state will have to transform to address the coming crisis, even as "economic activity in this state has dropped to almost nothing."

The 1,703 people who filed for unemployment last week will be just the beginning of widespread layoffs resulting from the pandemic. The unemployment call center is now seeing a similar number of filings every day, the governor said.

She has advised people to continue to stay at home so that the state's health care system won't get a massive inflow of patients all at once, hoping hospitals can treat patients in waves over weeks or months. If COVID-19 transmission can be slowed, it might give them enough beds, equipment and time to refuel.

Noem also said that tests returned negative for three women who were apprehended after escaping from the Women's Prison in Pierre, where an inmate tested positive this week. She also acknowledged that U.S. Sen. John Thune was consulting with his doctor on Thursday after leaving Washington, D.C., on Wednesday because he felt ill.

Follow AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Sen. John Thune returns to South Dakota after feeling ill

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Sen. John Thune was consulting with his doctor in his home state of South Dakota on Thursday after leaving Washington, D.C., a day earlier because he felt ill.

Thune, the Senate majority whip, was told by doctors to self-monitor and that he didn't need to take additional action, according to a Wednesday night update from spokesman Ryan Wrasse. Thune flew home on a chartered flight, accompanied by one member of his security detail. He also took the precaution of wearing a mask on the flight.

Thune is 59. His office declined to say whether he would be tested for COVID-19 or who paid for the flight. Wrasse tweeted later Thursday that Thune had improved Thursday morning.

South Dakota's other senator, Republican Mike Rounds, is self-isolating at his family farm in South Dakota following the vote on a \$2.2 trillion fiscal package aimed at shoring up the nation's economy.

Rounds told reporters Thursday he is taking the precaution in part because his wife, Jean, is at higher risk for COVID-19 following her treatment for cancer. He said he is not feeling symptoms but plans to take the precaution for seven to 10 days.

Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul announced Sunday that he had tested positive for the coronavirus. He kept working for six days after getting tested, saying he had no symptoms.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

The Latest: Medical group says COVID-19 response not enough

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — The Latest on the coronavirus outbreak in South Dakota (all times local):
5:30 p.m.

The largest medical advocacy group in South Dakota said on Thursday Gov. Kristi Noem is not doing enough to stop the spread of COVID-19.

The South Dakota Medical Association, which advocates for physicians in the state, sent a letter to the governor asking her to close restaurants, bars and other non-essential businesses. It also said she should halt all elective procedures to conserve medical supplies.

"The COVID-19 pandemic presents an unprecedented challenge to our state and we must take proactive steps to prevent further community spread," said Robert Summerer, the group's president.

The Republican governor has recommended businesses to limit gatherings to 10 or fewer, but left the enforcement of that up to counties and cities.

11:30 a.m.

Unemployment filings in South Dakota surged to 1,703 last week as COVID-19 spread in communities in South Dakota, state officials announced on Thursday.

The number is nearly a nine-fold increase from the previous week. Employers across the country have laid off workers due to the economic downturn from the coronavirus, prompting nearly 3.3 million Americans to apply for unemployment last week.

"A large number of employers are announcing COVID-19 related layoffs, so we anticipate the number of new unemployment claims will continue to rise," said state Labor and Regulation Secretary Marcia Hultman.

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The state's call center for filing unemployment claims has been swamped with calls.

8:35 a.m

Ellsworth Air Force Base has declared a public health emergency in order to give its commander additional authority to enforce social distancing strategies due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Officials said the declaration also better aligns the base with national guidance.

South Dakota health officials say the number of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 rose to 41 Wednesday, but no cases have been reported on the base.

The commander could expand the civilian leave policy and further restrict base access under the declaration.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

Leaders encouraged base families to follow the Centers for Disease Control guidelines, avoid gatherings of 10 or more people, and practice social distancing and good personal hygiene.

Road crossing Gavins Point Dam to close for at least 1 month

YANKTON, S.D. (AP) — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers says it will close Crest Road crossing Gavins Point Dam near Yankton, South Dakota, for at least a month.

The road will close at 8 a.m. Tuesday so contractors can re-seal expansion joints in the powerhouse. That work was postponed last year due to a road closure on Nebraska Highway 121 when a bridge was washed out during the "bomb cyclone" storm in March.

The Corps says the road will remain closed for about four to six weeks, 24 hours a day, seven days a week including weekends. People are asked to plan to taking alternate routes during the closure.

British Prime Minister Johnson tests positive for virus

LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has tested positive for the new coronavirus, but remains in charge of the U.K.'s response to the outbreak.

Johnson said Friday that he was tested for COVID-19 on the advice of the chief medical officer after showing "mild symptoms" involving a temperature and a persistent cough.

"I've taken a test, that's come out positive so I am working from home, I am self-isolating, and that's entirely the right thing to do," he said in a video message posted on his Twitter account.

"But be in no doubt that I can continue, thanks to the wizardry of modern technology, to communicate with all my top team to lead the national fightback against coronavirus."

The government said that if Johnson is unable to work, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab will replace him.

Johnson has met in person with some senior ministers and officials this week, and has appeared at press conferences alongside his top medical and scientific advisers.

Earlier this week Prince Charles, the heir to the British throne, announced that he had tested positive for the virus.

Tourists stranded in Asia by canceled flights, shut borders

By PENNY YI WANG Associated Press

PHUKET, Thailand (AP) — From the sun-soaked beaches of Thailand to the foothills of Mount Everest in Nepal, tourists across Asia are finding their dream vacations have turned into travel nightmares as airlines cancel flights and countries close their borders in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

Thousands of tourists escaping cold weather in Europe were scrambling this week to find alternative ways to return home from the Thai island of Phuket in the Andaman Sea.

Ksenia Vostriakova and her friends were scheduled to fly back to Moscow on an April 3 Singapore Airlines

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flight, but it was among those canceled when the airline slashed its operations. They have booked a flight on Qatar Airways for April 6 and are hoping nothing else changes.

"Now we're really worried that this flight also might be canceled," Vostriakova said, adding that their Thai visas run out in mid-April. "We might still stay here because everything changes."

Thailand went under a state of emergency this week as the government gives itself new powers to deal with the virus crisis. The country, which last year welcomed 39 million tourists, announced it was closing its borders to nearly all foreigners. Its national airline, Thai Airways, said it was suspending almost all of its flights.

It's a trend seen around the region and the world. The Airports Council International Asia-Pacific said Friday that 12 major hubs in Asia-Pacific had seen an average decrease in air traffic of more than 80% in the second week of March versus the same period last year.

Up to 10,000 tourists are believed to be stranded in Nepal after the government ordered a complete lockdown that halted all flights and road travel to prevent the spread of the virus, the country's tourism board said. Most businesses and government offices were also shut.

Spring is the tourist season for Nepal when thousands of visitors come to hike the mountain trails.

At the Lukla Airport, the only gateway to the Mount Everest region, there were more than 200 trekkers stranded, according to Dhurba Shrestha, an airport official. Even if the highways were open, the closest road is three days trek downhill.

Officials were working on arrangements of special flights to at least get tourists back to the capital, Kathmandu.

The German government on Friday arranged a rescue flight — a Qatar Airways charter — that left the capital with 305 people on board, mostly German nationals.

In Kathmandu's tourist enclave, visitors could still be found wandering around empty streets. A handful of restaurants and hotels were still open, but most shops were shuttered. Police were blocking locals from moving around but not tourists.

"We were supposed to leave on March 21 but we are still in Nepal and waiting for our embassy to help us arrange a flight," said New Lee Kuan, from Malaysia.

The Indian Ocean island nation of Sri Lanka said that it was ready to help an estimated 18,000 tourists return home either via scheduled flights that are still operating or special charters if required. The country is under a nationwide curfew until at least next week.

In Indonesia, more than 2,500 foreign tourists were stranded in Bali, the most famous of the country's more than 17,000 islands. The government has granted all tourists automatic visa extensions, a move made after long lines formed at immigration offices.

"This is good news that helped us a lot," said Ruben Evert Ernst, a German on vacation with his partner whose visa had been set to expire in a few days.

Visitors to Thailand haven't been so lucky. Hundreds of tourists seeking visa extensions were crowded Friday under a row of awnings next to a makeshift immigration office that's been set up on the outskirts of Bangkok after throngs formed at the main building. There wasn't enough room for the tourists to keep their distance and stay in the shade so most were pressed up almost against one another.

"I woke up today at 5:30 to get here on time so it's very stressful," said Murdoch Baghaie, from Sacramento, California. "I'm supposed to be a tourist enjoying the scenery. Nothing like enjoying Thailand anymore."

Shopping malls, bars, sit-down restaurants, public swimming pools and many other places have all been ordered closed in Thailand.

At least for now, Phuket's beaches remain open. That's good news for Russian tourist Vitaliy Kurikov, who has been spending his days playing with his son on the white sands of Bang Tao beach.

"If they close the beaches, I really don't know what to do," he said.

Associated Press journalists Niniek Karmini in Jakarta, Indonesia, Bharatha Mallawarachi in Colombo,

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Sri Lanka, Binaj Gurubacharya in Kathmandu, Nepal, and Tassanee Vejpongsa in Bangkok contributed to this report.

Spain sees record number of virus deaths: UK leader infected

By BERNARD CONDON, DAVID RISING and NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Spain on Friday reports a record number of daily virus deaths at 769, but an official says that the country's new infections are easing.

In the U.K., British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has tested positive for the new coronavirus. His office says Johnson was tested after showing mild symptoms.

THIS IS MAJOR BREAKING UPDATE. AP's earlier story is below:

U.S. coronavirus infections surged to top the world amid warnings that the pandemic is accelerating in cities like New York, Chicago and Detroit, while a record \$2.2 trillion emergency package neared final approval Friday by Congress to help millions of newly unemployed Americans and struggling companies.

The situation in countries with even more fragile health care systems grew more dire on Friday. Russia, Indonesia and South Africa all passed the 1,000-infection mark and South Africa began a three-week lockdown. India launched a massive program to help feed hungry day laborers after a lockdown of the country's 1.3 billion people put them out of work.

In France, a 16-year-old student became the youngest person in the country to die from the virus. Her sister, Manon, spoke out in the French media, saying that Julie was hospitalized Monday after developing a "slight cough" last week, then died Tuesday at the Necker children's hospital in Paris.

"We must stop believing that this only affects the elderly," said Manon, who did not reveal her surname. "No one is invincible against this mutant virus."

France has reported more than 1,600 deaths so far amid 29,000 infections.

The U.S. now has more than 85,000 confirmed cases, and Italy was set to pass China's 81,782 infections later Friday. The three countries account for 46% of the world's nearly 540,000 infections and more than half of its acknowledged virus deaths.

Analysts, however warned that all those infection figures could be low for reasons that varied in each nation.

"China numbers can't be trusted because the government lies," American political scientist Ian Bremmer, president of the Eurasia Group think-tank, said Friday in a tweet. "U.S. numbers can't be trusted because the government can't produce enough tests."

Italian epidemiologists warn that the country's numbers are likely much higher than reported — perhaps five times as high — although two weeks into a nationwide lockdown the daily increase seems to be slowing, at least in northern Italy.

"It's a horrible sensation, not being able to breathe," said Fausto Russo, a 38-year-old fitness trainer who is one of 10,000 Italians whose infection has been cured. "Imagine putting your head under water."

Health care workers grew increasingly angry at the lack of protective equipment.

"Our emergency room was like a petri dish," said Benny Mathew, a nurse at New York's Montefiore Medical Center who heard Thursday he had COVID-19 and is now worried he may infect his wife and two daughters.

"I'm angry. We could have secured enough personal protective equipment months ago. It was happening in China since December," he said. "But we thought it was never going to happen here."

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. But for others, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, the virus can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

The worldwide death toll climbed to over 24,000, according to Johns Hopkins University but more than 124,000 people have recovered, about half in China.

New York state, the epicenter of the U.S. outbreak, reported 100 more deaths in one day, accounting for almost 30% of the 1,300 fatalities nationwide. Gov. Andrew Cuomo said the number of deaths will

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increase soon as critically ill patients who have been on ventilators for days succumb.

"That is a situation where people just deteriorate over time," Cuomo said.

The White House's coronavirus response coordinator, Deborah Birx, said counties in the Midwest around Chicago and Detroit are seeing a rapid increase in cases.

Washington, D.C., confirmed 36 new cases, raising its total to 267. The district is under a state of emergency, its major attractions like the Smithsonian museums and National Zoo closed and White House and Capitol tours cancelled. Police have blocked off streets, bridges and traffic circles to prevent crowds from coming to see Washington's blooming cherry blossom trees.

Russian authorities ramped up testing this week after widespread criticism of insufficient screening.

The stay-home order for India's 1.3 billion people threw out of work the backbone of the nation's economy — rickshaw drivers, fruit peddlers, cleaners and others who buy food with their daily earnings. The government announced a \$22 billion stimulus to deliver monthly rations to 800 million people.

India's massive train system was also halted to stop the spread of the virus but that might not work. Jobless workers are now attempting to walk hundreds of miles to their home villages from India's major cities.

In China, where the virus was first believed to have started, the National Health Commission on Friday reported 55 new cases, 54 of them imported infections. Once again, there were no new cases reported in Wuhan, the provincial capital where the coronavirus first emerged in December. China is barring most foreigners from entering.

In a phone call Friday, Chinese leader Xi Jinping told U.S. President Donald Trump that China "understands the United States' current predicament over the COVID-19 outbreak and stands ready to provide support within its capacity."

The two countries should "work together to boost cooperation in epidemic control and other fields, and develop a relationship of non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect and win-win cooperation," the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

The pandemic appears to have peaked in China, even while the government remains on guard against imported cases. Beijing is sending medical teams and equipment abroad, especially to Europe. But it has strongly protested U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's repeated references to the outbreak as the "Wuhan Flu," saying that promotes bias against China and Chinese Americans.

The economic damage of the pandemic was growing. Italy shut down most of its industry, and a record-shattering 3.3 million Americans applied for unemployment benefits last week — nearly five times the old record set in 1982. Companies in Europe are laying off workers at the fastest pace since 2009, according to surveys of business managers.

Despite that, Wall Street rallied for the third straight day after an unprecedented \$2.2 trillion economic rescue package to help businesses, hospitals and ordinary Americans passed the Senate. The rescue plan, which is expected to be voted on in the House later Friday, would dispense checks of \$1,200 per adult and \$500 per child.

Rising reported from Berlin and Winfield reported from Rome. Associated Press journalists around the world contributed to this report.

Follow AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Italy hopes virus is easing but fears new onslaught in south

By NICOLE WINFIELD, COLLEEN BARRY and TRISHA THOMAS Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Doctors and nurses in Italy's overwhelmed northern hospitals have welcomed a slight stabilizing in the number of coronavirus infections but fear the virus is still silently spreading in the south two weeks into the West's most extreme nationwide shutdown.

As the dead in Italy keep piling up, virologists warn that the actual number of Italy's positive cases is up

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to five times as high as the official count of 80,539. That means infections will still climb even with Italians ordered to stay home for all but essential activity.

Italy, the epicenter of Europe's pandemic, has by far the most virus deaths of any nation in the world, a grim tally of 8,165. On Friday, Italy is on track to surpass China in its infection count and have the most cases of any nation behind the U.S.

"It is something devastating," said the Rev. Mario Carminati, who has turned over a church in the tiny Lombard town of Seriate to host coffins before they are taken by military convoy to be cremated. This week, dozens were lined up in two neat rows down the central aisle, and were immediately replaced by new ones when they were taken away.

"At least the relatives and family know that someone is taking care of them, with a prayer and a benediction before they are taken away," he said.

Despite the toll, officials have also expressed cautious optimism that the exponential spread of the virus is starting to slow in the hard-hit north, thanks to two weeks of military-enforced stay-at-home orders. For several days this week, new infections and deaths showed signs of slowing down, and emergency rooms weren't seeing the tsunami of sick that characterized the first weeks of the pandemic following Italy's first positive test Feb. 20.

"The numbers are still high, but for a few days now the numbers have stopped rising, thank God," said Dr. Luca Lorini, head of intensive care at the Pope John XXIII hospital in Bergamo, one of the hardest hit of Italy's public hospitals.

Some 500 medical personnel at the hospital are infected, and Lorini said he has found himself treating colleagues, friends, children of friends and parents of friends in his overwhelmed 88-bed ICU that serves a city of 120,000.

He marvels that he is still standing and wonders if maybe he was infected early on with slight symptoms and developed immunity. Nationwide, at least 33 doctors have died and 6,414 medical personnel have tested positive.

"We know it before we go into battle, and we accept it," Lorini told The Associated Press.

Elsewhere in Bergamo, the Italian army's Alpini mountaineering forces are building a field hospital to be staffed, in part, by some of the 150 medical personnel sent by Russia, one of only a handful of countries along with China and Cuba to respond to Italy's urgent appeal for medical equipment, protective masks and personnel.

But the need is also growing in the south, where hospitals are even less prepared and equipped than the prosperous north. In one week, Puglia in the "heel" of the Italian peninsula went from 478 cases to 1,182, with a doubling of ICU patients. Campania also doubled its caseload to 1,310 and tripled the number of people in ICUs.

"It's a matter of hours, not days," the governor of the Campania region that includes Naples wrote to the central government, complaining that his urgent requests for ventilators had gone unheeded. "There is a real chance of adding a tragedy of the south to the tragedy of the north."

Cateno De Luca, mayor of the Sicilian city of Messina, took the extraordinary step of recording a warning to residents in his nasal, gravelly voice for drones to play as they fly over the seaside city monitoring residents' movements.

"Don't go outside! That is an order from Mayor De Luca!" the drone blasts.

Italy's high death toll and aggressive spread of the virus has led Italian epidemiologists to estimate that the true number of infected could be as high as 450,000, and that under-testing is putting Italians at risk of further contagion. Currently, Italy only tests people showing symptoms, because its labs cannot process any more, and to date more than 360,000 tests have been performed.

Virologist Dr. Andrea Crisanti, director of molecular medicine at the University of Padua and a consultant for the Veneto regional government, points to the only controlled epidemiological study done in the outbreak, in the tiny Veneto town of Vo'Euganeo, as evidence that Italy's true numbers of infection are much higher — and that the risk of not testing more widely is enormous.

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Italy recorded its first death in Vo, and the town was locked down Feb. 22 and the entire population of 3,300 tested. According to the study, 3% of Vo's residents were infected, but between 50%-75% of them were asymptomatic. But because all positive cases were identified, isolated and quarantined, regardless of whether they were symptomatic, Vo has seen its new infections crumble.

"This tiny town has taught us a lot," Crisanti told state-run RAI radio.

Crisanti said the Vo study showed that even asymptomatic people transmit the virus, since the few new infections registered between tests were within households of asymptomatic people. The only way to stop the spread, he told RAI, is more testing, active surveillance of all positive cases and quarantine.

Based on the Vo results, Veneto Gov. Luca Zaia is planning to vastly ramp up testing across the region, aiming to reach 20,000 tests a day and hand out protective masks to each family. Already, Veneto has tested nearly 80,000 people, and compared to hard-hit Lombardy next door, has a comparatively low mortality rate with 287 dead and 6,935 positive cases.

The government on March 10 imposed a nationwide lockdown after an initial quarantine of a dozen small towns in Lombardy and Veneto failed to stop the spread of the virus. On Thursday, Italy idled all non-essential production and industry, the most widespread manufacturing shutdown in the world.

The industrial lobby Confindustria has estimated it could cost 70 billion-to-100 billion euros (\$77 billion-\$110 billion) of national wealth a month if 70% of companies are closed.

Two weeks in, the measures appear to be having their effect on the virus, slowing new infections and relieving pressure on the health system. By Thursday, more than 10,000 of Italy's 80,000 infected had been cured.

Twenty days after coming down with a fever, and after nearly a week in an air-pressurized helmet pumping oxygen into his virus-ravaged lungs, Fausto Russo is now breathing on his own and hopes to go home as early as Sunday from the Santa Maria Goretti hospital in Latina, near Rome.

"It's a horrible sensation, not being able to breathe," said Russo, a 38-year-old fitness trainer. "Imagine putting your head under water."

Lorini, the doctor, knows well the toll that the virus takes on both patients and hospital staff. When he goes home each night, a five-minute walk from the hospital, he allows himself a few minutes to listen to music and "unplug" from the intensity of the ICU ward.

His current favorite song is Bruce Springsteen's "Secret Garden." He smiles as he thinks about the lyrics. "You've gone a million miles/ How far'd you get/ To that place where/ You can't remember/ And you can't forget."

"Listen to it today," Lorini suggested. "It will give you a sense of tenderness."

This version corrects spelling of Springsteen's name.

Barry reported from Soave, Italy.

The Associated Press receives support for health and science coverage from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

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Staying afloat: \$2.2 trillion bill offers economic lifeline

By PAUL WISEMAN and JOYCE M. ROSENBERG AP Business Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the coronavirus crisis, even doctors can face a cash crunch.

Dr. Benjamin Ticho, an ophthalmologist in Chicago Ridge, Illinois, has seen his revenue plunge 80% as patients stay home and he cancels non-emergency surgeries. He's cut his staff's hours sharply and is negotiating with his creditors.

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"We've reached out to many of our bigger vendors and said, 'Hey, we may be facing a cash crunch — can you give us a break, or at least defer payments?' Many have been sympathetic," said Ticho, who owes loans on medical equipment. He's giving his patients a break, too, by holding off for now on collecting their unpaid balances.

The record \$2.2 trillion emergency package nearing final approval in Congress is aimed at businesses like Ticho's and people like his patients: Caught in a public health lockdown that has closed companies and brought economic life to a standstill, they are at risk of running out of money and being unable to pay bills or meet daily expenses.

The idea behind the legislation is to give companies and families a cash cushion to better weather the health crisis and looming recession. When it's safe to go back to work, dine out and book airline tickets again, the thinking goes, they'll be more financially ready to return to something closer to normal life.

"It will inject trillions of dollars of cash into the economy as fast as possible to help American workers, families, small businesses and industries make it through this disruption and emerge on the other side ready to soar," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who helped negotiate the package. The House is expected to vote on the plan Friday.

So Congress is sending a one-time payment directly to most American adults and U.S. residents with Social Security numbers. That amounts to \$1,200 for single adults earning up to \$75,000 a year and \$2,400 for married couples earning up to \$150,000, plus \$500 per child. Someone filing as head of household would get the full payment if they earn \$112,500 or less.

The payment is reduced by \$5 for each \$100 that a taxpayer's income exceeds those thresholds, and is completely phased-out for single filers with incomes exceeding \$99,000, \$146,500 for head of household filers with one child, and \$198,000 for joint filers with no children.

The package would also help replace the earnings of unemployed workers for four months, providing them with their state's unemployment benefits plus an extra \$600 a week. For the first time, gig economy workers such as Uber drivers can claim unemployment benefits, too.

The support for individuals and households is especially important because the social safety net in America isn't as strong as it is in the wealthy developed countries of Europe.

The package includes \$50 billion in tax credits for businesses that keep employees on payroll and will cover 50% of those workers' paychecks. Companies can also defer payment of the 6.2% Social Security tax, giving them an incentive to put off layoffs at a time when ordinary business has come to a halt.

Also included is \$454 billion in seed money that will allow the Federal Reserve to make roughly \$4.5 trillion in loans to larger industries.

At \$2.2 trillion, the money that Congress and the Trump administration are throwing at the economic crisis amounts to more than 10% of America's gross domestic product — the broadest measurement of economic output. By comparison, President Barack Obama's \$787 billion stimulus plan in the depths of the Great Recession amounted to about 5.5% of GDP.

And that doesn't count what else the Fed is doing. It has slashed its benchmark interest rate to zero. It's flooding financial markets with cash by buying up securities, including government and, for the first time, corporate bonds. It's also buying so-called commercial paper, short-term IOUs that companies issue to cover operating costs such as payrolls. And it's readying a loan program for small businesses.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell has made clear that the central bank will do what it takes to support the economy. In an interview Thursday on NBC's "Today" show, Powell said the Fed would lend an essentially unlimited amount, if necessary, to support banks, businesses and city and state governments until the viral outbreak is brought under control.

The chairman acknowledged that the economy will suffer and that unemployment will rise.

"There can also be a good rebound on the other side of that," he said. "By assuring the flow of credit in the economy and keeping rates low, we want to assure that that rebound, when it does come, is as vigorous as possible."

"Except for wartime expenditures during World War II there is nothing comparable to this in U.S. his-

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tory," said Adam Posen, president of the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, D.C.

This rescue isn't just bigger. It's also different in significant ways.

In most economic downturns, even severe ones, policymakers aim at coaxing jittery consumers and businesses to start spending again by slashing interest rates, cutting taxes, or putting people to work on public works projects and giving them paychecks.

It's not going to work that way this time. Nobody is going to go out shopping or schedule a cruise when they're quarantined indefinitely inside their living rooms. And businesses aren't going to hire, open new offices or invest in equipment when they aren't collecting revenue because they have no customers.

Policymakers now just want to keep businesses and individuals from going under while the virus still rages, hoping they'll be in shape to drive a recovery when the crisis is over.

"They're truly focusing on stopping the system from freezing up," said Louis Hyman, an economic historian at Cornell University who has studied the labor market and gig workers.

For now, it seems, there's no way to turn back the forces pulling the economy into recession for the first time in 11 years. Economists are expecting the April-June quarter to be the worst on record. The economy may plunge at an annual rate of 20% or more over those three months. Millions of Americans are expected to lose their jobs in the next few weeks. On Thursday, the Labor Department reported that roughly 3.3 million Americans had filed for unemployment benefits last week — obliterating the 1982 record of 695,000.

The rescue being cobbled together by the Fed, Congress and the White House is designed to reach business owners such as New York tour operator Georgette Blau, who has laid off her tour guides and tapped her personal savings to keep her On Location Tours operating.

Blau is uneasy about seeking a loan from the Small Business Administration, saying the monthly payments would be too high. She would consider looking into the Fed's plans to provide credit to small firms. But it won't be easy to calm her financial worries.

"Even something like \$75,000 is not going to last us very long," she said.

The scale of the damage is staggering. More than 180,000 stores are temporarily shuttered, accounting for more than 40% of U.S. retail space, according to GlobalData Retail, a research firm.

"Retailers were caught up in a nightmare," said David French, senior vice president of government relations at the National Retail Federation, the nation's largest retail trade group. "They have people to pay. Rents to pay. They have inventories."

No money is coming in at Olio, a wedding and event venue in Peabody, Massachusetts. Owners Sarah Narcus and Ellen Basch have canceled or postponed all events through the spring. They've asked, and gotten, leniency from their lenders, including the bank that holds the million-dollar mortgage on their building.

"They were very receptive. They have deferred payments except for interest and escrow for 90 days," Narcus says. The business still has to pay other expenses including taxes and utilities.

To keep what could be a steep but short recession from turning into something worse, economists say the government needs to move fast.

But it won't be easy.

"No set of existing financial pipes was designed for a crisis requiring payments to more than 100 million individuals or households within days or weeks," write Peterson Institute researchers Donald Hammond and David Wilcox.

They are worried that the government will rely on income tax rolls to identify recipients; but many Americans, especially the poorest ones, don't pay income taxes and can't be found that way. They suggest using Social Security records and federal assistance rolls, too.

"We urge policymakers to emphasize the need for speed," Hammond and Wilcox write, even if it means some Americans accidentally get more than one relief check. "In most cases, the people who receive multiple payments will be at the lower end of the economic ladder and thus likely to be in great need of help."

Cornell's Hyman expects that the government will make mistakes as it tries to roll out so much money, so quickly. But he's impressed with the rescue package anyway.

"It's the biggest intervention in human history, and it's all done in a week," he said. "It's crazy."

Rosenberg reported from New York. AP Economics writers Christopher Rugaber in Washington and Anne D'Innocenzio in New York contributed to this report.

In Iran, false belief a poison fights virus kills hundreds

By NASSER KARIMI and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Standing over the still body of an intubated 5-year-old boy wearing nothing but a plastic diaper, an Iranian health care worker in a hazmat suit and mask begged the public for just one thing: Stop drinking industrial alcohol over fears about the new coronavirus.

The boy, now blind after his parents gave him toxic methanol in the mistaken belief it protects against the virus, is just one of hundreds of victims of an epidemic inside the pandemic now gripping Iran.

Iranian media report nearly 300 people have been killed and more than 1,000 sickened so far by ingesting methanol across the Islamic Republic, where drinking alcohol is banned and where those who do rely on bootleggers. An Iranian doctor helping the country's Health Ministry told The Associated Press on Friday the problem was even greater, giving a death toll of around 480 with 2,850 people sickened.

The poisonings come as fake remedies spread across social media in Iran, where people remain deeply suspicious of the government after it downplayed the crisis for days before it overwhelmed the country.

"Other countries have only one problem, which is the new coronavirus pandemic. But we are fighting on two fronts here," said Dr. Hossein Hassanian, an adviser to Iran's Health Ministry who gave the higher figures to the AP. "We have to both cure the people with alcohol poisoning and also fight the coronavirus."

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, or death.

The pandemic has swept across the world, overwhelming hospitals, crippling economies and forcing governments to restrict the movements of billions of people. Particularly hard hit has been Iran, home to 80 million people.

As of now, there is no known cure for COVID-19, the illness caused by the virus. Scientists and doctors continue to study the virus and search for effective medicines and a vaccine.

But in messages forwarded and forwarded again, Iranian social media accounts in Farsi falsely suggested a British school teacher and others cured themselves of the coronavirus with whiskey and honey, based on a tabloid story from early February. Mixed with messages about the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers, some wrongly believed drinking high-proof alcohol would kill the virus in their bodies.

The Islamic Republic has reported over 29,000 confirmed cases and more than 2,200 deaths from the virus, the highest toll of any country in the Middle East. International experts also fear Iran may be underreporting its cases, as officials for days played down the virus ahead of a parliamentary election.

That fear of the virus, coupled with poor education and internet rumors, saw dozens sickened by drinking bootleg alcohol containing methanol in Iran's southwestern Khuzestan province and its southern city of Shiraz. Videos aired by Iranian media showed patients with IVs stuck in their arms, laying on beds otherwise needed for the fight against the coronavirus, including the intubated 5-year-old boy. Iranian media also reported cases in the cities of Karaj and Yazd.

In Iran, the government mandates that manufacturers of toxic methanol add an artificial color to their products so the public can tell it apart from ethanol, the kind of alcohol that can be used in cleaning wounds. Ethanol is also the kind of alcohol found in alcoholic beverages, though its production is illegal in Iran.

Some bootleggers in Iran use methanol, adding a splash of bleach to mask the added color before selling it as drinkable. Sometimes it is mixed with consumable alcohol to stretch supply, other times it comes as methanol, falsely advertised as drinkable, Hovda said. Methanol also can contaminate traditionally fermented alcohol.

Methanol cannot be smelled or tasted in drinks. It causes delayed organ and brain damage. Symptoms include chest pain, nausea, hyperventilation, blindness and even coma.

Hassanian said his figures included reports from coroner's offices around Iran also counting those who

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died outside of hospitals from the poisonings.

"Unfortunately in some provinces, including Khuzestan and Fars, deaths from drinking methanol has exceeded the number of deaths from the new coronavirus," he said.

Dr. Knut Erik Hovda, a clinical toxicologist in Oslo, said to expect more methanol poisoning victims.

"The virus is spreading and people are just dying off, and I think they are even less aware of the fact that there are other dangers around," Hovda said. "When they keep drinking this, there's going to be more people poisoned."

Even before the outbreak, methanol poisoning had taken a toll in Iran. One academic study found methanol poisoning sickened 768 people in Iran between September and October 2018 alone, killing 76.

Other Muslim nations that ban their citizens from drinking also see such methanol poisoning, although Iran appears to be the only one in the pandemic so far to turn toward it as a fake cure. In Buddhist Cambodia, police said they seized 4,200 liters (1,100 gallons) of methanol from a man who unwittingly planned to make toxic hand sanitizer because of the virus outbreak.

Muslim drinkers in Iran can be punished with cash fines and 80 lashes. However, minority Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians can drink alcoholic beverages in private.

While police occasionally announce alcohol busts, the trade in nontoxic alcohol also continues. Locally made Iranian arak from fermented raisins, known as Aragh sagi, sells for \$10 for a 1.5-liter bottle. Imported vodka sells for \$40 a bottle.

"Every year during Nowruz, or the Persian New Year holidays that begin March 21, my customers double," said Rafik, an Iranian-Armenian who makes vodka in the basement of his Tehran home. He spoke on the condition that only his first name be used for fear of arrest. "This year, because of corona, it jumped up by four- or five-fold."

Farhad, a self-described heavy drinker who lives in central Tehran, said alcohol remains easy to find for those looking for it.

"Even you can find it offered when you are walking down the street," he said.

Since 1979, Iran's 40 alcohol factories have seen their production changed to pharmaceutical needs and sanitizers. Others had been left idle, like the abandoned Shams alcohol factory east of Tehran.

But now, in a time when even some mosques in Iran hand out high-proof alcohol as a sanitizer, officials plan to start work again at Shams to produce 22,000 liters of 99% alcohol a day.

Gambrell reported from Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Associated Press writers Mehdi Fattahi in Tehran and Sopheng Cheang in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, contributed.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

10 Things to Know for Today

By The Associated Press

Your daily look at late-breaking news, upcoming events and the stories that will be talked about today:

1. MORE THAN HALF A MILLION INFECTIONS GLOBALLY The U.S. passes China with more than 85,000 coronavirus cases as Italy shut most of its industry and throngs of Indian day laborers received food rations after a nationwide lockdown.

2. FALSE BELIEF PROVES DEADLY IN IRAN Nearly 300 Iranians have been killed and more than 1,000 sickened by ingesting toxic methanol out of the misconception it kills the new coronavirus.

3. WHERE SCIENTISTS ARE SKEPTICAL Experts are challenging the accuracy of simple pin-prick blood tests or nasal swabs that can determine within minutes if someone has, or previously had, COVID-19.

4. VIRAL ENDGAME LEAVES EVERYONE GUESSING Public health experts caution that it would be reckless to lift restrictions before infections have peaked and begun to ebb, but also waiting months or years for a vaccine is not plausible either.

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5. WHO MIGHT DELAY STIMULUS VOTE Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., an opponent of the \$2.2 trillion economic relief bill, may seek to force a roll call vote, forcing Democratic leaders to summon members back to Washington.

6. 'TOO MANY PEOPLE ARE DYING ALONE' Dr. Kamini Doobay, an emergency medicine physician in New York, says many critically ill patients are not with loved ones due to a strict no visitors' policy.

7. VIRUS PUTS STRAIN ON COUPLES It's a time when every domestic decision can seem to have impossibly high stakes, from going to the grocery store to deciding who gets quarantined together.

8. 'I WAS AFRAID BUT I DIDN'T HESITATE' Malak el-Kashif is perhaps Egypt's most outspoken transgender woman activist, a label that in a largely conservative and patriarchal society has meant battling a war on multiple fronts.

9. R KELLY CITES VIRUS CONCERNS IN SEEKING JAIL RELEASE Lawyers for the R&B singer say hand sanitizer and soap are hard to come by in Chicago's Metropolitan Correctional Center and social distancing nearly impossible.

10. HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS GREAT DIES "Curly" Neal, the dribbling wizard who entertained millions of fans for parts of three decades, is dead at 77.

Washington set to deliver \$2.2 trillion virus rescue bill

By ANDREW TAYLOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With rare bipartisanship and speed, Washington is about to deliver massive, unprecedented legislation to speed help to people and businesses as the coronavirus pandemic takes a devastating toll on the U.S. economy and health care system.

The House is set to pass the sprawling \$2.2 trillion measure on Friday morning after an extraordinary 96-0 Senate vote late Wednesday. President Donald Trump marveled at the unanimity Thursday and is eager to sign the package into law.

The relief can hardly come soon enough. Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said Thursday the economy "may well be in recession" already, and the government reported a shocking 3.3 million burst of weekly jobless claims, more than four times the previous record. The U.S. death toll has surpassed 1,200 from the virus.

It is unlikely to be the end of the federal response. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Thursday that issues like more generous food stamp payments, aid to state and local governments and family leave may be revisited in subsequent legislation.

"There's so many things we didn't get in ... that we need to," Pelosi told reporters Thursday.

The legislation will pour \$1,200 direct payments to individuals and a flood of subsidized loans, grants and tax breaks to businesses facing extinction in an economic shutdown caused as Americans self-isolate by the tens of millions. It dwarfs prior Washington efforts to take on economic crises and natural disasters, such as the 2008 Wall Street bailout and President Barack Obama's first-year economic recovery act.

But key elements are untested, such as grants to small businesses to keep workers on payroll and complex lending programs to larger businesses. Millions of rebate payments will go to people who have retained their jobs.

Policymakers worry that bureaucracies like the Small Business Administration may become overwhelmed, and conservatives fear that a new, generous unemployment benefit will dissuade jobless people from returning to the workforce. A new \$500 billion subsidized lending program for larger businesses is unproven as well.

First the measure must clear Congress. Leaders in both parties had hoped to pass the measure with a sparsely attended voice vote — remarkable for a bill of such magnitude — so scattered lawmakers don't have to risk exposure by travelling back to Washington.

But now it is feared iconoclastic Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., an opponent of the bill, may seek to force a roll call vote. Democratic leaders summoned members back to Washington, at least those who are able and willing to return.

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Friday's House session will also be unprecedented. Originally scheduled as a non-working "pro forma" meeting, the session will be extended to a debate on the bill — all conducted under social distancing rules to minimize the risk of transmitting the virus.

Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, one of the House's conservative leaders, said he wasn't aware of anyone planning to block a voice vote Friday but planned to talk more with colleagues before the vote.

"If that's the method used to get this to the American people, to get this passed, then I think lots of members are probably OK with that," Jordan said Thursday as he drove back to Washington. "I know the plan is for it to be a voice vote, and that's what the leadership has said they're for, and I think that's fine."

Wednesday night's unanimous Senate vote on the bill was especially striking — a united front that followed days of sometimes tumultuous negotiations and partisan eruptions. Democrats twice voted to block the bill to seek further add-ons and changes.

"The power of the argument that we had — that you need a strong government to solve these problems, both health and economic — carried the day," Schumer told The Associated Press on Thursday. "Had we not stood up on those two votes it wouldn't have happened."

Underscoring the effort's sheer magnitude, the bill finances a response with a price tag that equals half the size of the entire \$4 trillion-plus annual federal budget. The \$2.2 trillion estimate is the White House's best guess of the spending it contains.

The rescue bill would provide one-time direct payments to Americans of \$1,200 per adult making up to \$75,000 a year and \$2,400 to a married couple making up to \$150,000, with \$500 payments per child.

Unemployment insurance would be made far more generous, with \$600 per week tacked onto regular state jobless payments through the end of July. States and local governments would receive \$150 billion in supplemental funding to help them provide basic and emergency services during the crisis.

"We call them checks in the mail, but most of them will be direct deposits," Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin told CNBC on Thursday. "It will be within three weeks. We're determined to get money in people's pocket immediately."

The legislation also establishes a \$454 billion program for guaranteed, subsidized loans to larger industries in hopes of leveraging up to \$4.5 trillion in lending to distressed businesses, states, and municipalities. All would be up to the Treasury Department's discretion, though businesses controlled by Trump or immediate family members and by members of Congress would be ineligible.

There was also \$150 billion devoted to the health care system, including \$100 billion for grants to hospitals and other health care providers buckling under the strain of COVID-19 caseloads.

Republicans successfully pressed for an employee retention tax credit that's estimated to provide \$50 billion to companies that retain employees on payroll and cover 50% of workers' paycheck up to \$10,000. Companies would also be able to defer payment of the 6.2% Social Security payroll tax. A huge tax break for interest costs and operating losses limited by the 2017 tax overhaul was restored at a \$200 billion cost in a boon for the real estate sector.

An additional \$45 billion would fund additional relief through the Federal Emergency Management Agency for local response efforts and community services.

Most people who contract the new coronavirus have mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, or death.

Associated Press writer Alan Fram contributed to this report.

In Egypt, transgender activist fights battle on many fronts

By **MAGGIE MICHAEL** and **MARIAM FAM** Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Malak el-Kashif left home on her birthday seven years ago. Walking into an uncertain future, she was underdressed for the weather and armed with little— except for some makeup, a few women's accessories and 50 Egyptian pounds (at the time about six American dollars).

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"I was afraid but I didn't hesitate," she said. "There weren't any other solutions."

That night, el-Kashif was a 13-year-old boy named Abdel-Rahman. She has since emerged as perhaps Egypt's most outspoken transgender woman activist.

It's a label that in a largely conservative and patriarchal society has meant battling a war on multiple fronts.

"When you declare you are different, you should get ready for war. A big war," she said. "The society will stomp on you and treat you like you are the enemy."

She has been ostracized by her family and scorned by some who accuse her of tampering with God's creation. She has been attacked by others scandalized by her activism for LGBTQ rights. Legally, she still holds a male's identity card.

None of this has deterred her from publicly advocating for transgenders' rights. She appeared on a television show in a blonde wig--which she now sees as a cringe-worthy fashion faux pas. On her Facebook page, she has campaigned for transgenders, chronicled her transition and posted photos with a rainbow background. She rails against homophobia, sexual harassment, bullying and the patriarchy.

"If I wanted to hide, then I would have hidden and just stayed at my parents' and not become a trans and saved myself all of this. ... It's just not me, not Malak," she said. "Malak is someone else."

Officially transitioning in Egypt can be complex. It involves medical tests, psychological treatment for two years and approvals by medical specialists and religious authorities. Success is far from assured.

Osama Abdel-Hay, head of the doctors' syndicate's "gender correction" committee, said a cleric used to sit on the committee alongside medical specialists. He stopped attending meetings and the committee's work was disrupted for years, he said. "He wasn't supportive of the decisions of the committee," he said, refusing to elaborate.

Abdel-Hay said he didn't recall how many approvals were given to transgenders. His assistant scribbled on a piece of paper summing up the committee's work between 2014 and 2017: 87 approvals for "physical" reasons but zero for "gender identity disorder." Thirty-one were left unresolved.

Now, under a new system, the medical committee sends the cases it approves to Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Academy. Out of three cases sent to the religious scholars, two were rejected. The approved one cited a fertility disorder.

"I think they are sensitive to changing the sex because they don't want to change the creation of God," he said, referring to the religious establishment in Egypt. The syndicate that oversees the committee doesn't want to clash with Al-Azhar over this issue, he said, but added, "if there was no religious opinion in the process, approvals would have been faster."

Abdel-Hady Zarei, who heads the fatwa committee at Al-Azhar, said there cannot be one religious opinion for the cases. Instead, each must be studied by a group of religious scholars who hear from medical specialists. Decisions are made on a case-by-case basis, he said, adding the issue "is put in the hands of the medical specialists because they are the experts."

The surgery must provide a benefit or prevent a harm, he said. There may be a consensus "one case will lead to a correction" while another "is just a tendency or desire toward the other gender."

Nazeer Ayad, secretary-general of the Islamic Research Academy, told The Associated Press that sex "change or correction" is only allowed in "exceptional cases," like when the sex cannot be determined as either male or female.

"It's a medical issue," he said. "The academy and the sharia scholars make their decision based on what the doctors say."

El-Kashif said she never received a response to her case. She was diagnosed with "gender identity disorder," she said. The term was replaced in the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic guide by "gender dysphoria" — a conflict between assigned gender at birth and the one a person identifies with, which may lead to significant distress.

An approval would have allowed her to have the surgeries at a public hospital, paving the way for chang-

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ing her ID.

She argued the decision should be purely medical.

"When you get sick, do you see a doctor or a sheikh? A doctor," she said. "When a woman is giving birth does she go to the hospital or to the mosque? The hospital."

El-Kashif grew up in a religious, traditional household where she memorized parts of the Quran. At a home where "a man is a man and a woman is a woman," she enjoyed more freedom as a boy than her sisters or the girls in her neighborhood.

The advantages did not matter. After playing with two girlfriends, making dresses for dolls, the then 9-year-old declared to her mother: "I am not a boy. I am a girl." She was banished to her room. When her father arrived, he beat her, she said.

The worst part came next. She called it "my struggle with the mirror" phase. Years of asking Who am I? If I am a boy then why do I think this way? If I am a girl then why do I look the way I do?

"This was the hardest phase ever, even harder than confronting society, harder than prison," she said. "It was a huge fight that no one could protect me from."

Compounding her dilemma, she didn't have the vocabulary to explain her situation. That changed when her sister said the actress in a movie she was watching was transgender. She started researching.

She experimented with makeup and set up fake identities online. On her birthday, she received an ultimatum: follow the rules or leave. "I picked the tougher option."

El-Kashif's mother declined comment for this story.

Sometimes, el-Kashif slept in a park or stayed up all night. For money, she swept up hair at a salon or mopped staircases.

El-Kashif's battles are etched on her slender body. The scars peeking underneath her top are from the time she threw herself from the fifth floor. The ones on her arm are a reminder of cutting herself with razors more times than she can count.

Then there are the invisible wounds that chronicle a life of hardship and defiance.

There's the day she went out in a black wig and pink shoes. She said her father and brother found her and tore her clothes off her body as they took her home. There is the fear she will die alone and the feeling that when her mother looked at her, she saw not her child but a "freak."

In a moment of reconciliation, el-Kashif posted a picture of silver socks and a pink watch on Facebook. "My mother brought these to me and said she felt she gave birth to me all over again. ... I am very happy, the happiest person on earth," she wrote. The relationship is complicated with ups and downs.

El-Kashif punctuates her recounting of painful life events with jokes and sarcastic comments. As she talks, she smokes heavily, fidgets or plays with her hair--which she had colored red and often wears a lipstick shade to match.

"She is traumatized. This is (what happens) when you topple the temple," said Mozn Hassan, a leading feminist activist and a friend of el-Kashif's. "These people, that Malak is one example of, experience multilayers of violence and exclusion all the time."

Reda al-Danbouki, executive director of the Women's Center for Guidance and Legal Awareness, said "most trans people (here) prefer to remain silent so they can retain even a small part of their rights. They don't want a confrontation with society on top of what happens with their families." El-Kashif "has shocked the patriarchy."

El-Kashif's activism extends beyond advocating for the LGBTQ community. She was arrested last year after she called for protests following a fatal train crash because of what she saw as government negligence. She was imprisoned in a men's prison. The arrest, her third, sparked an outcry as activists and rights groups feared for her safety, especially due to her gender identity. She said she was held in solitary confinement.

Hassan said pressure mounted on authorities at the time to isolate her from male prisoners to spare

her possible violence.

After her release, el-Kashif filed a lawsuit demanding special places for holding transgenders in prisons and police stations.

Now, she lives in a sparsely furnished rental. One of the drawings in her room shows bare legs, one shackled by an iron ball. A note taped to the mirror carries a grim reminder: "Quit the chemistry. Otherwise, it will do to you what it did before," a reference to abuse of anti-depressants.

Day-to-day life can be hard. On a trip to a bank, an employee said he would have to call the police to witness any transaction because her ID showed a teenage boy.

Shortly before her birthday last year, el-Kashif posted a picture of herself online writing that she had completed her gender transition surgeries.

"Today is the day I defeated society," she wrote. "From this day on, there's only Malak."

She was flooded with thousands of messages. Some congratulated her; many insulted her.

The comments ranged from "pray to God to heal you" or "you have lost in this life and the afterlife" to "If you were my son, I would have set you on fire."

But other encounters have left her feeling like she's making a difference.

One mother approached her at a hospital and said she sought medical help for her daughter after hearing el-Kashif's story. Another time, a transgender man stopped her to let her know that "To me, you are resistance."

Fam reported from Winter Park, Fla.

Associated Press religion coverage receives support from the Lilly Endowment through the Religion News Foundation. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

Federal prisons struggle to combat growing COVID-19 fears

By MICHAEL BALSAMO and MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When a federal correction officer geared up for duty recently at a Florida prison complex, he added an N95 mask amid coronavirus fears. He has a sister who had an organ transplant and an elderly mother at home.

But a supervisor ordered him to take it off and threatened disciplinary action if he refused. At other federal prisons, though, he would have been told to wear one. Rules on protective gear vary widely from prison to prison.

And inmates say there is little guidance on what to do if they experience flu-like symptoms and very little social distancing. Some who have symptoms are not tested.

Together, these accounts detail a scattershot policy on COVID-19 safety at the federal Bureau of Prisons amid the growing pandemic. Advocates and even prison guards are calling for reforms to head off a potential outbreak in a prison system plagued for years by violence, misconduct and staffing shortages.

This report is based on interviews with nearly two dozen correction officers, inmates, attorneys and advocates, many of whom spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity for fear of retribution.

Health officials have been warning for more than a decade about the dangers of epidemics in jails and prisons, which are ideal environments for virus outbreaks: Inmates share small cells with strangers, use toilets just a few feet (meters) from their beds and are herded into day rooms where they spend hours at a time together.

While statistically the number of confirmed coronavirus cases within the Bureau of Prisons system is far lower than the rate outside prisons in the U.S., there is widespread fear among inmates and staff members that the virus could spread rapidly. So far, 10 inmates and eight staff members within the federal prison system have been confirmed to have COVID-19.

Attorney General William Barr said Thursday that the Justice Department takes seriously "our responsibility to protect those who are put in our custody."

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"We want to make sure that our institutions don't become petri dishes," he said. "But we have the protocols that are designed to stop that, and we are using all the tools we have to protect the inmates."

In a statement to the AP, Bureau of Prisons Director Michael Carvajal said the agency has "thus far been fortunate in that our rate of COVID-19 infection is remarkably low."

"We believe that the low number of cases to this point, in a system this large, is a testament to our effective planning and execution to date," he said.

And the Bureau of Prisons said its employees were expected to follow its guidance on the coronavirus and would investigate if officials are "made aware of specific circumstances that would lead us to believe that policy or guidance may not have been followed."

There are approximately 146,000 inmates at the 122 federal correctional facilities across the U.S., including about 10,000 over the age of 60. New inmates coming into the federal prison system are screened for COVID-19 risk factors, have their temperature taken and are being quarantined for 14 days.

But inmates nationwide contacted by the AP raised a similar issue: There are no signs or documents listing the symptoms of COVID-19, and there's been little communication about what they should do if they experience flu-like symptoms.

Some exhibiting flu-like symptoms were not tested or quarantined at several facilities, including at the FCI Yazoo City in Mississippi and at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in New York City, according to inmates and advocates. There have been confirmed COVID-19 cases at both.

Joseph Plany, locked up at a federal prison camp in Beaumont, Texas, said one inmate sought treatment for respiratory symptoms and was turned away at the medical unit and sent back to his dorm.

"They're not telling us anything," he said in an interview with the AP. "They just they're not equipped to handle it."

Congressional leaders and prison advocates are pressing the Justice Department to release at-risk inmates ahead of a potential outbreak, arguing that the public health guidance to stay 6 feet (1.83 meters) away from other people is nearly impossible behind bars.

"There is no adequate possible plan, certainly not without greatly decreasing the population in these institutions," said David Patton, executive director and chief attorney at the Federal Defenders of New York. "There is simply not enough space in there."

Barr sent a memo to the Bureau of Prisons on Thursday to increase the use of home confinement and identify non-violent, at-risk inmates who "might be safer serving their sentences in home confinement rather than in BOP facilities."

Prison staff members in Florida and South Carolina described scenes of inmates allowed to be far closer than the 6-foot recommendation, situations that leave correctional officers and prison employees also at risk.

At Coleman, a large federal prison complex near Orlando, Florida, dozens of inmates were crowded last week into the commissary, admissions area and prison yard, a staff member said.

At a minimum security federal prison in Bennettsville, South Carolina, inmates were let out of their cells two units at a time, nearly 250 people at a time. They crowded into open spaces and filled up a room to watch television — about 20 inmates sitting no more than 3 feet (0.91 meters) apart, correctional officer Charles D'Apice said.

"There is no social distancing on the inside," D'Apice said. "They're telling the inmates to stay 6 feet apart from each other, but then they let 120 in a unit out together. They get as close as they want."

At the Metropolitan Correctional Center, the notorious federal jail where Jeffrey Epstein killed himself last year, one staff member said gloves are readily available but masks are not. The staff restrooms are running empty of even the most basic pandemic need: soap.

Carvajal said in a statement that cleaning, sanitation and medical supplies had been inventoried and there were "ample supplies on hand and ready to be distributed or moved to any facility as deemed necessary." The agency had also ordered additional supplies, he said.

Visitors are now banned from prisons, but inmates are still being shuttled to and from court appearances, where employees fear they could come into contact with the virus and bring it back behind bars. Inmates making those trips still need to be patted down and escorted by officers — close contact that flies in the

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face of social distancing requirements.

As part of the agency's protocols for dealing with the virus, staff members who work in facilities in areas with "sustained community transmission" are having their temperature taken before their shifts start. If it's too high, they'll be sent home.

But officers at a medium-security federal prison in Jesup, Georgia, described broken thermometers hampering screenings. When a staff member got a frighteningly low reading of 89 degrees — an indication of hypothermia — management argued that each person's body temperature is different and refused to replace the thermometers, they said.

Pam Milwood, a local union president at Jesup, said staff members who report being sick are still being told to work, their temperatures taken not by medical staff.

"How do you determine that I look sick and you don't? Who makes that call? You have a factory foreman over there taking our temperatures, not even clinical. Who is he to make that call?" she said.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death. The vast majority of people recover.

Worldwide, there have been more than 535,000 cases and more than 24,000 deaths. In the United States, there have been about 86,000 cases and about 1,300 deaths.

Sisak reported from New York. Associated Press writers Jim Mustian and Martha Mendoza contributed to this report.

Follow Balsamo and Sisak on Twitter at twitter.com/MikeBalsamo1 and twitter.com/MikeSisak.

Virus test results in minutes? Scientists question accuracy

By **ARITZ PARRA, CIARÁN GILES and JILL LAWLESS** Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Some political leaders are hailing a potential breakthrough in the fight against COVID-19: simple pin-prick blood tests or nasal swabs that can determine within minutes if someone has, or previously had, the virus.

The tests could reveal the true extent of the outbreak and help separate the healthy from the sick. But some scientists have challenged their accuracy.

Hopes are hanging on two types of quick tests: antigen tests that use a nose or throat swab to look for the virus, and antibody tests that look in the blood for evidence someone had the virus and recovered. The tests are in short supply, and some of them are unreliable.

"The market has gone completely mad," Spanish Health Minister Salvador Illa said Thursday, lamenting the lack of face masks, personal protection equipment and rapid tests, "because everybody wants these products, and they want the good ones."

The Spanish government on Thursday sent 9,000 rapid antigen tests that were deemed unreliable back to a manufacturer that, according to the Chinese government, had no license to sell them.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson this week called the rapid tests a "game changer" and said his government had ordered 3.5 million of them.

The U.K. hopes the tests will allow people who have had COVID-19 and recovered to go back to work, safe in the knowledge that they are immune, at least for now. That could ease the country's economic lockdown and bring back health care workers who are being quarantined out of fears they may have the virus.

Many scientists have been cautious, saying it's unclear if the rapid tests provide accurate results.

In the past few months, much of the testing has involved doctors sticking something akin to a long cotton swab deep into a patient's nose or throat to retrieve cells that contain live virus. Lab scientists pull genetic material from the virus and make billions of copies to get enough for computers to detect the bug. Results sometimes take several days.

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Rapid antigen tests have shorter swabs that patients can use themselves to gather specimens. They are akin to rapid flu tests, which can produce results in less than 15 minutes. They focus on antigens — parts of the surface of viruses that trigger an infected person's body to start producing antibodies.

Health authorities in China, the United States and other countries have offered few details on the rates of false positive and false negative results on any coronavirus tests. Experts worry that the rapid tests may be significantly less reliable than the more time-consuming method.

Lower accuracy has been a concern with rapid flu tests. Spanish scientists said the rapid tests for coronavirus they reviewed were less than 30% accurate. The more established lab tests were about 84% accurate.

Those results "would prevent its routine introduction," according to a report by the Spanish Society of Infectious Disease and Clinical Microbiology that triggered the alarms in Spain and spurred the government's rejection of the 9,000 antigen tests.

Similar questions swirl around new antibody tests involving blood samples. Some versions have been described as finger-prick tests that can provide important information in minutes.

Antibody tests are most valuable as a way of seeing who has been infected in the recent past, who became immune to the disease and — if done on a wide scale — how widely an infection has spread in a community.

The antibody tests also will allow scientists to get a better understanding of how deadly coronavirus is to all people, because they will provide a better understanding of how many people were ever infected, ranging from those who never showed symptoms to those who became fatally ill. The results will also guide vaccine development.

But so much is unknown, including how long antibodies — and immunity — lasts, and who the blood tests should be used on.

"We don't have all the answers," said Dr. Robin Patel, president of the American Society for Microbiology.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, and death. Most people recover.

More than 15 companies have notified the U.S. Food and Drug Administration that they have developed antibody tests, the agency said. The companies are permitted to begin distributing the tests to hospitals and doctors' offices, provided they carry certain disclaimer statements, including: "This test has not been reviewed by the FDA."

In Spain, the government sought the rapid tests for use first in hospitals and nursing homes, where efforts to halt the spread of the virus have been hampered by widespread infections among health workers.

Hopes about the transformative power of the tests have been raised, then partially dashed, in the U.K. Sharon Peacock, director of the national infection service at Public Health England, told lawmakers this week that the tests would be available in the "near future" for purchase through Amazon for use at home or to have completed in a pharmacy.

"We need to evaluate them in the laboratory to be clear, because these are brand-new products," she said, explaining that the evaluation should be completed this week. She said "further millions" were being ordered on top of the 3.5 million the government had already bought.

But England's chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, urged caution.

"I do not think, and I want to make this clear, that this is something you will suddenly be ordering on the internet next week," Whitty told a news conference Wednesday. "The one thing worse than no test is a bad test.

"If they are incredibly accurate, we will work out the quickest way to release them. If they are not accurate, we will not release any of them," he said.

The prime minister's spokesman was unable to say Thursday how much the U.K. had paid for the tests, which come from several suppliers, or whether the money would be refunded if they turned out to be unreliable.

The chief scientist at the World Health Organization said wider testing would allow health officials to pinpoint infections in people who appear healthy but may be carrying the virus.

"We know that if you really go out and test everyone in the community, you're going to find people walking around with this virus in their nose who do not feel at all ill," Dr. Soumya Swaminathan said in an interview.

WHO believes most transmissions of the virus occur through people who already show symptoms, but "the question is still open" about how asymptomatic people may spread infection, Swaminathan said.

Jill Lawless reported from London. Jamey Keaten in Geneva and Mike Stobbe in New York contributed to this report.

Follow AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Couples in quarantine: Stress, anxiety, fear of the unknown

By JOCELYN NOVECK AP National Writer

The 60-something husband works in the food industry and still insists upon leaving every day for work, saying he needs to keep his business afloat. His frightened wife desperately wants him to stay home.

For another couple, in the midst of a separation, the bitterly fought issue is the kids and whether they can safely see friends. One parent is allowing it in an effort to be the "fun parent"; the other bitterly opposes it.

And for still another couple, it's simply about grocery shopping. She fills the cart, and he accuses her of hoarding unnecessarily. She argues that they need to be prepared.

Scenarios like these are playing out in urban high-rises, suburban homes and tiny rural communities across America as couples try to navigate what has abruptly become the "new normal" during the coronavirus outbreak. Described by therapists, lawyers or the couples themselves, they reveal how even the most subtle differences in temperament or coping strategy can be painfully exacerbated under the incredible stress and anxiety that the outbreak is causing.

It's a time when every domestic decision can seem to have impossibly high stakes, says Catherine Lewis, therapist and faculty member at Ackerman Institute for the Family in New York, from the seemingly small — whether to go grocery shopping — to the fraught calculus of which family members should isolate together.

"This pandemic is making us all think about our relationships, because you really cannot do one thing without it impacting somebody else," says Lewis, who's been conducting therapy sessions remotely. "It's such a powerful example of how interconnected we all are."

Added to that, Lewis notes, is the utter helplessness of having no idea how long the situation will last.

She does see some couples finding "that they have a wild capacity to be resilient, to just find a way to move through the day." On the negative side, it's clear that people are generally not at their best when under deep stress.

"Normal patterns are intensified," she says. "There's increased annoyance, people snapping."

Alcohol can become a more frequent coping mechanism. Or worse.

"I'm worried about couples where there is intense aggression," she says. In cases where there was already domestic abuse, advocates fear a dangerous escalation.

Jennifer Kouzi, a divorce lawyer and mediator, puts it bluntly: "We're seeing a lot more bad behavior."

She's been receiving calls from clients who had already been unhappy in their marriages or in the process of splitting, and are now feeling increasingly desperate. They feel helpless, too, because along with the enforced confinement, the legal process is mostly on hold. Courts are generally closed.

In many cases, there may be no ramifications for bad behavior. One parent, for example, has refused to turn over a child to the other in accordance with their agreement, citing the virus crisis, even though

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the other parent is taking every precaution. Police have refused to enforce the custody order and recommended the parent go to court, but it's unclear if judges will deem the case an emergency. In another case Kouzi is aware of involving a separated couple, one parent is allowing their kids to go see friends, "to be the fun parent, so the kids will want to stay there full-time instead of with the parent actually following recommendations and guidelines."

It's not all grim.

"Some parents have actually risen to the occasion and are communicating better than normal, rearranging schedules and increasing FaceTime access and doing what makes sense" for their kids, she says.

Kouzi, who practices in both New York and in Westchester County, one of its suburbs, is telling her clients to try to use the time productively or to consider mediation.

"There will be such a backlog when courts open up again," she says.

Some couples are experiencing only minor ripples, if any. Stephanie Pfeiffer, a business systems analyst in Boston, found herself annoyed with her husband when they went food shopping last week, and each time she put something into the cart — two pounds of butter, cans of tuna or tomato soup, a box of crackers — he questioned why.

"We're arguing over groceries," said Pfeiffer. "He accuses me of panicking and hoarding, but the reality is we NEED more groceries." After all, the couple is now working at home together.

In a minor adjustment, Pfeiffer recently moved her makeshift work station away from the kitchen table, where her husband works, into a corner of the dining room. "Now we cannot see each other," she quips. "As time stretches out, I'm optimistic we will get into a routine and settle in."

Some stay-at-home mothers say their husbands, now homebound, are finally seeing how much domestic work their spouses do. In New Jersey, Caren Tolleth, mother of a 5-year-old and a 9-month-old, finds that her workload has only increased with the addition of her husband to the routine.

"It's been like most days," she reported last week, "except that my husband is leaving dirty dishes and I get to clean up after him, too." She joked that her spouse had made the mistake of coming down at one point to chat, "and I handed him a baby to put down for a nap. He hasn't come down since!"

Adrienne Pattison, who lives in a rural area of Washington state, joined a Facebook group called "Parenting Under Quarantine" a week ago and wrote: "Is it just me or is anyone else totally frustrated with the husband/partner or whatever?? I'm about to go postal!" Her good-natured venting elicited more than 160 comments and anecdotes.

Maggie Hellman, the Bergenfield, New Jersey, mother who created the Facebook group for her friends to blow off their own steam — she never thought it would balloon to over 20,000 — notes that some couples are, of course, dealing with gravely serious challenges. Her brother, a pediatric intensive care physician, has to come home through a side door to discard dirty clothing and wash his hands to avoid infecting the family. His wife, a nurse, must be extremely careful as well.

Hellman, a social worker and stay-at-home mom, says it's natural that couples with children are feeling intense stress.

"Children create stress in a marriage, period," she says. "The relationship changes dramatically." Under current conditions, she says, "you're stuck at home all day with each other when perhaps there already were issues." She imagines that single parents have it even worse, especially if they have only one child.

"They get no break, they have no one else to be with," she says.

Lewis, the family therapist, says it's still early days. She hopes the couples she treats will find a way to deal with the anxiety and uncertainty in a useful way.

Some of her best advice to couples: "Let's try not to both have a bad day at the same time," she says. "If today's your bad day, mine is tomorrow. Let's not blow at the same time."

AP National Writer Jocelyn Noveck writes frequently about gender issues. Follow her on Twitter at @JocelynNoveckAP.

On NYC's front lines, health workers worry they will be next

By **BERNARD CONDON, JIM MUSTIAN and JENNIFER PELTZ** Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A nurse died from coronavirus after working nonstop for weeks at a hospital where staffers frustrated with dwindling supplies posed in gowns made of trash bags. An emergency room doctor fears he had the virus long before getting too sick to work. Another nurse worries the lone mask she's issued each day won't be enough to protect her from an unending tide of hacking, feverish patients.

At New York City-area hospitals on the front lines of the biggest coronavirus outbreak in the nation, workers are increasingly concerned about the ravages of the illness in their own ranks, and that the lack of testing and protective gear is making it not a matter of if they get it, but when.

"Our emergency room was like a petri dish," said Benny Mathew, a nurse at Montefiore Medical Center who got word Thursday that he had COVID-19 and is now worried he may infect his wife and two daughters.

"I'm angry. We could have secured enough personal protective equipment months ago. It was happening in China since December," he said. "But we thought it was never going to happen here."

Some hospitals have had so many dying patients that the city brought in refrigerated truck trailers for bodies as a precaution. At Elmhurst Hospital in Queens, 13 people succumbed to the virus in one day. City ambulances have seen a surge in calls, responding to nearly 5,800 on Thursday alone.

Several doctors, nurses and paramedics told The Associated Press of deteriorating working conditions in emergency rooms and ICUs that make caretakers even more vulnerable. Sick patients are placed in beds packed end-to-end. Limited supplies of face masks, gowns and shields have them wearing the same protective equipment all day. A lack of available ventilators could soon put doctors and nurses in the agonizing position of prioritizing who gets them and who does not.

And perhaps most troubling, changes in official guidance that allow health care workers exposed to coronavirus to continue working, as long as they themselves are not showing symptoms. Some health care workers say they're being told they can keep working even if they've tested positive for the disease, known as COVID-19, as long as they're asymptomatic.

"We just have to hope we don't get infected," said William da Silva, a nurse at St. Vincent's Hospital in suburban Westchester. "People are going back to work with COVID-19, and they're going to infect the patients and each other."

Da Silva is certain he's been infected, but he said he's been getting the run around from officials all week as he seeks to get tested. Self-quarantined with his pregnant wife and toddler, he's so disillusioned by how he's been treated that he may not go back.

"I've put them all at risk," Da Silva said of his family. "I don't think I want to go back to that environment after this because apparently we don't matter. I can't continue working in hospitals after this."

While the city has meticulously tracked the toll of its outbreak — reporting 21,873 infections, 281 deaths and at least 3,900 hospitalized as of Thursday — officials say they do not have numbers on how many health care workers are sick or dying.

Hospital operator Northwell Health said 155 of its 72,000 employees have tested positive for coronavirus. The New York State Nurses Association said at least 67 nurses had been infected. The union for the city's EMS workers said more than 50 had tested positive and more than 400 are showing symptoms. One of them, paramedic Christell Cadet, is in critical condition in a Brooklyn ICU.

It's been a common theme as the virus has spread around the world.

In China, where the outbreak started, over 3,000 medical workers are believed to have been among the more than 80,000 people infected. Health care workers account for about one-tenth of the more than 74,000 infections in Italy, and roughly one-eighth of the 47,600 cases in Spain.

In New York City, at least one health care worker has been killed by coronavirus.

Mount Sinai West emergency room nurse Kious Kelly, 36, died Tuesday after a 10-day bout with the disease. He worked at the same hospital where three nurses, frustrated at the scarcity of supplies, posted pictures of themselves on social media wearing makeshift garbage bag protective gowns, an image splashed on Thursday's New York Post cover with the headline: "TREATED LIKE TRASH."

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A nurse who worked with Kelly for eight years fell ill at the same time. Emailing the AP from her sick bed, she said Kelly had worked as a supervisor for weeks without a break since the coronavirus started taking hold in New York. She shared her thoughts on condition of anonymity because she said hospital policy threatens employees with termination for speaking to the media.

"He was helping nurses on the floor, pushing beds, transferring patients," said the nurse. "A couple weeks before his death we were talking about his future plans and he was telling me that he would go back to school. I am devastated about his death and cannot stop crying."

In a statement Thursday, Mount Sinai Health System denied that the nurses depicted in trash bags were actually using them as protective gear since the real gear could be seen beneath the bags. "This crisis is straining the resources of all New York area hospitals and while we do – and have had – enough protective equipment for our staff, we will all need more in the weeks ahead," it said.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo acknowledges the ranks of health care workers are thinning while also claiming "no hospital, no nurse, no doctor can say legitimately, 'I don't have protective equipment.'"

Medical specialists from other areas have been redeployed to emergency rooms and ICUs, and a volunteer force of 40,000 retired doctors, nurses, therapists and technicians will soon answer the call for reinforcements.

Montefiore emergency room nurse Judy Sheridan said personal protective equipment are "clearly not being made available in any meaningful way to front line caregivers" and reusing masks will only make them susceptible to contamination.

"This is like telling a person, 'Here are three piece of toilet paper -- make that last for a week!'" said Sheridan, who is also president of the State Nurses Association.

Barbara Rosen, a registered nurse in New Jersey for more than four decades and a vice president of the Health Professionals and Allied Employees union, said members are "scared to death."

"You're being torn between going out and doing your duty, what you were born to do, which is to take care of sick patients, and getting sick yourself and bringing it home to your family," she said.

While coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms in most people, older people and those with existing health problems could have a more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

Rosen said her union has also heard from nurses using garbage bags to protect their clothing and receiving expired masks that could have decomposed elastic bands, compromising safety. She called the lack of resources "unheard of in the medical profession. It's like going into a three-alarm fire with a water pistol."

Mayor Bill de Blasio vowed Thursday to get health care workers the supplies they need: "One way or another, we're going to get them to you every day," he said, adding that the city has enough supplies for this week, at least.

In another effort to bolster the ranks of health care workers, the state is taking up an offer from New York University's medical school to allow students who completed their final year of training to become doctors immediately and help in the city's hospitals.

For Evan Gerber, among about 60 NYU fourth-year medical students who have accepted the battlefield promotion, the furor over personal protective equipment is indeed weighing on his mind.

"Of course I'm a little bit nervous to jump into this ... anybody would be," said the 26-year-old from the Phoenix area. "It's definitely one of the risks that you take when you enter medicine. One of the big things that's driving fear here is the unknown."

Michael R. Sisak and Larry Neumeister in New York, and David Porter in Newark, New Jersey, contributed to this report.

Not all or nothing: Anti-virus lockdowns could lift slowly

By **CHRISTINA LARSON** and **RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For the millions of Americans living under some form of lockdown to curb the spread of the coronavirus, not knowing when the restrictions will end is a major source of anxiety. Will

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life events — weddings, funerals, even just simple nights out with friends — be delayed for a few weeks, a few months or much longer?

President Donald Trump gave one answer this week, saying he hoped businesses would reopen by Easter, on April 12, citing the severe damage restrictions have done to the economy. Most public health experts, however, caution that it would be reckless to lift restrictions before COVID-19 infections have peaked and begun to ebb — unleashing a second wave of cases that could be just as damaging to the economy.

Scientists are reluctant to predict exactly when restrictions could be safely loosened, but based on what they've observed in China — the first country struck by the new virus — some relief could come approximately six to eight weeks after lockdowns are implemented. That is based on the assumption that cases could peak two or three weeks after lockdowns begin, and gradually decline for the next two or three weeks.

While we may yearn for a clear timeline for when life will return to normal, scientists say that isn't exactly the right question. Routines won't resume exactly as they were for several months, or longer — but that doesn't mean we'll all be stuck in total lockdowns until then.

"We can't simply wait inside for two years for a COVID-19 vaccine" to be developed, said Stephen Morse, a disease researcher at Columbia University. "We have to find some way to return to normal life."

Decisions on how and when to lift restrictions, he added, should be based on information about infection rates that can only be learned by increasing testing. That will allow policymakers to tailor restrictions to fit the outbreak in different areas.

Rather than imagining the lockdown as having an on/off switch — where the only choice is between completely shutting down the country or throwing all rules out the window — many scientists advocate for charting a course in between, where restrictions can be ramped up or down. Imagine that the lockdown has a volume dial that can be twisted up or down.

"With more information, we can target our responses to be the most impactful," said Nadia Abuelezam, a disease researcher at Boston College. That might mean introducing people back into the workforce in stages, she suggested.

Scientists are closely watching what happens in other countries that were struck earlier by the coronavirus to see what happens when those places loosen restrictions.

Restaurants and offices have begun to reopen in many Chinese cities, about two months after the country began to lock down. There are still restrictions in place — such as limits in how many people can occupy an elevator or a conference room — and widespread testing for the disease continues.

A second outbreak could prompt future clampdowns.

"People should be prepared for the fact that we are not going back to completely normal life for a while," said Mark Jit, a disease researcher at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. "But we also need to allow people to see the light at end of the tunnel."

The metaphorical dial of restrictions could be set in different positions, depending on what expanded testing reveals about how many people in an area are currently infected — and how many have recovered from past infections.

The goal would be to allow people to partially return to their daily routines, while limiting the chances of new infections.

The new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms in many people, but even if only a fraction of cases are severe enough to require hospitalization — between 14% and 20% — the sheer scale of the epidemic puts enormous strain on hospitals, health care workers and other patients who may see unrelated procedures delayed.

On Thursday came a grim milestone and reminder that the United States has not begun to flatten the curve of the epidemic: The total number of confirmed infections — more than 83,000, according to Johns Hopkins University — surpassed China's toll.

The White House is now considering a data-driven approach.

In a letter Thursday to America's governors — who have largely been the ones implementing the restrictions in the U.S. — Trump said that his administration was planning to expand "robust surveillance testing,

which allows us to monitor the spread of the virus throughout the country.”

The information would be used to “suggest guidelines categorizing counties as high-risk, medium-risk, or low-risk,” the letter said.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government’s top infectious disease expert, and White House adviser Dr. Deborah Birx have recently outlined the approach in media briefings and interviews.

“What we are trying to do is utilize a laser-focused approach,” Birx said at Thursday’s White House briefing.

While few details are available, this approach seems to differ from other countries that have focused on identifying and isolating infected individuals and their close contacts.

In South Korea, which managed to curb an early outbreak without fully shutting all businesses and schools, widespread testing allows health workers to find infected people and aggressively track down people they came into contact with — thus allowing them to contain the spread of infection.

For the U.S. to learn from this example or adopt a similar approach, the first step is more widespread testing, said Elizabeth Halloran, a biostatistician at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle.

In addition to tests that check whether people are currently infected, experts are also honing tests to detect whether someone has had the disease in the past. Scientists expect that people who have recovered from COVID-19 will have some immunity to it, though they aren’t sure for how long.

This information could better inform decisions. Perhaps people with immunity could be among the first to return to work — or maybe the data would reveal what locations or behaviors are the riskiest for disease spread, said Abuelezam.

Before relaxing social-distancing restrictions, there will also need to be ample supply of protective gear for health care workers, said Halloran. Shortages of masks and other supplies have put them in jeopardy and threatened to slow or halt their work.

There are no easy answers, but scientists say it’s misleading to imagine a choice between public health and jobs.

“If you don’t do enough about the virus, you’re going to get steamrolled by it — which would also steamroll the economy,” said Jeffrey Shaman, a data scientist at Columbia University.

Follow Christina Larson on Twitter: twitter.com/larsonchristina

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Coronavirus cases hit 2 largest US cities differently

By **BRIAN MELLEY** Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Los Angeles recorded its first case of coronavirus five weeks before New York City, yet it’s New York that is now the U.S. epicenter of the disease.

Public health officials are keeping a wary eye and warning that LA could end up being as hard hit as New York in coming weeks, in part because a planned increase in testing may uncover a dramatic surge in cases. Testing in Los Angeles County is expected to increase from 500 per day to 5,000 by the end of the week.

“I would love to be able to say with all certainty that’s where we’re not going,” Los Angeles Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer said when asked about New York’s numbers. “We would be foolish not to prepare for a similar scenario here in LA County.”

In both cities, schools have been canceled, many businesses shuttered and employees who can have been ordered to work from home. New York City, with roughly 8.5 million residents, had nearly 22,000 cases and 281 deaths as of Thursday, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. Los Angeles County,

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which contains its namesake city of 4 million people plus an additional 6 million residents, had just over 1,200 cases and 21 deaths.

Health experts don't know why there is such a big difference in the number of cases, but believe several things could be at play, such as urban density, differences in the use of mass transportation and slightly earlier moves by authorities to enact social distancing policies. A difference in the speed and amount of tests could also be factors, as officials warn that many people who get COVID-19 don't necessarily have symptoms.

The virus is spread in tiny droplets from coughs and sneezes. Most people who get it experience mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For others, in particular older adults or people with other large health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

While a shortage of tests in California during the early weeks of the crisis is one reason for a much lower number of cases, it doesn't alone explain the difference. New York has tested about three times as many patients, but it has 10 times as many cases as all of California.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced New York's first case March 1. The first person reported in Los Angeles, California's second case, was announced Jan. 26.

To date, there have been 385 deaths in New York state, more than four times the 81 in California.

"The death rate from COVID-19 in California is doubling every three days, which is lower than the New York death rate of doubling every two days," said Dr. Jennifer Prah Ruger, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania medical school. "It is hard to know with certainty the exact causal mechanisms at this stage in the epidemic."

Factors that could explain the differences in the outbreak between New York City and LA speak to the differences in the way people live on opposite coasts.

In New York, residents live in large multi-unit buildings, many with small elevators and tight hallways. City sidewalks are choked with walkers and commuters who flow in and out of the city's robust subway system.

"New York City is a more densely packed community than what we see in California, even in Los Angeles, which is much more spread out," said Robert Kim-Farley, a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles Fielding School of Public Health. "The mixing, if you will, of population is much greater there."

Still, Kim-Farley warned that with a simultaneous rise in cases and testing, "we're going to start seeing just tremendous increases," in the next two weeks in LA.

Indeed, on Thursday confirmed cases in LA jumped from about 800 to 1,200, which health officials attributed to the availability of kits.

"This represents a huge jump, my friends: an increase of more than 50% in a single day of confirmed cases," said Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti. "Even more disturbingly, we see that if this rate of increase continues (in the county), in six days we will be where New York is today, the same number of cases per capita as they are struggling through."

New York's public transportation system carries 8 million passengers a day, about eight times the ridership on Los Angeles public transit. Commuters in Los Angeles are far more likely to travel alone by car on one of the many freeways that crisscross a county 10 times the size of New York City.

Professor James Moore II, director of the transportation engineering department at the University of Southern California, said he stopped riding the light rail to campus as the outbreak started spreading. He bought a parking permit and began to drive, a social distancing luxury not everyone can afford, particularly in New York City where car ownership is scarcer.

"It stands to reason ... if you pack small areas and you're dealing with a disease that is more contagious than the flu but less contagious than the measles, somewhere in there you're probably going to come away with a lot of cases," Moore said. "The fact that we rely fairly heavily on automobiles in Southern California and California in general is sort of a lucky break in the crisis for us."

Another element that could have slowed the spread in California was earlier action to force social distancing.

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On March 19, Garcetti, LA's mayor, shut down schools, restaurants and ordered all but essential employees to work from home and Gov. Gavin Newsom issued the nation's first statewide stay-at-home directive that evening. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo followed suit the next day.

It will take time to tell whether those measures were effective because of the virus's two-week incubation period.

"We can hope it was social distancing that has limited the cases in California, but there are just too many factors that play into spread of the virus to be sure," said Dr. Catherine Troisi, an epidemiologist at University of Texas, Houston.

"If we were to go on lockdown where nobody saw anybody else for 28 days — two times the incubation period — we are pretty sure we can stop the spread of the virus," she said. "But, that's not very reasonable, economically or socially."

Associated Press reporter Martha Mendoza in Santa Cruz, California, contributed to this story.

Are gun shops 'essential' businesses during a pandemic?

By LISA MARIE PANE and JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

In some parts of the U.S., authorities say gun shops aren't essential businesses and should close during stay-at-home orders meant to slow the coronavirus. In other places, officials are stopping background checks for concealed carry permits. Elsewhere, city leaders have invoked emergency powers allowing bans on gun sales.

As the nation grapples with a pandemic that has upended daily life, some gun rights advocates are concerned about an erosion of Second Amendment rights just as Americans are buying firearms in record numbers to try to ensure their safety.

"When there's a national emergency, people are looking for food, water, shelter — that part is important to the survival of our nation," said Michael Cargill, owner of Central Texas Gun Works in Austin. "They are also looking for the Second Amendment to protect their families."

He's scaled back how long he's open each day but said he won't close his shop and doesn't believe he should be forced to.

In recent weeks, firearm sales have skyrocketed. Background checks — the key barometer of gun sales — already were at record numbers in January and February, likely fueled by a presidential election year. Since the coronavirus outbreak, gun shops have reported long lines and runs on firearms and ammunition.

Background checks were up 300 percent on March 16 compared with the same date a year ago, according to federal data shared with the National Shooting Sports Foundation, which represents gunmakers. Since Feb. 23, each day has seen roughly double the volume over 2019, according to Mark Oliva, spokesman for the group.

"When people aren't able to provide for their own security or their own safety, they're going to take measures to make sure that they can. That's why we have that Second Amendment," Oliva said. "This is a public safety issue."

The federal background check system has been overwhelmed by the massive increase in firearm sales. What might normally take a few minutes is taking much longer, and a backlog on background checks has ballooned to about 80,000, Oliva said.

If a background check takes longer than three business days, gun dealers are permitted to allow the sale to go through unless a state has stricter waiting periods. But the National Shooting Sports Foundation has advised gun dealers not to feel beholden to complete the sale if they have concerns about the potential buyer.

"We are cautioning retailers that they may want to exercise patience and prudence," Oliva said.

Even some gun control advocates say it might not be wise to shut down federally licensed firearms dealers, whose sales require background checks. That could force buyers to use a website or seek a private sale that doesn't require a check, making it more difficult to trace a firearm if it's used in a crime.

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There are risks to both closing a gun shop or keeping it open, said David Chipman, a retired agent with the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

"If you keep it open, there's the risk of first-time buyers who are largely buying out of fear and panic and untrained," said Chipman, now senior policy adviser for Giffords, a gun control advocacy group.

Gun control advocates are concerned about a large number of new owners lacking the usual access to training on how to store and handle their weapon properly. They also worry that Americans who are stocking up now eventually will sell their firearms privately.

"If we can imagine how horrible this crisis is ... the people who hoarded the guns might decide six months from now — once they see no zombies around but they've run out of tuna and beef jerky — that they need the money to buy food," Chipman said.

In a number of U.S. cities, including New Orleans, the mayor has issued an emergency proclamation that declares the authority to restrict sales of firearms and ammunition.

In some states that have ordered people to stay home, gun stores were not among the businesses deemed essential and allowed to stay open, like grocery stores.

That has led to confusion in California, where for the second time this week, Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva ordered gun shops to close, challenging a finding by the legal counsel for the nation's most populous county that the stores are essential businesses.

David Prince, owner of Eagle Gun Range in Farmers Branch, Texas, near Dallas, had to temporarily close his store under Dallas County's stay-at-home order, then was allowed to reopen Wednesday when gun stores were reclassified as essential.

Prince said gun stores are critical because they give people the chance to defend themselves.

"I always knew people were going to want to protect themselves. What I was concerned about was the look in their faces, they are covered in fear," Prince said. "If I give them the ability to have a firearm, it gives them a fighting chance to defend their family."

The range that is part of his store is considered nonessential and has been forced to close, meaning new gun buyers can't use it to train on how to handle their firearm.

Pane reported from Boise, Idaho. Vertuno reported from Austin, Texas.

A New York doctor's story: 'Too many people are dying alone'

By ROBERT BUMSTED and DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — As an emergency medicine physician in New York City, Dr. Kamini Doobay has always known that death is part of the territory when trying to care for the city's sickest.

But it hasn't always been like this — patients hit the hardest by the coronavirus, struggling to breathe and on ventilators, with no visitors allowed because of strict protocols to prevent spreading the virus.

"So often a patient will be on their deathbed, dying alone, and it's been incredibly painful to see the suffering of family members who I call from the ICU, hearing the tears, crying with them on the phone," said Doobay, 31.

"Too many people are dying alone with absolutely no family around them," she said. "This is one of the most horrific things."

A third-year resident, Doobay, who works at New York University Langone Medical Center and Bellevue Hospital, said being among the doctors and other health care workers trying desperately to deal with the wave of sick and dying patients coming into city hospitals is "unlike anything I've ever experienced, it's very chaotic, it's overwhelming."

"I've never felt so physically and emotionally burdened in my life, I've never felt so deeply sad and distraught," the New York City native said.

While the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms in most people, it can lead to more severe illnesses, including pneumonia and death for some, like those who are older or have underlying health issues.

The impact it's had on the city's hospitals also has health care providers like Doobay worried about

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their own exposure, and wanting officials in charge to do everything possible to get hospital workers the protective equipment they need to protect their own health.

"We did not go into this field thinking we're going to be martyrs," she said. "This is a serious crisis that we're in and we deserve to be protected. We're not in a battlefield. We're not in a war zone."

And she worries about the kinds of choices all doctors could be faced with: Who should get what kind of help if the number of cases and hospitalizations continues to increase past the point where there is enough equipment, like ventilators, to meet the extreme patient need?

"Who does that ventilator belong to? These are questions that, you know, I think about when I go home at night and fortunately, haven't had to make those decisions yet," she said. "But we're getting there."

She hoped the general public would listen to the experts and do all they can to limit the virus's spread through self-quarantining and similar measures.

"It's really painful to see someone die. It's really painful to not know what the future holds. And we're really working hard to protect you," Doobay said. "So I hope that we can all join in solidarity to protect each other."

Hajela reported from New Jersey.

Follow AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>.

A defiant Maduro threatens 'cowboy' Trump after drug charge

By JOSHUA GOODMAN and SCOTT SMITH Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro stood defiant in the face of a \$15 million bounty by the U.S. to face drug trafficking charges, calling Donald Trump a "racist cowboy" and warning that he is ready to fight by whatever means necessary should the U.S. and neighboring Colombia dare to invade.

Maduro's bellicose remarks Thursday night came hours after the U.S. announced sweeping indictments against the socialist leader and several members of his inner circle for allegedly converting Venezuela into a criminal enterprise at the service of drug traffickers and terrorist groups.

One indictment by prosecutors in New York accused Maduro and socialist party boss Diosdado Cabello, head of the rubber-stamp constitutional assembly, of conspiring with Colombian rebels and members of the military "to flood the United States with cocaine" and use the drug trade as a "weapon against America."

Maduro, a former bus driver who fashions himself an everyman icon of the Latin American left, said the charges were politically motivated. He said they ignore U.S. ally Colombia's role as the main source of the world's cocaine and his own role in facilitating peace talks between Colombia's government and that country's rebels over the past decade.

"Donald Trump, you are a miserable human being," Maduro railed during his televised address. "You manage international relations like a New York mafia extortion artist you once were as a real estate boss."

What was some of Maduro's most venomous rhetoric ever against Trump also came with a threat of military force: "If one day the imperialists and Colombian oligarchy dare to touch even a single hair, they will face the Bolivarian fury of an entire nation that will wipe them all out."

Earlier, Venezuela's chief prosecutor opened an investigation against opposition leader Juan Guaidó for allegedly plotting a coup with retired army Gen. Cliver Alcalá, who after being named in the U.S. indictments said he had stockpiled assault weapons in Colombia for a cross-border incursion. Without offering evidence, Maduro said the Drug Enforcement Administration was behind a plan by Alcalá to assassinate him and other political leaders.

The indictment of a functioning head of state is highly unusual and is bound to ratchet up tensions with Washington as the spread of the coronavirus threatens to collapse Venezuela's shortage-plagued health system. Maduro has ordered Venezuelans to stay home in an effort to curb the spread of the virus, which officials say has infected 107 people and claimed its first death Thursday.

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Criminal acts to advance a drug and weapons conspiracy that dates back to the start of Hugo Chavez's revolution in 1999 occurred as far afield as Syria, Mexico, Honduras and Iran, the indictment alleges. Attorney General William Barr estimated the conspiracy helped smuggle as much as 250 metric tons of cocaine a year out of South America.

"The Maduro regime is awash in corruption and criminality," Barr said in an online news conference from Washington. "While the Venezuelan people suffer, this cabal lines their pockets with drug money, and the proceeds of their corruption. And this has to come to an end."

The coordinated unsealing of indictments against 14 officials and government-connected individuals, along with the announcement of rewards of \$55 million against Maduro and four others, attacked all the key planks of what Barr called the "corrupt Venezuelan regime," including the Maduro-dominated judiciary and the powerful armed forces.

In Miami, prosecutors charged Supreme Court Chief Justice Maikel Moreno with laundering in the U.S. at least \$3 million in illegal proceeds from case fixing in Venezuela, including one involving a General Motors factory. Much of the money he spent on private aircraft, luxury watches and shopping at Prada, prosecutors allege.

Maduro's defense minister, Gen. Vladimir Padrino, was charged with conspiracy to smuggle narcotics in a May 2019 indictment unsealed in Washington.

"This announcement is a major blow for Maduro who has been running Venezuela like a mafia state, with rampant corruption and widespread atrocities, and absolute impunity," said Jose Miguel Vivanco, the Americas director of Human Rights Watch. "With this indictment he may now lose his aura of invincibility, of being completely above the law, which is very welcome news."

But it's unclear how it brings Venezuela any closer to ending a 15-month standoff between Maduro, who has the support of Russia and China, and the U.S.-backed Guaidó. It also could fragment the U.S.-led coalition against Maduro if European and Latin American allies think the Trump administration is overreaching. An estimated 5 million Venezuelans have left the country in recent years, fleeing hyperinflation and widespread food and medicine shortages.

"It's an incredibly dangerous gamble to redouble the offensive against Maduro's regime when the priority must be to shore up the country's collapsing health system and prevent an even worse migrant exodus," said Ivan Briscoe, the Latin America director for the Crisis Group. "These U.S. charges could spell doom for any thaw, expose Guaidó to grave risks, and appear high-handedly indifferent to the immediate suffering of Venezuela's people."

Maduro has long accused the U.S. "empire" of looking for any excuse to take control of the world's largest oil reserves, likening its plotting to the 1989 invasion of Panama and the removal of strongman Gen. Manuel Noriega to face drug trafficking charges in Florida.

Barr and Elliott Abrams, the State Department's special envoy on Venezuela, are driving the hawkish U.S. stance toward Maduro, much as they pushed for Noriega's ouster in the late 1980s — Barr as a senior Justice Department official and Abrams as assistant secretary of state for Latin America.

U.S. officials see other parallels as well. Noriega transformed Panama into a playground for violent, international drug cartels, and the Trump administration has accused Maduro and his military henchmen of harboring drug traffickers, guerrillas from Colombia and even Hezbollah, a designated terrorist group.

They also have accused government officials together with well-connected businessmen of stealing hundreds of billions of dollars from the state coffers, much of it from state oil giant PDVSA, which has seen its production plunge to a seven-decade low.

Still, charging Maduro was no easy task. Sitting foreign leaders normally enjoy immunity from prosecution under U.S. law and international norms.

But the U.S. is among 60 countries that no longer consider Maduro a head of state even if he does hold de facto power. They instead recognize Guaidó, the head of the congress, as Venezuela's rightful leader following the socialist's re-election in a 2018 race marred by allegations of fraud and an opposition boycott.

The evidence against Maduro was collected over several years by investigators in Miami, New York,

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Houston and Washington who have brought drug trafficking, foreign bribery and money-laundering charges against several senior Venezuelan officials, members of the military and government-connected businessmen.

To the surprise of many, Maduro has stubbornly clung to power. The Trump administration raised the ante last fall, withdrawing support for a Norway-sponsored mediation effort and extending sanctions so that even foreign companies faced retaliation for extending Maduro a lifeline.

Separately, Barr prioritized investigations into Maduro's inner circle, according to two people who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal Justice Department deliberations.

The pressure to deliver, the people said, went into overdrive around the time Guaidó visited Washington in February and Trump praised him as his guest at the State of the Union address, calling him "a very brave man, who carries with him the hopes, dreams and aspirations of all Venezuelans."

Frank Mora, a former Pentagon official, said the U.S. is right to condemn Maduro and others for repressing his people, stealing from state coffers and turning Venezuela into a criminal state.

But he worries the indictments play more into the emotion of voters in Florida — a must-win state for Trump where Venezuelans, Cubans and Nicaraguans fleeing authoritarian governments have political muscle — than help address the country's grinding crisis.

"We're not going to go in and capture him," said Mora, who now heads the Latin America studies institute at Florida International University. "This isn't about regime change or restoring democracy to Venezuela. It's about electoral politics."

Associated Press writer Joshua Goodman reported this story in Miami and AP writer Scott Smith reported from Caracas, Venezuela. AP writers Jim Mustian in New York and Michael Balsamo and Matthew Lee in Washington contributed to this report.

NY wants the nation's breathing machines, but supply is low

By BRADY McCOMBS and TOM KRISHER Associated Press

New York's scramble to find enough breathing machines to treat its rapidly expanding legion of coronavirus patients illustrates a problem vexing hospitals and governments worldwide.

In his nationally televised briefings this week, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has made desperate pleas to other states and the federal government to send breathing machines that the state will return when demand slows down.

Cuomo's plea has proven to be a tough sell. For one, the devices are already in short supply nationally. And medical professionals and officials in other states are expecting to be inundated with coronavirus cases themselves relatively soon. They aren't easy to quickly manufacture either, despite efforts underway by several major companies.

The machines also known as ventilators are necessary for severely ill patients, and there aren't enough to meet the projected needs as the virus spreads.

Compounding the problem is the fact that doctors say coronavirus patients often need ventilators for weeks, if not longer — slowing the hand-off from one patient to the next. It's the same problem that China and Italy have also faced with no easy solution.

Cuomo said this week his state has 4,000 ventilators and has purchased another 7,000. The U.S. government has pledged to send New York another 4,400 ventilators. That's still far short of the 30,000 ventilators that Cuomo said the state will need if the crisis reaches its expected breaking point in New York, which has emerged as a virus hotspot.

In an interview Thursday night with Fox News Channel's Sean Hannity, President Donald Trump dismissed Cuomo's estimates.

"I don't believe you need 40,000 or 30,000 ventilators," Trump said.

In the meantime, New York is converting a couple thousand anesthesia machines they have into makeshift ventilators and adding a second set of tubes to some ventilators so each one can be used for a two

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patients.

"It's not ideal, but we believe it's workable," Cuomo said.

The American Society of Anesthesiologists disagreed, saying in a statement that sharing a breathing machine for two people is dangerous and could prevent both patients from benefiting because "ventilation needs to be individually tailored and monitored continuously." The group did back New York's use of anesthesia machines.

At present, U.S. hospitals have roughly 65,000 ventilators that are fully capable of treating severe coronavirus patients. But they could cobble together about 170,000, including some simpler versions that won't work in all cases, said Dr. Lewis Rubinson, chief medical officer at Morristown Medical Center in New Jersey and lead author of a 2010 medical journal article on the matter.

In a February presentation for other medical professionals, Dr. James Lawler, an associate professor and infectious disease specialist at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, estimated that 960,000 people in the U.S. will need to be on ventilators.

Rubinson said it's unlikely the U.S. would need that many ventilators at the same time, estimating it will need more like 300,000 fairly quickly. If social distancing works, people will catch the virus at different times, allowing hospitals to use ventilators multiple times.

"This is the whole reason why everyone talks about flattening the curve," he said.

He estimates there are seven or eight ventilator makers in the world, and together they can crank out several thousand per month, far short of global demand.

In the most severe cases, the coronavirus damages healthy tissue in the lungs, making it hard for them to deliver oxygen to the blood. Pneumonia can develop, along with a more severe and potentially deadly condition called acute respiratory distress syndrome, which can damage other organs.

Ventilators feed oxygen into the lungs of patients with severe respiratory problems through a tube inserted down the throat. The machines are also used routinely to help other hospital patients breathe, namely those undergoing surgery while under general anesthesia.

In China, where the virus first emerged, factories worked nonstop for about a month to try and produce ventilators but were initially held back by shortages of raw materials, according to Chinese media reports. They received the needed materials through donations, fundraising drives and charities. Some ventilators were purchased overseas. Finally on March 4, after at least 15,000 had been delivered to the province of Hubei, where the outbreak was concentrated, government officials declared there were enough to meet the province's basic needs.

Several companies around the world are trying to make the breathing machines, but it takes time.

At Dyson, the British company best known for making vacuums, a team of engineers has been working on a design for the last 10 days since receiving a request for help from Britain Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Billionaire inventor James Dyson told his staff the device would draw on technology used in the company's air purifier ranges and is powered by a digital motor. Britain wants to increase the availability of ventilators from 8,000 to 30,000.

U.S. automakers General Motors and Ford, teaming with ventilator makers, have hundreds of people working almost around the clock trying to make more of the life-saving devices. GM plans to start building test versions in early April, eventually making 20,000 per month.

Ford CEO Jim Hackett said this week that by mid-May, Ford should be manufacturing a ventilator with GE Health Care. He said all companies that make ventilators in the U.S. and Europe could be producing at a rate of 900,000 per year by June.

Experts say no matter how many they make, the number probably won't be enough to cover the entire need, and it may not come in time to help New York or other areas now being hit hard with critical virus cases.

General Motors is gearing up to make ventilators at an electronics plant in Kokomo, Indiana, but it hasn't given definitive numbers or a date to start production.

Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk has said on Twitter he's talking with ventilator maker Medtronic about

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manufacturing the devices, but company spokesmen didn't return messages seeking details.

Even if automakers and others start producing in May or June, any ventilators they make still will save multiple lives because they can be used to help two or more people, said Dr. Jack Iwashyna, a professor of internal medicine at the University of Michigan.

"The fact that you can't save everybody doesn't mean you shouldn't save some," he said.

AP researcher Yu Bing in Beijing, and Marina Villeneuve in Albany, New York, contributed to this report. McCombs reported from Salt Lake City and Krisher from Detroit.

Trump's push to open economy could come at cost of lives

By AAMER MADHANI, LAURIE KELLMAN and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The contrast could hardly be more stark. Gov. Andrew Cuomo of New York has said that if all of his sweeping, expensive measures to stem the coronavirus saved one life, it would be worth it. President Donald Trump has another view: The costs of shutting down the economy outweigh the benefits, frequently telling Americans that 35,000 people a year die from the common flu.

Though it may seem crass, the federal government actually has long made a calculation when imposing regulations, called "the value of a statistical life," that places a price tag on a human life. It has been used to consider whether to require seat belts, airbags or environmental regulations, but it has never been applied in a broad public health context.

The question is now an urgent one given that Trump in recent days has latched on to the notion that the cure for the pandemic should not be worse than the disease and argued that "more people are going to die if we allow this to continue" if the economy remains closed. He has targeted a return to a semblance of normalcy for the economy by Easter Sunday, April 12.

Critics say he's presenting the nation with a false choice at a moment when deaths and infections from the virus are surging.

"We're not going to accept a premise that human life is disposable," said Cuomo, whose state has seen far more infections and deaths from COVID-19 than any other state. "And we're not going to put a dollar figure on human life."

For decades, the federal government has made calculations on how policies intended to safeguard American health could impact the economy. Since the Reagan administration, federal agencies have been required to perform analysis of any proposed regulations that are expected to have \$100 million or more impact on the economy.

The Environmental Protection Agency, for example, assesses the benefits to people and the environment from cutting back on a harmful pollutant, but often tries to total up the costs of controlling the toxin as well. The Transportation Department estimates the additional cost that consumers would be willing to bear for improvements in safety at \$9.6 million.

Now, the push-pull of when to re-open the economy during the coronavirus crisis centers on a similarly bleak question: What's an economically acceptable death toll? Putting dollar figures on the value of life and health is inherently uncomfortable, one expert said.

"People hate that question," said Betsey Stevenson, an economics and public policy professor at the University of Michigan who served on the White House's Council of Economic Advisers during the Obama administration. "By laying out the math in such a crude way, people cringe when they see it."

Days into his own call for Americans to dedicate themselves for 15 days to social distancing, including staying home from work and closing bars and restaurants to help try to stall the spread of the disease, Trump has changed his tune.

Trump has grumbled that "our country wasn't built to be shut down" and vowed not to allow "the cure be worse than the problem."

"The LameStream Media is the dominant force in trying to get me to keep our Country closed as long as possible in the hope that it will be detrimental to my election success," Trump tweeted Wednesday. "The

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real people want to get back to work ASAP. We will be stronger than ever before!"

He also pushed back against suggestions that he is being cavalier about the prospect of more deaths being caused by a premature reopening of the economy. "How many deaths are acceptable to me?" Trump told reporters Wednesday evening. "None."

But Democrats say that Trump was prioritizing the economy over the health and safety of Americans.

"I'd like to say, let's get back to work next Friday," said former Vice President Joe Biden, the front-runner for the Democratic presidential nomination. "That'd be wonderful. But it can't be arbitrary."

Trump certainly has his defenders. Fox News commentator Britt Hume has called it an "entirely reasonable viewpoint" that older Americans would be willing to sacrifice for the good of the economy, and Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick has said he's "all in" on lifting social distancing guidelines in order to help the economy.

Mike Leavitt, a Health and Human Services secretary in the George W. Bush administration, said the battle against the virus is shaping into a "supremely local fight" and communities may need to periodically adjust as the crisis unfolds.

"Each jurisdiction may not come to the same conclusion — because each jurisdiction may have different situations about shopping and businesses reopening," Leavitt said in an email.

In the recent past, the government has also put a dollar figure on American life in the aftermath of man-made calamities, including the 9/11 attacks and the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, which killed 11 and devastated the regional economy, to compensate victims.

Kenneth Feinberg, who administered the victims' funds stemming from those events, said the formula used in the nation's courts was a simple one: What would the victim have earned over the course of their life at work but for the tragedy that took their life? On top of that, there was some added compensation for pain and suffering and emotional distress, he said.

"It is a rather straightforward calculation," Feinberg said.

But when it comes to the current pandemic, Feinberg said calculating the impact is not so simple.

"When somebody says, 'You know the risk of the virus is not as great as the risks to everybody through a deteriorating economy,' that's a choice that everybody will have to make," Feinberg said.

In the case of the coronavirus crisis, some economists and policy experts say the pandemic continues to present too many unknowns to employ the sort of coldly calculated, cost-benefit analysis that's been used to evaluate the impact of policies such as federal highway and air quality rules.

"It doesn't help to save the economy if a tremendous number of people have died or fallen ill and their lives are changed forever," said Lisa Heinzerling, who grappled with regulatory impact on the economy as the head of EPA's policy office at the beginning of the Obama administration.

Northwestern University economists Martin Eichenbaum and Sergio Rebelo and German economist Mathias Trabandt said in a working paper published this week that optimal containment efforts would lead to deeper economic damage and that recession in the U.S. was inevitable. But the economists also projected that maintaining social-distancing measures before the U.S. hits its peak in infections "saves roughly half a million lives."

Stepping back from efforts to preserve human life in the midst of an event of this scale could also have enormous impact on the trust of institutions for generations to come, said David Ropeik, a former instructor of risk communication at the Harvard School of Public Health,

"The benefit of an all-out fight against a virus includes reassuring the public that the government is on their side. Backing off that fight reasonably questions whether the government we have created to protect us from things like this crisis will do so," said Ropeik, the author of the book "How Risky Is It, Really?"

"The loss of that to protect the economy is undermining that faith. How can you price that?" he asked.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death. The vast majority of people recover.

Madhani reported from Chicago.

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This story corrects the spelling of Brit Hume.

Half-million infected worldwide as economic toll rises

By COLLEEN LONG, DAVID RISING and EMILY SCHMALL Associated Press

The human and economic toll of the lockdowns against the coronavirus mounted Thursday as India struggled to feed the multitudes, Italy shut down most of its industry, and a record-shattering 3.3 million Americans applied for unemployment benefits in a single week. The U.S. surpassed official Chinese government numbers to become the country with most reported infections.

As the number of cases worldwide topped a half-million and deaths climbed past 24,000, the damage to people's livelihoods and their well-being from the effort to flatten the rising curve started to come into focus.

In India, where the country's 1.3 billion people were under orders to stay home, legions of poor were suddenly thrown out of work, and many families were left struggling for something to eat.

"Our first concern is food, not the virus," said Suresh Kumar, 60, a bicycle rickshaw rider in New Delhi whose family of six relies on his daily earnings of 300 rupees, or \$4. "I don't know how I will manage."

India has the world's second-highest number of people living in extreme poverty, with produce peddlers, maids and other low-wage workers living day to day. The government announced a 1.7 trillion rupee (\$22 billion) economic stimulus package to deliver monthly rations of grain and lentils to 800 million people.

Around the globe, the death toll rose to about 8,200 in Italy, 4,300 in Spain and 1,700 in France, including a 16-year-old. The U.S. had about 1,300 deaths, about 400 of them in New York State, the worst hotspot in the nation. Most of those victims were in New York City, where hospitals are getting swamped.

A running count kept by Johns Hopkins University showed the United States now had the most reported cases of any country Thursday, with more than 85,000. Italy and China, the latter of which was the origin of the outbreak late last year, both had reported more than 80,000.

Louisiana was quickly becoming another smoldering hotspot. The number of new cases there jumped by more than 500 Thursday, for a total of over 2,300, with 86 deaths, including a 17-year-old, the health department said. The higher infection numbers reflected an increase in testing. New Orleans was gearing up for a possible overflow at hospitals, with plans to treat as many as 3,000 patients at the city's convention center.

From New York's Fifth Avenue and London's Piccadilly Circus to the boulevards of Paris and the streets of Rome and Madrid, restaurants, hotels, airlines, giant chains and small shops are all shuttered, and factories across both continents have ground to a halt, as cities, states and entire countries have ordered the closing of nonessential businesses and instructed people to stay home.

Companies in Europe are laying off workers at the fastest pace since 2009, according to surveys of business managers. And the U.S. is bleeding jobs as well: The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits last week was nearly five times the old record, set in 1982.

Dann Dykas, 37, of Portland, Oregon, was laid off from his job helping design and set up displays for trade shows.

"Everything is so surreal," he said. "I can't even get an interview for another job, and we now have to worry more about being careful and taking care of ourselves."

In Georgia, 33-year-old Ian Smith was let go from his job at a wine bar and is working "side hustles" and relying on the generosity of friends.

"On my worst days, it's hopelessness, and on some of my better days, it's 'What possibility can I create in all of this?'" he said. "I can't pretend that I always feel that, though."

In a rare positive sign, stocks rallied on Wall Street for the third straight day after an unprecedented \$2.2 trillion economic rescue package to help businesses, hospitals and ordinary Americans pull through the crisis won passage in the Senate. The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped more than 1,350 points, or over 6%.

The rescue plan, which is expected to be voted on in the House on Friday, would dispense checks of

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\$1,200 per adult and \$500 per child.

President Donald Trump, meanwhile, announced that federal officials are developing guidelines to rate counties by risk of virus spread, as he aims to ease the restrictions meant to slow the outbreak.

Deborah Birx, the White House coronavirus response coordinator, said the task force is concerned about certain counties in the Midwest that appear to be seeing a rapid increase in cases. She listed two: Wayne County in Michigan and Cook County in Illinois.

Montana joined the growing list of U.S. states ordering residents to stay home to fight the virus' spread.

Italy, the eurozone's third-biggest economy and a major exporter of machinery, textiles and other goods, became perhaps the first Western developed nation to idle most of its industry, extending a shutdown on smaller, nonessential businesses to heavy manufacturers.

Among the companies in Italy that have shut down or rolled back production: Fiat Chrysler, Ferrari, Pirelli tires and Luxottica eyewear, maker of Ray-Bans and Oakleys.

The industrial lobby Confindustria estimates a cost of 70 billion to 100 billion euros (\$77 billion-\$110 billion) of national wealth per month if 70% of companies are closed, as anticipated.

"We are entering a war economy," said Confindustria president Vincenzo Boccia.

Elsewhere around the world, South Africa, with the most industrialized economy in Africa, headed into a three-week lockdown starting Friday. The country is already in recession, with an unemployment rate of 29%.

And Britain unveiled another relief effort, this time aimed at the gig economy, many of whose workers are facing financial ruin. The government will give the self-employed grants equal to 80% of their average profits, up to 2,500 pounds (\$2,975) per month.

In other developments:

___ New York state's death toll jumped by 100 in one day, pushing the number to 385, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said. He added that experts expect the number to increase as critically ill patients who have been on ventilators for several days succumb to the virus. "That is a situation where people just deteriorate over time," Cuomo said.

___ China's National Health Commission on Friday reported 55 new cases of the virus, including 54 it said were imported infections in recent arrivals from overseas. Once again, there were no new cases reported in Wuhan, the provincial capital where the coronavirus emerged in December. China said it is temporarily barring most foreigners from entering as it tries to curb imported cases.

___ In the Mideast, Saudi Arabia announced a total lockdown on the capital, Riyadh, and Islam's two holiest cities, Mecca and Medina, in addition to a nationwide curfew. In the United Arab Emirates, authorities announced an overnight weekend lockdown and used drones to tell people to stay home.

___ The leaders of the Group of 20 major industrialized nations held a video summit for safety reasons and vowed to work together to confront the crisis but made no specific commitments.

___ In Brazil, the country's governors are defying President Jair Bolsonaro over his call to reopen schools and businesses, dismissing his argument that the "cure" of widespread shutdowns is worse than the disease. As of Thursday, the country had more than 2,500 cases and 59 deaths.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

So far, more than 120,000 people have recovered, according to the Johns Hopkins University tally.

___ Long reported from Washington, Rising reported from Berlin and Schmall from New Delhi. Associated Press journalists around the world contributed to this report.

A new beat for police across US: Enforcing social distance

By TOM HAYS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — In New York City, they've started dismantling basketball hoops to prevent people from gathering in parks and playing. In Lakewood, New Jersey, police broke up a wedding being held in violation of a ban on large gatherings. And in Austin, Texas, officers are encouraging people to call a hotline to snitch on violators of the city's orders for people to stay home.

Police departments are taking a lead role in enforcing social distancing guidelines that health officials say are critical to containing COVID-19. Along with park rangers, fire inspectors and other public servants, officers more accustomed to chasing suspects and solving crimes are spending these troubled days cajoling people to stay at least 6 feet apart.

"We're used to crowds, we're used to lines, we're used to being close together," New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said at a briefing this week. "No more."

The no-more mandate has forced the New York Police Department — a squad that normally prides itself on protecting packed crowds like the ones at the Times Square New Year's Eve celebration — into service dispersing small groups of people on city streets and public spaces.

Instead of the threat of terrorism, they're trying to stop the spread of a silent killer that as of Thursday had left more than 1,000 people dead in the U.S., at least 280 of them in New York City — all while trying to avoid using a heavy hand.

For starters, the nation's largest police department made thousands of visits to bars and restaurants to make sure they were observing a shutdown of dine-in services imposed this month, resulting in warnings but only a handful of citations.

Now comes an effort to impose restrictions in parks, playgrounds, housing project courtyards and sidewalks, where some people to congregate out of habit or indifference as temperatures rise. On Wednesday, de Blasio said the city was removing basketball hoops at 80 of its 1,700 public courts — places where he said people were ignoring instructions not to shoot around with anyone outside their household.

Enforcement also will include marked patrol cars driving through Brooklyn's Prospect Park and other popular outdoor escapes around the city, broadcasting recorded reminders about the importance of social distancing.

NYPD video shot in Manhattan's Lower East Side and posted on Twitter showed a squad car slowly rolling down a nearly empty street — occupied by just two people running on opposite sides of the street — and playing a message that implores, "Please help us keep you safe."

In addition, the city is mobilizing departments to form roving enforcement teams for the effort, including members of the fire and parks departments and the mayor's community affairs unit.

People are not being discouraged from getting out for a breath of fresh air solo, as couples or as families. But other activities like team sports or gatherings like outdoor family barbecues are going to be shut down, de Blasio said.

"If we see people in groups, we're going to break them up," he said. "If we see a place that's too crowded, we are going to get people to disperse."

De Blasio said he would even consider closing playgrounds as soon as Saturday if families don't follow new rules to "not overcrowd them" or allowing "kids playing with kids outside their own family."

In New Jersey, police charged three people in recent days for holding large gatherings in defiance of a state ban. In San Jose, Calif., officers have checked 369 businesses for compliance and issued their first citation on Wednesday. If the city's parks and trails continue to be crowded with residents, authorities could be forced to step up their enforcement — which Chief Eddie Garcia said could be difficult to determine.

"They can't play 'red light, green light' and say 'everybody, freeze! Let's get a tape measure out!'" he said.

In New York City, officers patrolling recreation areas and enforcing social distancing this week were seeing "a lot of empty soccer fields and a lot of empty basketball courts, which is good," NYPD Chief of Department Terence Monahan said.

For now, the department is trying to avoid a more lax approach used in Italy that is believed to have

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only fueled infection rates, while avoiding any semblance of the Big Brother-type crackdown in China.

As the crisis worsened, Italy ordered police to patrol cafes to make sure that people kept their distance and that shops shut at 6 p.m. each day, only to see the death count continue to rise. It has since shut down bars and cafes altogether.

In China, officials took more extreme measures, including locking people inside their apartment complexes. A state-run news agency even released what it claimed was video from a drone sent out to chase down and shame people not wearing masks.

Social media photos and videos from India showed police officers in surgical masks using batons to keep violators in line.

There also were reports that Singaporean authorities criminally charged a couple who lied about their travel history and revoked the residency of a man who broke his medical quarantine.

At this point, New York police say, the effort is "more about education and getting compliance," Monahan said. "It's about explaining to people the dangers involved and that this is a different world."

Associated Press reporters Olga R. Rodriguez in San Francisco, Stefanie Dazio in Los Angeles and Claudia Lauer in Philadelphia contributed to this report. The Associated Press receives support for health and science coverage from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content. Follow AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

What you need to know today about the virus outbreak

By The Associated Press undefined

The number of people around the world who have contracted the coronavirus has surged past 500,000, and the United States tops the list, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally.

U.S. deaths have now topped 1,200, in another grim update for a global outbreak that has wreaked havoc on economies and established routines of life. Worldwide, the death toll climbed past 23,000, according to Johns Hopkins' running count.

Nearly 3.3 million Americans applied for unemployment benefits last week — almost five times the previous record set in 1982 — amid a widespread shutdown caused by the virus. The surge in weekly applications is a reflection of the damage the outbreak is inflicting on the economy. Layoffs are sure to accelerate as revenue collapses at restaurants, hotels, movie theaters, gyms and airlines.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told leaders of the world's 20 major industrialized nations during an emergency virtual summit that "we are at war with a virus — and not winning it" despite countries' dramatic measures to seal their borders, shutter businesses and enforce home isolation for well over a quarter of the world's population.

Here are some of AP's top stories Thursday on the world's coronavirus pandemic. Follow [APNews.com/VirusOutbreak](https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak) for updates through the day and [APNews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak](https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak) for stories explaining some of its complexities.

WHAT'S HAPPENING TODAY:

—House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Congress will give final approval Friday to the \$2.2 trillion economic rescue bill, a vote that would cap Congress' tumultuous effort to rush the relief to a nation battered by the coronavirus. Stocks marched higher for a third straight day Friday as the bill moved closer to passage.

—At New York City-area hospitals on the front lines of the biggest concentration of coronavirus cases in the U.S., workers are increasingly concerned about the ravages of the illness in their own ranks. Louisiana, home to the world-famous pre-Lenten Mardi Gras festivities in New Orleans each spring, was quickly becoming another smoldering hotspot.

—The coronavirus is taking a growing toll on the U.S. military, and commanders and senior officials are bracing for worse. From nuclear missile fields at home to war zones abroad, from flight lines to ships at sea, the Pentagon is striving to shield vital missions even as it faces urgent calls for help on the civilian front.

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—China is temporarily barring most foreigners from entering the country as it seeks to curb the number of imported coronavirus cases. In India, some of the country's legions of poor and others thrown out of work by a nationwide stay-at-home order began receiving aid from public and private groups working to ensure people have enough to eat.

—The Trump administration is sticking with its crowd-friendly waiver of entrance fees at national parks during the coronavirus pandemic, as managers at some parks try and fail to keep visitors a safe distance apart and communities appeal for a shutdown at the parks still open. The administration agreed last week to close some parks, including Yellowstone, Grand Teton and the Great Smoky Mountains, after requests from the park managers.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death. The vast majority of people recover.

Here are the symptoms of the virus compared with the common flu.

One of the best ways to prevent spread of the virus is washing your hands with soap and water. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends first washing with warm or cold water and then lathering soap for 20 seconds to get it on the backs of hands, between fingers and under fingernails before rinsing off.

You should wash your phone, too. Here's how.

Misinformation overload: How to separate fact from fiction and rumor from deliberate efforts to mislead.

ONE NUMBER:

\$2.7 billion: Estimated cost of postponing the Tokyo Olympics, according to the Japanese financial newspaper Nikkei. The Tokyo Olympics need new dates for the opening and closing ceremonies in 2021. Nothing much can get done until those dates are determined by the International Olympic Committee, the Japanese government and Tokyo organizers.

Follow AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>

Harlem Globetrotters great Curly Neal dies at 77

By JOHN MARSHALL AP Basketball Writer

Fred "Curly" Neal, the dribbling wizard who entertained millions with the Harlem Globetrotters for parts of three decades, has died. He was 77.

The Globetrotters said Neal died in his home outside of Houston on Thursday morning.

"We have lost one of the most genuine human beings the world has ever known," Globetrotters general manager Jeff Munn said in a statement on Twitter. "Curly's basketball skill was unrivaled by most, and his warm heart and huge smile brought joy to families worldwide."

Neal played for the Globetrotters from 1963-85, appearing in more than 6,000 games in 97 countries for the exhibition team known for its combination of comedy and athleticism. He became one of five Globetrotters to have his jersey retired when his No. 22 was lifted to the rafters during a special ceremony at Madison Square Garden in 2008.

Neal was a crowd favorite with his trademark shaved head, infectious smile and ability to dribble circles around would-be defenders. He was a key player during the Globetrotters' most popular era in the '70s and '80s, appearing on TV shows and specials like "The Ed Sullivan Show," "Love Boat" and "Gilligan's Island."

Neal and the Globetrotters also appeared in numerous TV commercials, episodes of "Scooby-Doo" and had their own cartoon series.

"Hard to express how much joy Curly Neal brought to my life growing up. RIP to a legend," Golden State

Warriors coach Steve Kerr tweeted.

Neal was a star high school player in Greensboro, North Carolina, and led Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte to the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association title after averaging 23 points per game as a senior. He was inducted into the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame in a 2008 class that included North Carolina coach Roy Williams.

Neal also was inducted into the Globetrotters' Legends ring in 1993 and continued to make appearances for them as an "Ambassador of Goodwill."

Ethanol plants seek rule changes to resupply hand sanitizer

By DAVID PITT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — As hospitals and nursing homes desperately search for hand sanitizer amid the coronavirus outbreak, federal regulators are preventing ethanol producers from providing millions of gallons of alcohol that could be transformed into the germ-killing mixture.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's roadblock has been frustrating the health care and ethanol industries, which have been calling for a relaxed regulation to deal with the public health care emergency.

"Hand sanitizer is a big part of our lives," said Eric Barber, CEO of Mary Lanning Healthcare, a hospital in Hastings, Nebraska. "We can't get any. We order it and it's just not available."

The problem for the ethanol industry is that most plants make food-grade ethanol, one step below the highest pharmaceutical grade. But since the plants aren't certified to comply with stringent production standards designed to protect quality of medicines, food ingredients and dietary supplements, the FDA doesn't want the alcohol used for a product to be applied to the skin.

In addition, the alcohol is not denatured or mixed with a bitter additive to make it undrinkable. The FDA insists this step is "critical" because of cases of poisoning, sometimes fatal, among young children who have accidentally ingested hand sanitizers.

An FDA spokesman said Thursday that regulators have already seen a rise in poisonings linked to hand sanitizers in recent weeks, "heightening this public concern."

The FDA is also skeptical of industry claims that undenatured sanitizers could be distributed in a way that would keep them away from children.

"It is unclear what, if any, measure could be instituted to ensure that the product does not make its way into consumer hands, where children could have access," FDA's Jeremy Kahn said in an emailed statement.

Facing a nationwide shortage, Barber said the FDA should temporarily relax regulations to allow alternative production.

"You're talking about alcohol. Does it matter if it's fuel grade or whatever the stuff is they're trying to price gouge now? I think it's common sense," he said.

The American Hospital Association encouraged flexibility to help protect patients and caregivers, without directly weighing in on the sanitizer dispute.

"We may need to consider a range of possible solutions that were not on the table before the pandemic," said Nancy Foster, a vice president with the group, in an emailed statement to the AP.

The Consumer Brands Association, formerly the Grocery Manufacturers Association, has had conversations with the FDA to push the agency to reconsider its guidelines. The group, which represents branded food, consumer products and beverage companies, said that hand sanitizer supplies are running so low that its members have had to ration it out to workers in stores, distribution centers and manufacturing plants.

"We need a temporary solution," said Mike Gruber, vice president of regulatory and technical affairs at the trade association. "This goes toward ensuring basic food safety practices."

Distillers that produce vodka, whisky and other alcoholic drinks have been given some regulatory waivers by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau allowing them to produce hand sanitizer. Many have done that, but they produce much smaller volumes of alcohol than an ethanol plant could produce. They also receive a benefit in the Senate-passed stimulus bill.

The Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, which represents dozens of large and small distillers,

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applauded Congress for easing taxes on distillers who make hand sanitizer.

Under the stimulus package passed late Wednesday, distillers don't have to pay federal excise taxes on alcohol used for hand sanitizer through Jan. 1, 2021.

"Hundreds of U.S. distillers are stepping up to produce hand sanitizer and they should not be hit with a huge tax bill for producing this much-needed item, especially at a time when so many of them are struggling," said Chris Swonger, the group's president and CEO.

But the council said it's urging the FDA to update its guidance and let distillers use undenatured alcohol for hand sanitizer. The stimulus bill requires distillers to follow the FDA's guidance if they want to receive the tax breaks.

The FDA has waived dozens of regulations in recent weeks to boost production of key medical supplies, including coronavirus tests, ventilators, gloves and hand sanitizers.

Under the latest FDA guidelines, regulators maintain standards for alcohol, requiring new producers to use alcohol that meets federal or international standards for use in either drugs or food products.

The regulatory hurdles are especially frustrating for Midwest ethanol producers who are facing plunging fuel demand and a petroleum fight between Saudi Arabia and Russia that caused prices to plummet. The factors are forcing more plants to curtail production and close.

For ethanol producers relaxed rules, including a requirement of the hard-to-acquire denaturant, would allow them to step in an help in a national emergency.

"If we could get the FDA to say yes you can use the beverage grade and for the duration of this emergency at least for some point in time here for the next two weeks you can waive the denaturant we would literally have millions of gallons of hand sanitizer available within a matter of days," said Monte Shaw, CEO of Iowa Renewable Fuels Association, an ethanol trade group. "Every one of our plants has gotten contacted by people who want this stuff and we can't send it to them."

Andrew Vrbas owner of Pacha Soap, a boutique soap shop in Hastings, Nebraska, had just finished renovating a 100,000-square-foot former bread factory as a project to boost the community. Now, he's preparing to set up hand sanitizer production there to supply to hospitals. He's received calls from hospitals in Nebraska, Florida and New York City seeking hand sanitizer.

"We are literally three miles from a plant that has as much ethanol as you could imagine," he said. "We're sitting on millions of gallons of alcohol. If we could rally the federal government to say look if you just let us work with local ethanol producers we have the expertise, we have the ability to provide hand sanitizer to hospitals not only in Nebraska but all across the country that are just reaching out through my network saying if you could send us hand sanitizer, we're out."

Retail Writer Anne D'Innocenzio contributed from New York City, Health Writer Matthew Perrone from Washington and Auto Writer Dee-Ann Durbin from Ann Arbor, Michigan.

3.3 million seek US jobless aid, nearly 5 times earlier high

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nearly 3.3 million Americans applied for unemployment benefits last week — almost five times the previous record set in 1982 — amid a widespread economic shutdown caused by the coronavirus.

The surge in weekly applications was a stunning reflection of the damage the viral outbreak is inflicting on the economy. Filings for unemployment aid generally reflect the pace of layoffs.

Layoffs are sure to accelerate as the U.S. economy sinks into a recession. Revenue has collapsed at restaurants, hotels, movie theaters, gyms and airlines. Auto sales are plummeting, and car makers have closed factories. Most such employers face loan payments and other fixed costs, so they're cutting jobs to save money.

As job losses mount, some economists say the nation's unemployment rate could approach 13% by May. By comparison, the highest jobless rate during the Great Recession, which ended in 2009, was 10%.

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"What seemed impossible just two weeks ago is now reality," said Nancy Vanden Houten, an economist at Oxford Economics, a consulting firm. "The US economy will experience the largest economic contraction on record with the most severe surge in unemployment ever."

The economic deterioration has been swift. As recently as February, the unemployment rate was at a 50-year low of 3.5%. And the economy was growing steadily if modestly. Yet by the April-June quarter of the year, some economists think the economy will shrink at its steepest annual pace ever — a contraction that could reach 30%.

In its report Thursday, the Labor Department said 3.283 million people applied for unemployment benefits last week, up from 282,000 during the previous week. Many people who have lost jobs in recent weeks, though, have been unable to file for unemployment aid because state websites and phone systems have been overwhelmed by a crush of applicants and have frozen up.

That logjam suggests that Thursday's report actually understates the magnitude of job cuts last week. So does the fact that workers who are not on company payrolls — gig workers, free-lancers, the self-employed — aren't currently eligible for unemployment benefits even though in many cases they're no longer able to earn money.

Asked about the record-high applications for jobless aid, President Donald Trump said the figures were "fully expected."

"It's a lot of jobs, but I think we'll come back very strong," he said.

With layoffs surging, a significant expansion of unemployment benefits was included in an economic relief bill nearing final approval in Congress. One provision in the bill would provide an extra \$600 a week on top of the unemployment aid that states provide. Another provision would supply 13 additional weeks of benefits beyond the six months of jobless aid that most states offer. The new legislation would also extend unemployment benefits, for the first time, to gig workers and others who are not on company payrolls.

Separate legislation passed last week provides up to \$1 billion to states to enhance their ability to process claims. But that money will take time to be disbursed.

In the United States, the jump in applications for benefits is playing out in states across the country. In California, claims for unemployment benefits more than tripled last week to 187,000. In New York, they rose by a factor of five to 80,334. Nationwide, about 2.25% of the entire workforce applied for jobless aid last week. In Nevada, the figure was 6.8%, in Rhode Island 7.5%.

Gov. Gavin Newsom said 1 million claims for unemployment benefits had been filed in California since March 13. Many of those applications were likely filed this week, suggesting that next week's report could show an even larger number of claims.

In Florida, Jessy Morancy of Hollywood was laid off last week from her job as a wheelchair attendant and customer service agent at Fort Lauderdale Airport. Morancy, 29, called the state unemployment office on Monday to try to file for unemployment benefits but encountered just a recorded message telling her to call back later.

She was also concerned that even a full unemployment benefit of \$275 a week would be less than half of what she earned at her job and insufficient to provide for her children, ages 10 and 7.

"I'm still in a state of shock," Morancy said.

Even for those able to file a claim, the benefits will take time to kick in. It typically takes two to three weeks before applicants receive any money. State agencies must first contact their former employers to verify their work and earnings history. Only then can the employee's weekly unemployment benefits be calculated.

Worsening the problem, most state agencies that handle unemployment claims are operating at historically low funding levels and staffing that are intended to handle a trickle of claims. Just weeks ago, the job market was in the strongest shape it had been in decades.

Kim Boldrini-Sen, 41, has also struggled to file her claim. She has tried in two states: In Connecticut, where she works as an acupuncturist in a private practice, and in New York, where she lives and has her own acupuncture business.

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In Connecticut, she thought her application had been submitted. But when she returned last week to re-file as applicants are required to do each week, she found there was no record of her initial filing. After taking an hour to re-file, she received a pop-up notice that she was ineligible to do so online.

In New York, the state's website repeatedly crashed when she was halfway through filling out her request. When she finally managed to press submit, she received a pop-up saying she had to file over the phone. That hasn't worked well, either.

"I've called at all hours of the day," she said. "That's been my life for a week, and I still can't get through to anyone."

On Wednesday, the New York State Department of Labor tweeted, "If you have been unable to get through our phone and/or online system this week, please keep trying."

"We are working as hard as we can to ensure that all benefits are paid and appreciate your patience," the agency said on Twitter.

Worldwide, the United Nations estimates that up to 25 million jobs could be lost in the economic upheaval from the viral outbreak. That would exceed the 22 million that were lost during the 2008 global financial crisis.

In Europe, companies are laying off workers at the fastest pace since 2009, according to surveys of business managers. Official statistics for Europe that would reflect the outbreak's impact are not yet out. But companies have been announcing tens of thousands of job cuts, both permanent and temporary. Major car companies like Fiat Chrysler and airlines like Lufthansa are suspending most of their operations, putting tens of thousands of workers on temporary leave, many with only a partial salary.

The unemployment rate in the 19 countries that use the euro was 7.3% at last count in January. It's expected to rise toward 10%, depending on the duration of the outbreak, economists say. The rise in joblessness may not be as sharp as in the U.S. because it's harder to fire workers in Europe, where many governments are supporting companies financially to keep employees on partially paid leave.

Ellen Zentner, an economist at Morgan Stanley, said in a note to clients that 17 million jobs could be lost through May -- twice the entire 8.7 million jobs that were lost in the Great Recession. She expects the unemployment rate to average 12.8% in the April-June quarter, which would be the highest level since the 1930s.

Still, Zentner also expects the economy to start recovering by the second half of the year. But it will take time for things to return to something close to normal, she projects: The unemployment rate could still top 5% at the end of next year.

AP Writers Carlo Piovano in London, David Lieb in Jefferson City, Missouri, and Matthew Barakat in Falls Church, Virginia, contributed to this report.

Q&A: How can the huge congressional aid package help you?

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER, ALEXANDRA OLSON, and SARAH SELL Associated Press Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress is poised to approve an unprecedented \$2.2 trillion economic rescue package that will provide one-time checks for most Americans and significant enhancements to unemployment benefits. Both will provide much-needed help to those recently laid-off and to financially stressed households as the coronavirus shuts down much of the economy.

Here are some questions and answers about how the legislation can help you:

WHO IS GETTING A CHECK?

Everyone earning up to \$75,000 in adjusted gross income — the income on your tax return — and who has a Social Security number will receive a \$1,200 payment. The payment steadily declines for those who make more, and phases out for those who earn more than \$99,000. For married couples, both adults receive \$1,200, with the phase-out starting at \$150,000 of income and falling to zero for couples who earn \$198,000. Each child will also get \$500. For heads of household with one child, the benefit starts to

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decline at \$112,500 and falls to zero at \$146,500.

WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO TO GET ONE?

For most people, nothing. The U.S. Treasury will direct deposit the money in your bank if they have that information from this year's tax return or last year's. For everyone else, they will mail a check. If you didn't file a tax return for either 2018 or 2019, your check could be delayed. The government can use your Social Security benefit statement as well.

WHEN WILL I GET THE PAYMENT?

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin has said repeatedly that it should arrive in three weeks. Even if it arrives electronically, you should receive a written notice within 15 days after the payment that specifies how much you received and how it was delivered.

IS THERE HELP IN THE BILL FOR THE UNEMPLOYED?

The bill adds \$600 a week, for a period of four months, to standard unemployment benefits, which vary by state. The measure adds 13 weeks of coverage for people who have exhausted their existing jobless benefits. It also provides funding for states to let people collect their payments immediately, eliminating a one-week waiting period.

WHAT IF I ONLY WORK PART-TIME?

Some states do provide partial unemployment for people who work part time or whose hours have been reduced. And the emergency legislation provides incentives for states to set up so-called "short time compensation" programs, which provide benefits to offset lost pay through reduction of work hours. Those programs are intended to provide companies an alternative to cutting jobs.

For example, the rescue bill would pay half the cost of providing benefits to those with reduced hours through the end of the year to states that launch such programs.

I AM A GIG WORKER, CAN I QUALIFY?

Yes. The bill would create a temporary Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program to cover many workers not traditionally eligible for unemployment benefits, including self-employed people, contractors and those with limited work history. That program will last through December 31.

HOW MUCH MIGHT I RECEIVE?

The total amount of unemployment insurance depends on what each state provides. Economists at Goldman Sachs calculate that for the average worker who earns about \$1,200 a week, the enhanced weekly benefit should fully replace their lost wages. For lower-income employees of restaurants and hospitals, it should provide more than their usual salaries.

HAS THE GOVERNMENT DONE ANYTHING FOR HOUSING PAYMENTS?

Yes. Government-backed mortgage buyers Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac have said that they will suspend all foreclosure sales and evictions of borrowers in single-family homes owned by their companies. They have also expanded their forbearance program, offering more borrowers relief for up to one year and suspending late charges and penalties. Together they guarantee about half of the U.S. home market.

Also, the federal government suspended foreclosures and evictions for mortgages insured by the Federal Housing Administration.

If you're worried about missing a mortgage payment, contact your lender immediately. Numerous banks have said they are willing to work with distressed borrowers, including potentially suspending or reducing mortgage payments for a stretch.

WHAT ABOUT RENTERS?

Renters' fates depend on where they live and who they rent from. Reach out to your landlord or property management company to ask for leniency.

Several cities have halted evictions due to the coronavirus. Fannie and Freddie are also offering owners of multifamily properties forbearance relief on their mortgages, on condition they suspend all evictions of renters unable to pay because of the virus.

WHAT ABOUT STUDENT LOANS?

Student loan borrowers have a few options.

If you have a federal student loan, you can apply for a deferment or a forbearance at any time. Both

of these postpone payments temporarily but interest still accrues on some loans with deferment and all with forbearance.

Now, federal loan borrowers can seek an emergency administrative forbearance, which would allow them to postpone payments for up to 60 days. Borrowers must contact a servicer to apply. The postponement is automatically applied for borrowers more than 31 days late on payments. Interest will not be added to the balance at the end of the forbearance period.

Switching to an income-driven repayment plan may be a good option for some borrowers, said Mark Kantrowitz, a student loan expert and publisher of website Savingforcollege.com. If you've been laid off or your hours were greatly reduced, the payment can be lowered to zero.

The federal government also lowered the interest rate on all federally held student loans to 0% for an indefinite period. However, that will not lower the size of the monthly payment; instead it will apply the payment entirely to the principle of the loan.

If you have private student loans, contact your servicer for their options.

Lawyers, judges push to close immigration courts amid virus

By **JULIE WATSON** and **AMY TAXIN** Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Immigration attorneys have sported swim goggles and masks borrowed from friends to meet with clients in detention centers. Masked judges are stocking their cramped courtrooms with hand sanitizer for hearings they want to do by phone.

While much of daily life has ground to a halt to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, the Trump administration is resisting calls from immigration judges and attorneys to stop in-person hearings and shutter all immigration courts. They say the most pressing hearings can be done by phone so immigrants aren't stuck in detention indefinitely.

Rules change daily as the virus spreads and federal officials struggle to figure out how and whether they can keep the massive system running. Officials say they have not ruled out a total shutdown but are closing specific courts and delaying hearings.

The U.S. Justice Department on Monday postponed hearings for asylum-seekers waiting in Mexico, but only after judges in San Diego canceled hearings in defiance of orders to keep them running amid the pandemic. The government has delayed hearings for immigrants who aren't in detention but is moving forward for those who are.

Suspected coronavirus infections have forced immigration courts in New York, New Jersey and Colorado to temporarily shut down in the past week. As a precaution, the government announced the closure of several more Wednesday. Others that previously closed had reopened Thursday, including in Seattle. A handful of courts are only accepting documents.

But most of the 68 U.S. immigration courts are still holding hearings.

That's leaving judges and attorneys to try to protect themselves. Immigration and Customs Enforcement told lawyers to bring their own masks and gloves, which many hospitals can't even find.

And social distancing in a small courtroom is challenging, with judges passing paperwork back and forth to legal assistants while lawyers and immigrants' families crowd in. Interpreters fly across the country for hearings.

Immigration lawyers and unions for judges and the Homeland Security Department's own attorneys have jointly demanded that all courts close.

"We know the coronavirus is contagious even when people are not symptomatic, and so everyone is very concerned about it. It's not enough to be reactive. At that point, it's too late," said Samuel Cole, an immigration judge in Chicago who is also spokesman for the National Association of Immigration Judges. "So everyone is being put at risk."

The Justice Department's Executive Office for Immigration Review, which oversees U.S. immigration courts, said in an email to The Associated Press that it continually evaluates the situation and makes decisions based on public health information. Some courts may close even without a confirmed exposure.

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"Depending on the nature, scale, scope, and extent of any incident," the court system will respond appropriately, including closing courts, spokeswoman Kathryn Mattingly said.

The immigration courts encourage video conferencing when possible to reduce the risks, Mattingly said. No one, she said, is required to file documents in person.

The system faces a backlog of 1.1 million cases, and in many places, lawyers are considered essential workers exempt from state and city orders to stay home. In the criminal courts, some trials have been delayed and some states have closed courtrooms as the virus spreads.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

Some immigration judges are telecommuting, while others are simply refusing to come in, according to the judges' union.

At a New York City immigration court, attorneys arrived Monday to find all three immigration judges absent, said Andrea Saenz, supervising attorney for Brooklyn Defender Services, which represents detained immigrants.

Hours later, her attorneys learned that the court was closing after a suspected infection. Attorneys say they're having to decide between risking their health by going to court or staying away and having their client miss out on being released from detention.

"It's a disaster," Saenz said.

In New Jersey, requests for such hearings can be made online and have been granted rapidly. But in New York, they are often ignored, attorneys say.

After a New York attorney got no response, an immigrant's mother took a train from Long Island and then a New York City subway to court to hand-deliver the lawyer's written request for a telephone hearing. The woman has since been diagnosed with the coronavirus, according to a letter from the Association of Deportation Defense Attorneys to the Executive Office for Immigration Review.

"Can you imagine the number of people she came into contact with as the result of the decision to keep this court open?" the letter asked.

While hearings by phone work for some cases, they don't for children, according to attorneys who want those proceedings postponed.

"How are we supposed to make sure they're understanding things?" said Laura Barrera, managing attorney for the Tucson Children's Program at the Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project.

She said she asked to delay hearings set for Friday for 11 children in government custody but was denied. Now, the plan is to gather together the children from different shelters for a hearing by video, putting them at risk of exposing each other to the virus, Barrera said.

Attorneys also are struggling to meet with their adult clients to build cases.

Immigration lawyers in Arizona have been told that detention centers require visitors to wear a surgical mask, eye wear and medical gloves, which are hard to come by even for health providers.

Attorney Margarita Silva improvised. When she reached a detention facility in Eloy, Arizona, on Monday, she was wearing her husband's land surveyor goggles, a mask she borrowed from a friend and medical gloves she got from a hardware store. She said she felt ridiculous wearing the gear to meet a new client.

"My goggles were fogging up because every time I breathe into my mask, it goes to my goggles," Silva said.

Another lawyer had only a mask and a second donned swimming goggles, while the guards and detainees at the facility wore nothing, she said.

Silva said she wishes immigration authorities would release detainees who don't have a criminal history or only minor infractions, like her client. That, she said, would relieve the need for so many court hearings.

Taxin reported from Orange County, California.

Home internet jammed up? Try these steps before upgrading

By FRANK BAJAK AP Technology Writer

With so much of the U.S. workforce — and their families — now cooped up at home to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus, it's not a huge surprise that home internet is showing the strain.

If you've had a business videoconference stutter while your teenagers play Call of Duty online, or found yourself unable to stream the news while your spouse uploads huge data files for work, you'll have a good idea of the problem.

IS THERE A BANDWIDTH PROBLEM?

The internet's core is managing the spike in traffic just fine, experts say. It has massive capacity to handle Netflix, YouTube, Zoom and other streaming services.

True, Netflix recently throttled down its video quality in Europe at the request of authorities there. But the company already stores its programs on servers close to users' homes already, and there's no evidence that it's clogging networks.

IF THE INTERNET IS SO STURDY, WHY DOES MY HOME CONNECTION STUTTER?

The problem partly lies in the so-called "last mile," the link that connects your home to the ultra-high speed internet backbone.

Most U.S. homes get their internet from cable companies and thus connect to the broader network via coaxial cable, a legacy of the cable TV era. These connections provide faster "downstream" speeds to your home than "upstream" speeds back to the internet. Since videoconferencing sends equal amounts of data both ways, simultaneous sessions can clog the upstream channel and disrupt service for the entire household.

If that happens, one quick solution is to have some family members switch to audio-only, which conserves bandwidth. This also applies to anyone in multiplayer online games, where — per a wag on Twitter — the banter between players often resembles conference calls with occasional shooting.

You could also order a service upgrade, although that might not be strictly necessary. Some providers are temporarily offering more bandwidth, particularly for families with school-age children, in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Others have dropped service caps that charge extra when data usage passes a certain threshold.

The relatively few U.S. households with their own direct fiber-optic connections have the same bandwidth in both directions and shouldn't experience serious hiccups.

DOES MY HOME NETWORK NEED AN UPGRADE?

It might. Start with your internet modem, the device that most likely has a coax cable connecting it to your wall. Your internet provider often rents the modem to you.

If it's several years old, it's probably time to ask your provider if upgrading the modem's internal software, or replacing the modem entirely, will help. Older modems often can't deliver the full bandwidth you're paying for to your household.

Next up is your Wi-Fi router. If you have cable, it may be built into your modem. If you haven't already, try moving it to a more central location in your home or apartment; that will ensure bandwidth is distributed more equally.

Or you can add more access points and distribute Wi-Fi with a "mesh" network. Newer routers let you add several satellite stations that boost your signal throughout the house, though you might have to arrange that with your provider.

One more possibility: You can connect some devices directly to the router with ethernet cables instead of using Wi-Fi. This may improve the performance of videoconferencing.

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VIRUS DIARY: `When are we going to the playground, Mama?'

By **BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer**

OAKLAND, California (AP) — "When are we going to the playground, Mama?" she asks again today, like she did yesterday and the day before that.

I tell her we are not going to the playground today, that we can go for a walk, remember the virus we talked about? She chuckles. "Sorry, I was confused. I meant go for a walk."

We go for a walk but it is probably the last walk for a while, because I am scared and there are people out, still, also taking walks. It doesn't seem worth it.

I do not tell her this yet.

It's hard to explain time to a 4-year-old. Each day is new, a new hope that springs her out of bed and demands things, all the things she knows like playgrounds and parks and the coffee shop with her papa and her grandma's house on Fridays and her cousins' on Saturdays.

Now, I just ask if she wants to get dressed, she says "later, Mama!" and frolics around in pink bunny pajamas then settles to breakfast. I don't get dressed either. We have pancakes and strawberries and bananas but she asks me to remove the strawberries and bananas. Later I will bribe her with a spoonful of Nutella to eat half a strawberry.

We call her aunt on FaceTime and she grabs the phone out of my hand and scurries inside her play circus tent. The phone drops to the floor. She wants to show her aunt her new tent, which is not new but it's exciting and it was away for a while. I ask for the phone back. I have to talk to my sister-in-law.

Later we will have a chat on what makes us feel mad and also happy and sad and loved and scared and she will tell me that it makes her feel mad when I don't let her take the phone with her. She wants to hold it to carry the people on the other end to show them all the things, the same way she'd grab their hand and pull them to follow her. She tells me it makes her happy that her papa and I are home, that hugs make her feel loved and monsters make her feel scared. I tell her there are no monsters. I think she knows this.

She is not scared of the virus, even though I am terrified. She tells her grandparents that the virus hurts old people and that they are old people. Later one night, she asks me if her grandparents will get new again, which is her word for young and this makes sense but I explain to her that no, they won't. She asked this when I told her that her cat died. She asked if her cat will get new again and come back and I told her that no, she won't and we cried.

We do a playdate. I set up a Zoom call. I place my laptop on the floor so she can sit and see her friend. They start out just yelling each other's names, back and forth. Sometimes her friend moves out of the frame and so she asks, "Where are you? Where is your face?" and it is hilarious. They play hide and seek. They both get their Play-Doh and they play together. She gets annoyed and grunts. Getting annoyed is part of playing.

It is time to say goodbye. I feel relieved, but it is brief. I wonder every day how she will remember this time. I hope that we come out on the other end someday and that when we do she'll remember that we were together and we tried to protect each other.

"Virus Diary," an occasional feature, will showcase the coronavirus saga through the eyes of Associated Press journalists around the world. Follow AP Technology Writer Barbara Ortutay on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/BarbaraOrtutay>

Paris falls silent: Sound maps show impact of confinement

PARIS (AP) — What's that sound beneath the Eiffel Tower? It's silence — a rare phenomenon in big cities like Paris, but one that's increasingly common now that tourism is banned and millions of people in and around the French capital are confined at home.

Some 150 monitoring stations around the Ile-de-France — the name given to Paris and its suburbs — have recorded an "unusual silence" since the virus prevention lockdown officially began March 17.

The agency that measures sound pollution in the region, Bruitparif, released before-and-after maps

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Thursday showing the drop in decibels.

It's especially notable around Charles de Gaulle and Orly airports, thanks to the grounding of most flights. And alongside highways, whose traffic has slowed to a trickle as workers stay home. And around neighborhoods packed with night clubs, which are now shuttered to keep people at a safe social distance and keep the virus at bay.

Bruitparif noted a "very sharp drop in noise emissions of anthropogenic origin" — related to human activity — caused by a "drastic reduction in road, air and even rail traffic, the suspension of construction sites and the closure of many activities and festive places."

French authorities are struggling to slow the spread of the virus, which has claimed more than 1,300 lives around France and prompted confinement measures that are threatening jobs and pummeling the economy.

But they have also reduced air and sound pollution in one of Europe's most densely populated cities.

The maps show that even in the center of Paris, the decibel levels are down to what you'd normally see in suburban parkland. Some streets saw a 90% drop in sound levels over the past week. And Bruitparif says zones considered as facing "excessive noise have practically disappeared, notably at night."

Still, there is one sound that Parisians are hearing a lot more of lately: Birdsong.

Tiptoe through Dutch tulips? Not in coronavirus crisis

By **PETER DEJONG** Associated Press

LISSE, Netherlands (AP) — The manicured lawns and pathways winding the flower beds at the Keukenhof spring garden, normally crowded with thousands of visitors on any given sun-splashed spring day, were deserted Thursday.

A lonely worker pushed his wheelbarrow through the garden, carrying out maintenance even though nobody will be allowed to visit the Dutch park this season because of restrictions aimed at slowing the spread of the coronavirus.

"It feels very bad, you can imagine," said Keukenhof Director Bart Siemerink. "It really hurts. For all the gardeners, for all the people involved."

In a normal year, there are plenty of people — some 1,300 — involved in grooming the garden, working in stores and restaurants and maintaining order in the busy parking lot.

But this is not a normal year and now only about 40-50 staff are working to maintain the park to ensure it can reopen in 2021.

The Keukenhof's annual eight-week opening, which usually attracts some 1.5 million visitors from more than 100 countries, was postponed last week, and on Wednesday canceled altogether. It's not the only major Dutch tourist site that has fallen victim to the virus' march across the world. The Van Gogh Museum and Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam are shuttered, and even the brothels in the city's Red Light district have closed down.

Siemerink said he doesn't intend to let all the Keukenhof preparations — 7 million bulbs were planted by hand for this year's season — go to waste.

Instead of welcoming real guests, the park intends to showcase itself online — a sort of virtual tiptoe through the tulips.

Siemerink is now working on a project aimed at broadcasting live films online and in partnership with television stations in the Netherlands, Germany and Britain.

"If people cannot come to Keukenhof, we will bring Keukenhof to the people at home," he said.

Trump has megaphone, but states control virus shutdowns

By **MARK SHERMAN** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump has the biggest megaphone, but it's governors and local officials who will decide when to begin reopening their economies after shuttering them to try to slow the spread of the coronavirus. The Constitution largely gives states the authority to regulate their own affairs.

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Trump has set Easter, April 12, as a goal for reopening the U.S. economy, though he also has said he will be guided by his public health experts. Unless Americans continue to dramatically limit social interaction by staying home from work and isolating themselves, the number of infections will overwhelm the health care system, many health experts have warned.

Some questions and answers about the legal authority for shutting and reopening the U.S. economy.

Q. Does the president have the authority to override state and local orders?

A. No. Under our constitutional system, states have the power and responsibility for maintaining public order and safety. As we've seen since the outbreak began, decisions about limiting social interactions by ordering people to shelter in place, closing businesses and shutting schools are being made by governors and local officials. Those same officials will make the call about when to ease up, no matter the vehemence of Trump's exhortation to have businesses "opened up and just raring to go by Easter." Trump's comments "are just advisory," said John Malcolm of the Heritage Foundation.

Gov. Larry Hogan, R-Md., has ordered all nonessential businesses and schools to close, and he said Thursday on Twitter that he does not see a quick end to the restrictions. "This battle is going to be much harder, take much longer, and be much worse than almost anyone comprehends. We have never faced anything like this ever before, and I continue to urge the people of our state to stay in place at home and stay safe," Hogan wrote.

Q. But the president has set a 15-day period in which all Americans are being urged to drastically scale back their public activities. Doesn't that amount to a national order?

A. No. The guidelines are voluntary, and they underscore the limits on Trump's powers. He can use daily briefings and his Twitter account to try to shape public opinion, and he has not been reluctant to do so. "When Donald Trump selects a narrative and begins to advance it, especially through his Twitter account, it has a remarkable effect on those who trust him. The more the president speaks against more robust forms of social distancing (such as shelter-in-place rules), the more noncompliance we are likely to see on the ground level from citizens sympathetic to the president," Robert Chesney, a University of Texas law professor wrote on the Lawfare blog.

Q. Still, Trump has invoked some federal laws to address the virus outbreak, hasn't he?

A. Yes, he has. The Stafford Act allows the expenditure of tens of billions of dollars in emergency assistance. The Defense Production Act allows the president to direct private companies to produce goods or acquire raw materials. Trump has yet to actually order companies to do anything, over the objection of some local officials who have a desperate need for ventilators, masks and other equipment. But Trump can only assert powers that Congress has specifically given him. "There are real limits on the president and the federal government when it comes to domestic affairs," Berkeley law professor John Yoo said on a recent Federalist Society conference call. At the same time, the federal government has the power, under laws aimed at preventing the spread of communicable diseases, to quarantine people when they arrive in the United States and travel between states.

Q. Is it clear that state and local governments have authority to impose the severe restrictions we've seen?

A. Lawsuits already are challenging state actions on religious grounds and as seizures of property for which the government must pay compensation. But for more than 100 years, the Supreme Court has upheld states' robust use of their authority, even when it restricts people's freedoms. In 1905, the court rejected a Massachusetts pastor's complaint that he should not be forced to get a smallpox vaccine or pay a fine, Malcolm noted.

Autism diagnosis more common in the US as racial gap closes

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Autism has grown slightly more common in the U.S., but a gap in diagnosis of white and black kids has disappeared, according to a government report released Thursday.

Closure of that gap — thanks to increased screening — is the main reason autism diagnoses are up a little, some experts said.

About 1 in 54 U.S. children were identified as having autism in 2016, according to the new report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That's up from 1 in 59 children in 2014, and from 1 in 68 in both 2010 and 2012.

The new report is based on a tracking system in 11 states that focuses on 8-year-olds, because most cases are diagnosed by that age. The researchers check health and school records to see which children meet criteria for autism, even if they haven't been formally diagnosed.

Researchers have made differing estimates of how common autism is. But experts say this CDC system is the most rigorous, and the results are considered to be the gold standard.

There are no blood or biological tests for autism. It's identified by making judgments about a child's behavior. Traditionally, it was diagnosed only in kids with severe language and social impairments and unusual repetitive behaviors. But the definition gradually expanded, and autism is now shorthand for a group of milder, related conditions, too.

For decades, white children were diagnosed with autism far more often than black kids. Non-whites were more likely to be diagnosed with something else, like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or even just bad behavior, researchers have said.

Now, there is no difference between white and black children by age 8, though black kids continue to get diagnosed at older ages than white children, the CDC report said.

That indicates there's still a problem, said Alison Singer, president of the Autism Science Foundation.

"The earlier children are identified, the sooner they can start to receive services" like speech and occupational therapies, Singer said.

Also, the gap between white and Hispanic kids hasn't disappeared, though it also is shrinking.

While the diagnosis gap is narrowing, it's not clear that minority kids are getting the same access to services and treatment, said Michael Yudell, a Drexel University public health professor who is writing a book on the history of autism.

"As these (autism prevalence) numbers increase, we need to increase the resources," such as special education funding, he said.

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In drastic move, Italy shuts most factories to halt virus

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

Soave, Italy (AP) — Italy has become the first western developed nation to idle most of its industry to halt the spread of the coronavirus, a potential cautionary tale for other governments, such as the Trump administration, that are resisting such drastic measures.

After more than two weeks of a nationwide lockdown, the Italian government decided to expand the mandatory closure of nonessential commercial activities to heavy industry in the eurozone's third-largest economy, a major exporter of machinery, textiles and other goods.

The move by Italy, which is leading the globe in virus deaths, is more in line with draconian measures taken by China than with declarations coming out of other democratic partners, who are at least a week or two behind Italy's rate of virus infections.

The industrial closures put in stark contrast concerns over protecting lives in a country with an especially

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vulnerable aging population against fears of hurting an economy that already was on the brink of recession.

The industrial lobby Confindustria estimates a cost of 70 billion to 100 billion euros (\$77 billion-\$110 billion) of national wealth a month if 70% of companies are closed, as anticipated. Though some big companies had already suspended activities, thousands of smaller manufacturers had continued after adopting new safety regulations, and will now shut down.

"We are entering a war economy," said Confindustria President Vincenzo Boccia.

Economists grow dizzy speculating on the possible economic drag in a country that never fully recovered from back-to-back recessions the last two decades. UniCredit bank's chief economist, Erik Nielson, expects the economy to shrink by a staggering 5% to 15% this year - and that's assuming a recovery toward the end of 2020 and takes into account a 25 billion-euro aid package and 350 billion euros in liquidity and credit. Another 25 billion-euro package has been promised. The Italian Treasury has put the virus hit at 5% to 7% of GDP in 2020.

"The economic consequences of the suspensions risks to be unsurmountable, because the continuity of companies is being interrupted for a substantially undetermined period," *Il Sole 24 Ore*, the respected business daily of the Confindustria lobby, wrote Thursday.

The government decree mandates the industrial shutdown for one week, but as with the rest of the harsh containment measures they are likely to be extended depending on the pace of contagion.

It's a sobering prospect for other countries in Europe and for the United States, where President Donald Trump has said he aims to have commercial businesses reopen by mid-April, despite warnings from health experts that that is unlikely. There has been no discussion of closing U.S. manufacturing as a nationwide measure.

Unions in Italy have fought especially hard to have more sectors considered nonessential in order to protect workers. They won limits on activity at call centers as well as the production of plastic packaging, some paper and chemical products.

The powerful CGIL union confederation had said the government's initial list counted 800,000 companies as essential, with workers numbering 7.5 million, or 57% of the workplace.

Italy's moribund car industry has already been idled voluntarily, with Fiat Chrysler shutting down most of its Italian production and Ferrari converting a part of its factory to help make respirators. The tourism industry has been at a standstill for a month, and struggling Alitalia is virtually shut down. All non-essential commercial and retail activity was shuttered more than two weeks ago.

Premier Giuseppe Conte announced the new industry closures this weekend, citing the biggest emergency the country has faced since World War II. Industrial activities allowed to continue include many related to health care, agriculture and food production.

Under the measures, fashion house Prada said it will start producing 80,000 medical overalls and 110,000 masks for health care workers, and the Armani Group was converting to make single-use medical overalls. Work on a Genoa bridge to replace the one that fatally collapsed in August 2018 - considered of strategic importance - continued, while that on the Italian side of the Brenner Base Tunnel, which will be the longest rail tunnel in the world when completed, was suspended along with work on the Italian side of a high-speed rail tunnel to France.

In all, hundreds of thousands of small, medium-sized and large companies will be closed, with workers receiving partial salaries under short-term unemployment schemes that have been extended to even the smallest businesses.

They include Pirelli tiremaker, with Italy accounting for just 6% of global production, and Luxottica, the largest eyewear manufacturer in the world whose brands include Ray-Ban and Oakley.

The big concern for the small and medium-sized company owners that power Italy's economy is how long the shutdown will last, and how hard that will hurt cash-flow and hinder a smooth return to business.

"If the shut-down is two or three months, it might be as simple as turning a light back on, because supply chains and logistics are very efficient," said Carlo Salvato, an expert in small and medium business at Bocconi University. "But if the shutdown is longer and precipitates a deep slide in wealth, the patterns of

consumption could change dramatically.”

Olivari is a family-run maker of door handles based in northern province of Novara that survived two world wars, during which it was converted to munitions production due to its expertise with brass and aluminum. But in this shut down - despite the war metaphors - there is no war machine to balance losses from the forced closure.

Antonio Olivari, head of research and development, said the business, which counts 80 workers and annual revenue of around 15 million euros, can bounce back from two weeks or a month of a shut down. “It makes no sense to produce now anyway, with hardware stores and other channels closed,” he said. But if it drags on for months, issues emerge, like salaries.

And people’s priorities and habits could be different after this crisis, Olivari said. “Will people still want to invest in finishing or remodeling a home? There may be other priorities. It will be an anomaly that we have never experienced.”

Virus takes toll on US military as it tries to aid civilians

By ROBERT BURNS and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The coronavirus is taking a growing toll on the U.S. military, and commanders and senior officials are bracing for worse. From nuclear missile fields at home to war zones abroad, from flight lines to ships at sea, the Pentagon is striving to shield vital missions even as it faces urgent calls for help on the civilian front.

Training exercises big and small, including one of the largest in Europe since the end of the Cold War, have been curtailed. Army recruiting stations have closed. Troops around the globe are hunkering down to confront an enemy unlike anything the world’s most lethal armed forces have encountered before.

“It’s unprecedented in my lifetime,” Defense Secretary Mark Esper said, adding that he believes that “in a period of months” the worst will be over and the force will once again be “fully mission capable.”

Until then, the ramifications of COVID-19 for the military are likely to expand. There are worries, for example, about the defense industry being weakened and key weapons development slowed.

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, says that in a worse-case scenario, the military will lose some of its preparedness for combat and other missions. But the impact is likely to be “moderate to minor to low in terms of its risk” to national defense, he told reporters on Monday.

“I’m just not in a place right now where I can give you an accurate description of what that’s going to look like,” he said.

The Pentagon budget also is taking a hit, although a coronavirus relief bill working its way through Congress would provide billions for the growing list of new expenses, including loans to industry that would enable accelerated production of medical equipment like ventilators and respiratory masks for civilian use.

Many of America’s closest allies are waging their own COVID-19 battles, including Britain, Germany, Italy, France and other NATO partners, as well as South Korea, which hosts about 28,500 U.S. troops. At least temporarily, the pandemic has taken the edge off conflict in some of the globe’s major flashpoints, such as Iran, as governments focus on fighting the disease inside their own borders.

Gen. Joseph Lengyel, chief of the National Guard Bureau, which is accustomed to responding to single-event domestic natural disasters like a flood or hurricane, said the coronavirus outbreak is akin to having hurricanes of varying ferocity hit every U.S. state and territory, as well as the District of Columbia.

“This is a historic event that will require a historic response,” Lengyel said.

The Guard has been mobilized by every state governor and in three territories. In Washington, California and New York the federal government is footing the bill. As of Wednesday, more than 10,000 Guard members were on duty. The active-duty military also is helping, with three field hospitals deploying to New York and Washington, and Navy hospital ships expected in Los Angeles and New York.

The Guard is chipping in with a range of expertise, including what it calls weapons of mass destruction teams that are helping set up drive-thru testing stations.

No U.S. military member is known to have died from COVID-19, although infections are spreading.

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Brig. Gen. Paul Friedrichs, the top doctor on the staff of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Wednesday it appears highly likely that the spread inside the military will continue. Over the next three weeks, which he said is as far ahead as modeling data can reliably support a forecast, "we think we're going to see this — no surprise — continue to grow." His comment aligns with those of many others in the medical community and across the military, standing in contrast to President Donald Trump's statements about starting to return the country to normalcy by Easter.

As of Thursday, 280 of the 1.4 million-strong active duty force had been confirmed with the disease, up from 51 a week earlier.

"Our curve is not flattening," Friedrichs said.

The virus has penetrated the Pentagon, but with modest impact thus far as Esper and Milley remain at work in the military headquarters. As a precaution, Esper and the deputy defense secretary, David Norquist, are being kept physically separated. On Monday, the building's health risk alert level was raised a notch, and on Wednesday Esper ordered the higher alert level for all Defense Department sites worldwide.

In a virtual town hall meeting with Defense Department employees, Esper on Tuesday said his top priority is protecting troops and their families, but he noted that the military cannot function free of risk.

"You can't do social distancing in a submarine or even a tank," he said.

Navy ships have stopped port visits abroad, except when resupply or maintenance requires it. On Thursday the Navy said eight sailors aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt tested positive after the aircraft carrier made a port visit in Vietnam. A short time later, officials said the number was rising rapidly and was in the "dozens." This was the first reported time the virus has struck a warship at sea. The carrier was being diverted to Guam on Thursday, and all 5,000 aboard are to be tested. In general, the virus has been slower to disable a generally younger and healthier military population.

Not every ounce of normalcy has drained from the military establishment, but many of the problems and projects that dominated the defense scene just weeks ago have lost some of their immediacy — the ongoing battles against the Islamic State group, the drawing down of troops in Afghanistan, the stand-up of a Space Force, the grand plan for shifting the military's focus toward China.

This sudden shift has echoes of September 2001. One day before the terrorist attacks, then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was making a public pitch for combating bureaucratic waste in the Pentagon, a campaign that fell to the wayside as the nation geared up for war against al-Qaida and the Taliban.

Military commanders have been taking steps to protect and isolate key troops such as those on counter-terrorism teams, security forces and air crews. Officials acknowledge growing concern about U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, where thousands of locals who had been in neighboring Iran have streamed back across borders.

So far, no U.S. service member in Iraq, Syria or Afghanistan is known to have tested positive for the virus, but a couple dozen have shown symptoms and are in isolation. Navy Capt. Bill Urban, spokesman for U.S. Central Command, said two U.S. sailors tested positive in Bahrain earlier this week. Across the Mideast, about 1,500 U.S. troops are in precautionary quarantine.

In Iraq, commanders have moved U.S.-led coalition troops off smaller bases and sent some out of the country after the Iraqi government suspended all military training.

Though little discussed in public, the U.S. has made significant adjustments to ensure that the nation's strategic nuclear forces — the bombers, submarines and land-based missiles that form the U.S. nuclear "triad" — remain at the ready. For example, airmen who operate and secure Minuteman 3 nuclear missiles on the Great Plains are doing longer tours in the missile fields and self-isolating afterward.

The Navy has paused some phases of initial training for its elite SEAL force. Navy Capt. Tamara Lawrence, a spokeswoman for Naval Special Warfare Command, said an eight-week pause is affecting three training sections. She said early training that pushes new candidates to the limit was paused because the extremely strenuous requirements can risk affecting their immune systems.

Lawrence said there is no current expectation that the pause will affect the Navy's ability to fill its need for SEALs and the personnel who drive their boats.

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The Army's specialized Green Berets are continuing field training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, although some classroom training has been shifted online.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

Meghan to narrate Disney nature film in first post-royal job

LONDON (AP) — Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, has her first post-royal job: narrating a Disney documentary about elephants.

Disney announced Thursday that the duchess, who is married to Britain's Prince Harry, is lending her voice to "Elephant," to be released April 3 on the Disney+ streaming service. It's one of a series of animal- and nature-themed features released to mark Earth Month.

The film follows an elephant family on a 1,000-mile (1,600-kilometer) journey across the Kalahari Desert.

Harry and Meghan shocked the world in January by announcing that they were quitting as senior royals, relinquishing official duties and seeking financial independence. Since late last year they have been based on Vancouver Island, and will officially end royal duties on March 31.

The grandson of Queen Elizabeth II married the American actress Meghan Markle at Windsor Castle in May 2018, in a ceremony watched by millions around the world. The couple later said they found scrutiny by the British media — which they said tipped into harassment — intolerable.

Dreaming of lottery riches? Virus could cut jackpots

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Hoping to escape all the coronavirus-caused economic uncertainty by winning a giant lottery jackpot?

Think again. Those jackpots are going to shrink as the pandemic tamps down lottery sales.

The group that oversees the Powerball game announced Wednesday night that it would cut minimum jackpots in half, from \$40 million to \$20 million, after there is a winner of the current big prize. The jackpot also could grow more slowly, with minimum increases of \$2 million instead of the normal \$10 million after each twice-weekly drawing.

"Powerball players in many U.S. lottery jurisdictions are under shelter-in-place orders or recommendations from their governors or mayors, which have affected normal consumer behaviors," said Gregory Mineo, the director of the Maine lottery and chairman of the Powerball Product Group. "Just like other enterprises around the world that are making adjustments, we are making proactive changes to continue to offer the world's premier lottery product."

The other national lottery game in the United States, Mega Millions, is considering a similar move.

"The Mega Millions Consortium has begun internal discussions about potential changes to address the slowdown in sales during the current health crisis," said Gordon Medenica, who heads the Maryland lottery and is director of the national game.

Medenica notes, however, that Mega Millions has a minimum increase of \$5 million after each drawing so is in better position to weather the decreased sales.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, or death.

The move by Powerball won't affect the current \$160 million jackpot, which will continue to rise by at least \$10 million until there is a winner.

Another thing that won't change is the odds of winning a jackpot, and they're puny for both games. For Powerball, the odds are one in 292.2 million, and for Mega Millions they're one in 302.6 million.

Powerball and Mega Millions are played in 45 states plus Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Powerball also is offered in Puerto Rico.

Many businesses cautious about restarting economy amid virus

By MICHELLE R. SMITH and DEE-ANN DURBIN Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — President Donald Trump wants the country open for business by mid-April, but some experts warn it's not as easy as flipping a switch: Economies run on confidence, and that is likely to be in short supply for as long as coronavirus cases in the United States are still rising.

Trump this week said he wants businesses "opened up and just raring to go by Easter," which falls on April 12. That contradicts many public health experts, who warn that restrictions should only be lifted gradually and once more data about infection rates is available. They expect efforts to curb the disease will continue for several months at least.

Despite wild swings in financial markets and signs that unemployment is surging — both of which could hurt Trump in an election year — many businesses say it's not clear that reopening will be even an option in a few weeks: They have to follow the orders set in each state, and many of those are open ended or could be extended at any time. They are worried that opening too soon could be seen as irresponsible. And even if they did reopen, would customers come if the virus isn't under control?

"He's not being realistic. How can you open if the cases are climbing day after day?" asked Paul Boutros, who owns East Side Pockets, a small restaurant that has lost most of its business since nearby Brown University sent students home two weeks ago.

Business groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Federation of Independent Business, are cautious. They say reopening is a call health experts will have to make; in the meantime, they're focused on getting financial help for businesses.

Some business leaders and workers, of course, back the idea of a shorter shutdown. In a weekend post on Twitter, former Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein said those at lower risk should return to work in a few weeks.

"Extreme measures to flatten the virus 'curve' is sensible — for a time — to stretch out the strain on health infrastructure. But crushing the economy, jobs and morale is also a health issue — and beyond," he said.

Taggart Barron, who is in finance and is working from his home in Bentonville, Arkansas, during the outbreak, said he would go into the office more if he were allowed — and that would mean he would be spending more, too, like on lunches out.

"I worry about the human and economic impact of a forced shutdown with no defined end in sight," said Barron. "We are killing a fly with a missile."

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo — whose dire warnings and sometimes scolding tone in his daily briefings have often made him a foil for Trump during the outbreak — has suggested a staged opening eventually. He said that perhaps younger people who appear to be less affected or people who had recovered from the virus — if scientists are able to confirm that means they have immunity — could start to go back to work.

Cuomo said there was no need to "choose between a smart health strategy and smart economic strategy. We can do both and we must do both."

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness and death.

In Europe, government and industry leaders are debating the extent of the shutdown and which sectors are "essential." In Italy, which leads the world in deaths from the virus, the government is tightening its lockdown further, while French President Emmanuel Macron recently urged employees in key industries to continue showing up for work. Three months after the start of the outbreak in China, business has not yet returned to normal.

But as difficult as it was to shut down large parts of the American economy, restarting them may be even harder, especially if it happens while there is still uncertainty about the outbreak's trajectory. If a restart comes too early, it could also further fuel the pandemic, in which more than 20,000 people have already died globally.

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Economic research on previous pandemics that weren't as severe has found that people voluntarily pulled back on shopping, travel and other activity to avoid exposure from crowds, according to Constance Hunter, chief economist at KPMG. So consumer spending would likely remain weak even if businesses largely reopened.

"It's very tough to say to people, 'Hey, keep going to restaurants, go buy new houses, ignore that pile of bodies over in the corner. We want you to keep spending because there's some politician who thinks GDP growth is what really counts,'" Bill Gates, a major philanthropist to global public health efforts, said in an interview that was part of a series organized by TED.

The travel industry, for one, expects that even if severe restrictions are lifted after three months, demand for air travel will be weakened by the loss of jobs and consumer confidence, according to an analysis released Tuesday by the International Air Transport Association, an industry trade group. The association expects global passenger demand to be down 65% in the April-June period. By the fourth quarter, that could narrow to a 10% decline, the group said.

There are also added burdens on workers these days that could make a partial reopening difficult. Many people in the workforce have family members at home that might need care or who are vulnerable to the virus or the workers may themselves be quarantined, noted Laurie White, president of the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce. In many places, schools are closed for the foreseeable future, so caring for their children may prevent some from returning to work.

The cost of the virus will have to be paid one way or another, said Gabriel Ehrlich, director of the Research Seminar in Quantitative Economics at the University of Michigan. We can pay it now, by using shutdowns to slow down the virus' spread while we ramp up our ability to manage it, or later, in the form of increased public health costs if infections surge.

"I don't want to downplay or minimize the fact that there are really substantial economic costs," Ehrlich said. "But the reality is getting the disease under control is also beneficial for the economy."

James Mark, who owns the restaurants North and Big King in Providence, said pushing to restart the economy before the health crisis is over would put businesses like his in a terrible position. As things are now, there's some leverage for small businesses to negotiate with landlords or banks over rents, mortgages and debt payments. If things reopened while the coronavirus was still spreading, he'd be under pressure to put his staff and customers at risk to pay those bills.

"I don't think there's any economic solution until the health side of this gets solved," Mark said. "We can't rush this."

Durbin reported from Ann Arbor, Michigan. Associated Press writer Chris Rugaber in Washington contributed to this report.

The beat goes on: Locked-down Berlin clubs take party online

By JONA KALLGREN Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Locked down due to the coronavirus pandemic, the nightclubs in the German capital have decided to keep the beat going — at least online.

Berlin's nightclubs were closed March 13 to help slow the spread of the virus. In response, some of them formed a streaming platform to let DJs, musicians and artists continue performing.

The first livestream of the "United We Stream" project took place last week from the stage of Watergate, a nightclub housed in a former office building by the river Spree in the city's Kreuzberg district. The shows run each night from different clubs between 7 p.m. and midnight (6 p.m. to 11 p.m. GMT).

Stephan Langer, who lives in the state of Brandenburg, found the stream on Facebook and has been watching and listening almost every night. The free broadcast has been a life raft for him and others coping with quarantine requirements and the ban on most social gatherings.

The music "always makes me happy, so now I'm always in a good mood at home," he said, adding "I can close my eyes and dance and just feel free."

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The other advantage for Langer, who communicated via Facebook, is that the clubs change. "I get to go to some clubs where I've never actually been. And I get to listen to new DJs," he said.

It's free to watch, but the Clubcomission, the group representing the clubs that initiated the project, is seeking donations to support the clubs and the performers.

"Right now, all the clubs are closed, of course," said Lutz Leichsenring, the spokesman for Clubcomission. "There are no clubs making any money in any way. This platform is meant to at least cover the most necessary costs and to prevent insolvencies."

So far, it seems to be working. Scores of people have been tuning in to the broadcasts and opening their pocketbooks.

After the first weekend of streaming, produced by the TV channels ARTE and RBB, more than 270,000 euros (\$292,000) had been raised.

Berlin's hedonistic nightlife is world famous. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, many large buildings stood empty, and some were converted into clubs that played mostly electronic music and stayed open 24 hours a day on weekends.

If the clubs disappear, Leichsenring said, the city stands to lose part of its identity.

"The clubs in Berlin are a part of the DNA of this city," he said. "If that were to fall apart, and the city just becomes filled with large companies and chain stores, then Berlin would look very different. That would be a real shame."

Langer, for one, thinks the role of the clubs can't be overstated, especially during the uncertain times brought on by the coronavirus.

"I think it is really important to save the Clubs because they give you a chance to feel free for one night, to forget the problems and just have fun," he said.

While nonstop global news about the effects of the coronavirus have become commonplace, so, too, are the stories about the kindness of strangers and individuals who have sacrificed for others. "One Good Thing" is an AP continuing series reflecting these acts of kindness.

The G20 video call: In virus era, even summits are virtual

By TAMER FAKAHANY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The face-to-face tension among foes was gone. So was the in-person camaraderie among allies.

Gone were the impromptu and urgent "bilats" — bilateral meetings between leaders to iron out a sticking point. Gone was the image of one leader leaning over another seated counterpart, whispering into an ear in a conspiratorial fashion before, perhaps, they shared a laugh. Gone, for now, were the lavish dinners and toasts honed to the host nation's cultural traditions.

Like much else in the time of coronavirus, governing as a global leader attending high-level summitry has been unceremoniously upended.

Thursday's virtual meeting of the Group of 20 nations, with more than a dozen heads of state participating, was less a global summit and more of a high-powered conference call. It lasted about 90 minutes — the same as a standard soccer match — instead of the usual, more languid two days.

Hangzhou, Hamburg, Buenos Aires and Osaka had been the hosts for the previous years' gatherings. For 2020, it was to be Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Chaired by Saudi King Salman, who is presiding over the G20 this year, the meeting's purpose was to tackle the pandemic and its economic implications as people lose their incomes amid closures, curfews and lockdowns.

In opening remarks, the Saudi king said, "This human crisis requires a global response. The world counts on us to come together and cooperate in order to face this challenge."

But coming together never seemed more of a metaphor than it did at this particular "gathering."

Extraordinary images emerged on social media of conference call gallery shots — the kind that legions

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around the world, pushed into working from home, have become accustomed to seeing in recent days. Instead of unshaven or dressed down colleagues, there were U.S. President Donald Trump, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, India's Narendra Modi, French President Emmanuel Macron and Canada's Justin Trudeau, among others, interacting in pixels with the Saudi monarch.

Instead of wall-to-wall live video coverage and photographers' cameras snapping, the only indication the virtual summit had started was a lone ticker on Saudi TV.

What else does the virtual summitry cause? It makes transparency even more of an issue. There were no media briefings where journalists could ask probing questions of leaders or their deputies. There were no aides walking the sidelines, available to the news media to clarify, add context and answer probing questions.

For Saudi Arabia, this was not what it expected or wished. When its crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, attended the G20 summit in Argentina at the end of 2018, it was largely as a pariah. Video showed him standing alone, apart, after global revulsion at the slaying of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the kingdom's consulate in Istanbul. The blame from many quarters was resting firmly at his door.

Then came some salvation: Russia's President Vladimir Putin steadfastly made his way to bin Salman, and they exchanged a robust high-five with a wide smile. For better or for worse, these are the type of personal moments that define high-level summits.

There was no such moment Thursday. There were only pixels and screens, digitized audio and leaders in rooms scattered across a beleaguered planet. When the world's leaders came together on Thursday, they did it separately. And then — with no ceremony, no meal, no shared group photo — they hung up and went about their ever more uncertain days.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Tamer Fakahany is AP's deputy director for global news coordination and has helped direct international coverage for the AP for 17 years. Follow him on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/tamer-fakahany>.

Smaller communities prepare for onslaught of virus patients

By **RUSS BYNUM** and **REBECCA SANTANA** Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) — It started with an infected person from out of town who attended a funeral. Now the largest hospital in Georgia's mostly rural southwest corner is rapidly running out of space amid the highest rate of coronavirus infection in the entire state.

At Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital in Albany, Georgia, intensive care beds are filled with COVID-19 patients, employees are hand-sewing masks to help stretch dwindling supplies, and every day is a struggle.

The rampant infections in New York City have dominated much of the national conversation about the disease. But far from the coasts, smaller communities are also preparing for things to get worse, and in places such as Albany, it's already happening.

"I can't tell you how it's going to be Friday, much less in the week after," said Scott Steiner, CEO of the four-hospital health system that includes Phoebe Putney Memorial.

The situation in Georgia reflects a reality on the ground that is at odds with President Donald Trump's repeated vow to have the the American economy up and running by Easter. Albany is already out of intensive-care beds. Louisiana authorities estimate that New Orleans could be inundated by the end of next week. The Wisconsin governor projects 1,000 deaths before Easter.

Roughly 90,000 people live in Albany and surrounding Dougherty County. The virus' effect has been outsized compared with the community's population. Infections countywide have surpassed 100, including seven deaths, making it Georgia's hardest-hit county outside metro Atlanta.

And there's no sign of the crisis peaking soon. On Wednesday, the hospital was still waiting on 900 test results.

For most people, the virus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can

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cause more severe illness, including pneumonia, and death.

Smaller communities often compete against larger cities or states when it comes to buying the gowns, face shields or masks that are crucial to safeguarding hospital staff. In Louisiana, Gov. John Bel Edwards has repeatedly sounded the alarm about how his state has the third-highest rate of confirmed virus cases per capita while also noting the difficulty of getting supplies.

"I hope we can get to a different place nationally soon as to how (personal protective equipment) and ventilators are being managed because quite frankly, Louisiana cannot compete with New York and its purchasing power," the governor said recently, noting that even New York isn't getting what it needs.

In New Orleans, doctors and hospital officials are seeing an increased number of patients needing intensive care and working to avoid the possible overwhelming of their systems. Louisiana officials are considering housing patients in hotels and a convention center in New Orleans.

Executives with Ochsner Health system, which has facilities across much of south Louisiana, said they've urged staff to conserve personal protective equipment — in some cases safely reusing masks and patients' gowns — to avoid falling short as needs rise.

Staff members — including nurses and medical assistants — are being redeployed from outpatient clinics to help at hospitals, and doctors are having to learn to work outside their usual skill set. Surgeons and anesthesiologists are pressed into service in intensive-care units, guided by ICU doctors.

In Rooks County in northwest Kansas, home to about 5,000 people, five doctors gathered Wednesday at the county's hospital in Plainville to refresh their training on using the five ventilators available to them. Dr. Beth Oller, who has a family practice in Stockton, said she's been collecting videos from medical personnel around the country to assist with the refresher course.

The county has yet to see a confirmed coronavirus case, but that might be just a matter of time. Oller's practice, Post Rock Family Medicine, has submitted more than two dozen tests to a private lab. Oller is worried the hospital won't have enough personnel to do the intensive monitoring ICU patients require, with one nurse for every one or two patients.

Oller said Trump's suggestions that restrictions on people's movements and public gatherings could be loosened by Easter is ridiculous. That would make all the social isolating so far "count for nothing," she said.

"We don't have enough resources now to deal with a first wave. If we have a bad second wave, there's just no way we can confront that," she said.

North Carolina's second largest county, Mecklenburg, had 170 coronavirus cases as of Wednesday morning, and officials ordered residents to shelter in place for three weeks after hospitals warned that the county had just hours to prevent the virus from overwhelming critical services. The stay-at-home order takes effect Thursday.

"We've done hurricanes and we've done tornadoes, and we are even prepared for all those kinds of physical things. But to be able to cope with something that's unknown, that's transmitted from within each other, it's just very, very hard," Charlotte Mayor Vi Lyles said Wednesday during an online news conference.

Eagle County, Colorado, home to Vail and other ski resorts, has been especially hard hit. Many of the state's first cases originated in the Rocky Mountain county of 54,000, with community spread involving thousands of visitors and locals. Eagle has more than 96 cases, trailing only the Denver and Colorado Springs metropolitan areas. The pandemic could easily overwhelm medical staff and a lone county hospital with 56 beds.

Will Cook, president and CEO of Vail Health, says Eagle County has run the most tests per capita in Colorado, and it's not enough. He published a letter last week saying the real number is more likely hundreds, if not thousands.

Without social distancing, "we will not have enough respirators to keep people alive, and locals of all ages will be dying," Cook said.

In Albany, the hospital hopes for some relief in a second medical complex the system owns across town. They've also asked other hospitals to take some of its patients — with mixed results.

"We try to transfer out patients in critical care that have nothing to do with COVID-19. And they say no,

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because it's the unknown that people fear," he said.

Santana reported from New Orleans. Associated Press writers Sudhin Thanawala in Atlanta, Kevin McGill in New Orleans, James Anderson in Denver and John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas, contributed to this report.

Follow AP coverage of the virus outbreak at <https://apnews.com/VirusOutbreak> and <https://apnews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak>.

TV viewership climbing with people stuck at home by virus

By **DAVID BAUDER** and **LYNN ELBER** AP Television Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — A fixture on television, actress Julie Bowen of "Modern Family" is doing the same thing as millions of other people during the widespread coronavirus shutdown.

She's sitting at home, watching more television than she normally would.

In a world turned upside down by disease, TV viewership is growing. It's a rare bit of good news for an industry that has steadily shrunk, and its executives hope to seize an opportunity by anticipating what a stressed audience wants to see.

Bowen and her children binged on the NBC comedy, "Brooklyn Nine-Nine."

"I'd never seen it and it's super fun," she said. "I'm trying really hard to stay away from anything grim or reality-based right now. I don't want any heavy drama. Can't do it."

Television usage last week was up 8% over what it was in February, according to the Nielsen company. That may not seem like much, but this is the time of year when that statistic usually goes in the opposite direction: with Daylight Savings Time and moderating weather, more people spend time outside and away from the TV.

Not surprisingly, news programming is the biggest beneficiary.

In fact, if you're looking for breakout coronavirus TV stars, consider David Muir of ABC's "World News Tonight" or Lester Holt of NBC's "Nightly News." Both broadcasts had larger audiences last week than anything shown in the prime-time hours.

Twenty years ago the network evening news was considered on the brink of extinction. But more than 32 million people tuned into these broadcasts, along with the "CBS Evening News with Norah O'Donnell," each night for a rundown of the day's top developments.

Other programs that reported, or talked, about the news hit milestones last week. CBS' "Sunday Morning" had its biggest audience last weekend since 1994, and "Face the Nation" since 1991. ABC's "The View" had its most-watched week since January 2019. Same for NBC's "Today" show.

The original TV star-turned-politician, President Donald Trump, is on cable television nearly every day with news conferences, and reached 4.4 million viewers for a Fox News town hall on Tuesday. The impact of that exposure will be seen in November.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, also on cable nearly every day with coronavirus briefings, has a growing fan club.

"I've started laughing at his little jokes," wrote Rebecca Fishbein on Jezebel. "I catch myself touching my hair (not my face!) when he talks about an increase in testing capacity. I swooned when he told a reporter he had his own workout routine ... I think I have a crush???"

Anayo Michel, who owns a dance studio in Valley Stream, New York, credits her incessant watching of CNN's Dr. Sanjay Gupta for a decision to ask some of her instructors — before most people realized how disruptive the outbreak would be — to videotape classroom instruction.

"Sanjay for president!" Michel said.

CNN's daytime viewership last week was up 132% over the same week last year. Fox News Channel (77%) and MSNBC (38%) were also up, Nielsen said.

You can only take so many medical updates, however. Bernadette Scully, who's retired, said her husband drives her nuts by keeping Fox News on all day at the cottage in Cranberry Lake, New Jersey, where they

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are self-quarantining.

"It makes me stressed because you hear it all the time," she said. "My husband says, 'don't listen to it.' But you can't not listen to it."

The news is seeping into prime time entertainment in an unexpected way. Broadcast networks see their 8 p.m. shows doing well in part, they suspect, because many are being shown after expanded local news. Fox's "Last Man Standing" last week, for example, was up 50% in live viewing, Nielsen said.

Otherwise, programmers are waiting to see what these captive viewers want to watch.

"We're dealing with what everybody in the country is dealing with right now," said Nancy Daniels, who runs the Discovery Channel, Science Channel and Animal Planet, "which is what will tomorrow bring? What will next week bring? Or next month?"

Animal Planet last week ran 94 straight hours of cuddly animals romping onscreen, figuring busy parents could run it as a pleasing background that's also safe for the kids.

Daniels said the Discovery-owned networks have shifted daytime lineups to run marathons of some of their most popular shows, reasoning that shut-ins would appreciate the familiarity. On HGTV, that means multiple episodes of "Property Brothers" and "Love it or List it."

"We want viewers to feel like they're hanging out with friends," said Jane Latman, HGTV president.

Fox feels it has an obligation and opportunity to give people a respite from the news with escapist and hopefully positive fare such as "The Masked Singer," said Dan Harrison, Fox Entertainment executive vice president for program planning and content strategy.

"We are all assuming that people would be flocking to see whatever they consider 'comfort food' when it comes to programming right now," said Jeff Bader, NBC president of program planning, strategy and research. "For some people that would be comedy, but for other people it could be old movies or reality shows. One of my colleagues likes horror movies to escape reality."

So far, "Blacklist" is NBC's biggest coronavirus-era winner. Even a long-running success got a boost: CBS' "NCIS" drew about 13 million viewers on Tuesday, its biggest audience in more than a year and a 22% increase over the previous new episode, on March 10.

Bowen's "Modern Family" may benefit. The multiple-E Emmy-winning ABC comedy signs off after 11 seasons on April 8. The network also hopes to gather families with a David Blaine magic special, while CBS will air a James Corden prime-time special.

HBO's streaming service just had its best week since last summer, as viewers have sought favorites like "Big Little Lies" and "Westworld," and oldies like "Sex and the City" and "The Sopranos," said Cheryl Idell, WarnerMedia's top researcher.

Showtime, sensing an opening, is offering a free 30-day trial to non-subscribers.

Between March 3 and 14, Tivo reported a 600% increase in viewing of pandemic-themed fare, like "12 Monkeys," "Contagion" and "Outbreak." The most-requested item on Cinemax's on-demand platform over the past two weeks has been "Contagion."

Not everyone is willing to push the pandemic button, however. NBC announced Wednesday that it was yanking an episode of "New Amsterdam" about a flu epidemic in New York City that had been scheduled to run April 7.

Closed schools have been a lifeline for networks aimed at young people, which for years have been hard hit by parents who prefer on-demand viewing or try to limit screen time. Daytime viewing of children's programming was up 31% last week over the same week a year ago, said the research firm Comscore.

Lisel Doreste-Hamilton, a teacher in Port Orange, Florida, said she just subscribed to Disney programming for her daughter, Celia.

"She's been watching two Marvel movies a day," she said.

Even with all the people stuck at home, CBS had fewer viewers in prime time than the same week a year ago. The cancellation of March Madness is the likely culprit.

Then there's ESPN, left without the chief pillar of its business — live sports programming, and no idea when it will return. It is scrambling to fill the time, importing professional wrestling, airing again its award-

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winning documentary, "OJ: Made in America," and negotiating with leagues to rerun old games and events. There's been a lot of talk about NFL free agency and the upcoming draft.

Then, of course, there was ESPN's coverage of the Cherry Pit Spitting Championship from Eau Claire, Michigan.

Under the circumstances, ESPN's drop in viewership from the same week a year ago — 820,000 to 550,000 — could have been worse.

Elber reported from Los Angeles.

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Friday, March 27, the 87th day of 2020. There are 279 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On March 27, 2006, Al-Qaida conspirator Zacarias Moussaoui (zak-uh-REE'-uhs moo-SOW'-ee) testified at his federal trial that he was supposed to hijack a fifth airplane on Sept. 11, 2001, and fly it into the White House.

On this date:

In 1513, Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon (hwahn pahns duh LEE'-ohn) sighted present-day Florida.

In 1933, Japan officially withdrew from the League of Nations.

In 1945, during World War II, General Dwight D. Eisenhower told reporters in Paris that German defenses on the Western Front had been broken.

In 1958, Nikita Khrushchev became Soviet premier in addition to First Secretary of the Communist Party.

In 1964, Alaska was hit by a magnitude 9.2 earthquake (the strongest on record in North America) and tsunamis that together claimed about 130 lives.

In 1968, Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin (gah-GAH'-rihn), the first man to orbit the Earth in 1961, died when his MiG-15 jet crashed during a routine training flight near Moscow; he was 34.

In 1973, "The Godfather" won the Academy Award for best picture of 1972, but its star, Marlon Brando, refused to accept his Oscar for best actor. Liza Minnelli won best actress for "Cabaret."

In 1975, construction began on the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, which was completed two years later.

In 1977, in aviation's worst disaster, 583 people were killed when a KLM Boeing 747, attempting to take off in heavy fog, crashed into a Pan Am 747 on an airport runway on the Canary Island of Tenerife (ten-uh-REEF').

In 1980, 123 workers died when a North Sea floating oil field platform, the Alexander Kielland, capsized during a storm.

In 1990, the U.S. began test broadcasts of TV Marti to Cuba, which promptly jammed the signal.

In 2005, Pope John Paul II delivered an Easter Sunday blessing to tens of thousands of people in St. Peter's Square, but the ailing pontiff was unable to speak and managed only to greet the saddened crowd with a sign of the cross. In a live Internet interview with the Rev. Jesse Jackson, Michael Jackson declared himself "completely innocent" of child molestation charges, and said he was the victim of a conspiracy.

Ten years ago: Lights were switched off across the world from 8:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. local time to mark Earth Hour, an event organized by the World Wildlife Fund to highlight concerns about global warming. President Barack Obama announced he would bypass a vacationing Senate and name 15 people to key administration jobs using recess appointments. Mao Asada of Japan beat Olympic champion Yuna Kim of South Korea to win her second title at the World Figure Skating Championships, held in Turin, Italy.

Five years ago: Italy's highest court overturned the murder conviction of Amanda Knox and her ex-boyfriend in the 2007 slaying of Knox's roommate, bringing to a definitive end the high-profile case that had captivated trial-watchers on both sides of the Atlantic. U.S. Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., announced he would retire the following year.

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One year ago: A Wisconsin man, Jake Patterson, pleaded guilty to kidnapping 13-year-old Jayme Closs and killing her parents; the plea spared the girl from the possible trauma of having to testify at his trial. (Patterson was sentenced to life in prison.) Facebook said it was extending its ban on hate speech to prohibit the promotion and support of white nationalism and white separatism.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Julian Glover is 85. Actor Jerry Lacy is 84. Hall of Fame racer Cale Yarborough is 81. Actor-director Austin Pendleton is 80. Actor Michael York is 78. Rock musician Tony Banks (Genesis) is 70. Rock musician Andrew Farriss (INXS) is 61. Jazz musician Dave Koz (kahz) is 57. Movie director Quentin Tarantino is 57. Rock musician Derrick McKenzie (Jamiroquai) is 56. Rock musician Johnny April (Staind) is 55. Actress Talisa Soto is 53. Actor Ben Koldyke is 52. Actress Pauley Perrette is 51. Singer Mariah Carey is 50. Rock musician Brendan Hill (Blues Traveler) is 50. Actress Elizabeth Mitchell is 50. Actor Nathan Fillion is 49. Hip-hop singer Fergie is 45. Jazz musician Tia Fuller is 44. Actress Emily Ann Lloyd is 36. MLB catcher Buster Posey is 33. Actress Brenda Song is 32. Pop singer-songwriter Kimbra is 30. Actress Taylor Atelian is 25. Actress/R&B singer Halle Bailey is 20. Classical crossover singer Amira Willighagen (TV: "Holland's Got Talent") is 16.

Thought for Today: "Fear grows in darkness; if you think there's a bogeyman around, turn on the light."
— Dorothy Thompson, American journalist (1894-1961).