

Second wave of coronavirus pandemic hits New York and New Jersey

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The coronavirus pandemic is resurging in New York and New Jersey, which were the global epicenter of the pandemic for much of the spring, prompting totally inadequate responses from their state governments. Cases, test positivity rates, hospitalizations and deaths have begun rising in both states after months of relatively low numbers, even while the rest of the country experienced worsening conditions.

The most recent testing data for New York show that more than 3 percent of COVID-19 tests came back positive on Nov. 16—the first time since May that such a benchmark had been met. The seven-day rolling average was 2.9 percent, indicating that community transmission is steadily growing out of control. The Mid-Hudson region and Central New York have more than 4 percent test positivity; Western New York was at 6.5 percent on Monday.

Raw case numbers are likewise growing to levels not seen since the spring, recently reaching over 4,000 per day (and over 5,000 on Tuesday) compared to 600–700 daily during the summer.

Nearly 2,000 New Yorkers are hospitalized, a level also not seen since May. In the past month alone hospitalizations have doubled. Deaths are also beginning to climb; on Nov. 16 COVID-19 killed 36 people, bringing the state's total deaths over 34,000, an underestimate given dismal testing in the early stages of the pandemic.

The situation is similar in New Jersey, which was even worse hit on a per capita basis than New York earlier in the year.

New cases have risen to over 4,000, with 4,026 cases Nov. 16. The test positivity rate has also risen substantially, hitting 12.1 percent on Nov. 17, a level not seen since May. COVID-19 killed 20 people in New Jersey on Nov. 16.

Both states are experiencing a rate of reproduction of greater than 1, meaning that each sick person will pass along COVID-19 to more than just a single person on average. Rt.live, which estimates the reproduction rate based on data from the COVID Tracking Project, estimates New Jersey's rate at 1.24 and New York's at 1.23, both toward the high end of the spectrum of US states despite the large case numbers in other states.

These reproduction rates mean that if the pandemic is not curbed immediately, both states will see cases in the tens of thousands daily again, overwhelming the health care system and heralding a return of the scenes of the spring: mass graves, bodies stacked in portable morgues and health care workers pushed past the brink.

Given the scale of the disaster approaching—with the disastrous first wave fresh in millions of minds and the present scenes from across the country playing out in the news—the response of the state governments has been nothing short of criminal. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy, both Democrats, have implemented the most meager restrictions at a time period when decisive measures now could save thousands or tens of thousands of lives, just as the delays in the spring killed tens of thousands.

With much economic activity resumed across the region, Cuomo announced that as of Nov. 13, bars and restaurants with liquor licenses as well as gyms would have to close at 10 p.m. and private gatherings would be capped at 10 people.

New Jersey is likewise limiting indoor gatherings to 10 people as well as reducing percentage capacity for religious services and weddings.

To call such measures “inadequate” is being generous. There are no substantial restrictions on factories and other workplaces, educational facilities

and most dining, the 10 p.m. curfew notwithstanding. These are the three areas identified in detailed data compiled by the Illinois Department of Public Health as the largest centers of COVID-19 outbreaks in that state.

New York City schools have been kept open for in-person classes, with parents and educators alike waiting to hear each day if the schools will be closed due to rising test positivity rates. Besides causing unnecessary stress and creating the need for back-up plans, each extra day of instruction during rising cases provides opportunities for cases to spread in the schools. The Democratic Party-aligned *New York Times* has been among the main voices demanding schools be kept open so that workers remain on the job, even at the cost of indoor dining, which was also dangerous to resume.

Workers in New York and New Jersey have sacrificed much in the fight against COVID-19. Cases have been kept fairly low over the summer months in large part due to adherence to physical distancing measures and mask wearing. Parents have kept hundreds of thousands of New York City schoolchildren in online classes rather than engage in the dangerous “hybrid” teaching. Similarly, economic activity has dramatically declined in large part due to the lack of support provided to workers and small businesses during the lockdowns in the spring.

With vaccines in an advanced stage of development, workers cannot allow for cases to rise and unnecessary deaths to happen on a mass scale again. They must fight for the closure of all nonessential workplaces and full compensation for workers and small businesses.



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