New York, California ordered locked down in response to COVID-19

By Bryan Dyne
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New York Governor Andrew Cuomo today announced that the state will be under lockdown starting Sunday evening at 8pm until further notice. Cuomo’s statement was issued the day after California Governor Gavin Newsom ordered his state’s 40 million people to “stay home or at their place of residence.” In both states, essentially all forms of social gatherings have been effectively banned in an effort to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These orders were mirrored by the governors of Connecticut and Illinois. By Sunday evening, some 75 million people and more than a fifth of the United States population will be under some form of state-level executive order to stay indoors. The only exceptions will be if they are getting essential supplies or employed in “federal critical infrastructure sectors,” as defined by the Department of Homeland Security.

Workers forced to stay on the job include those in “medical and healthcare, telecommunications, information technology systems, defense, food and agriculture, transportation and logistics, energy, water and wastewater, law enforcement, and public works.” There are at the same time no provisions to provide the necessary personal protective equipment or sanitizer to prevent the spread of the coronavirus at these workplaces, placing these workers at great risk of infection and possibly death.

Twenty-eight states have also mobilized parts of their Army and Air National Guard, according to the Military Times. While these units are ostensibly being used to collect virus samples and provide relief supplies, it is an indication that they will be used to enforce the orders of the governors if necessary.

The coronavirus has now infected at least 276,000 people worldwide and killed more than 11,400, nearly double what these figures were a week ago. There were 30,000 new cases in just the past 24 hours. The United States itself has suffered a more than six-fold increase in cases since last Saturday, to 19,522, and a four-fold increase in deaths, now at 262. The number of new cases now exceeds that of Spain and Germany and rivals that of Italy, the new epicenter of the pandemic.

Coronavirus cases are currently mostly concentrated in New York, with 8,402 cases and 46 deaths, followed by Washington, which currently has 1,524 cases and 83 deaths, and California, at 1,249 cases and 24 deaths. Twenty-three other states, however, have at least 100 confirmed cases and no state has less than seven. More than half have at least one death.

New York City is currently facing a massive shortage in medical equipment, with Democratic mayor Bill de Blasio warning that the city’s health system will run out of personal protective supplies in three weeks at most. He has asked for 3 million N95 masks, 50 million surgical masks, 15,000 ventilators and 25 million each of surgical gowns, gloves, coveralls and face masks to handle the surge of coronavirus cases that are expected to come in the next several weeks.

For his part, US President Donald Trump continued his xenophobic characterization of COVID-19, again referring to it at yesterday’s press conference as “the Chinese virus.” He also used the coronavirus as a further excuse to crack down on immigration, stating that “we’ve had this problem for decades, but now with the national emergency … we can actually do something about it.” Trump continued, “This is now at a level nobody has ever approached.” Trump explicitly reassured corporations that trade and cargo would be unaffected.

Amid a widespread shortage of respirators in the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently released guidelines advising
medical professionals providing care to infected
patients to use bandannas to protect themselves from
COVID-19 when surgical masks are unavailable. This
both places the health care providers at higher risk of
becoming infected as well as allows the contagion to
spread even further.

The United States is critically behind other countries
in terms of testing availability, and hospitals are
encouraging suspected coronavirus cases, even if they
have been in contact that has tested positive, not to
show up at emergency rooms unless they have severe
symptoms. By failing to carry out widespread testing,
quarantines, and isolations, the US response risks a
devastating expansion of the pandemic.

“Large scale physical distancing, movement
restriction, are in a sense a temporary measure,” noted
World Health Organization Executive Director Dr.
Michael Ryan yesterday. “What they do is they slow
down to some extent the spread of infection in
communities and thereby take pressure off the
healthcare system. They don't fundamentally deal with
the problem of disease transmission, and if you want to
get back to what countries like Korea are doing, Japan
or China, Singapore, Hong Kong and others. If you
want to get back to that then you really have to get
back to the hard-core public health measures of case
finding, contact tracing, quarantine, isolation.”

WHO spokesperson Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove
continued, saying “Ample testing ... isn't enough. We
know that by finding those cases, isolating cases, and
caring for those cases is critical. Quarantining of your
contacts so that they cannot pass the virus onward is
absolutely critical to stopping transmission moving
between people.”

These statements followed warnings this week from
London’s Imperial College and the Harvard Global
Health Institute, which warned that even with large
scale lockdowns and other interventions, more than 1.1
million people are likely to succumb to the disease in
the US alone.

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