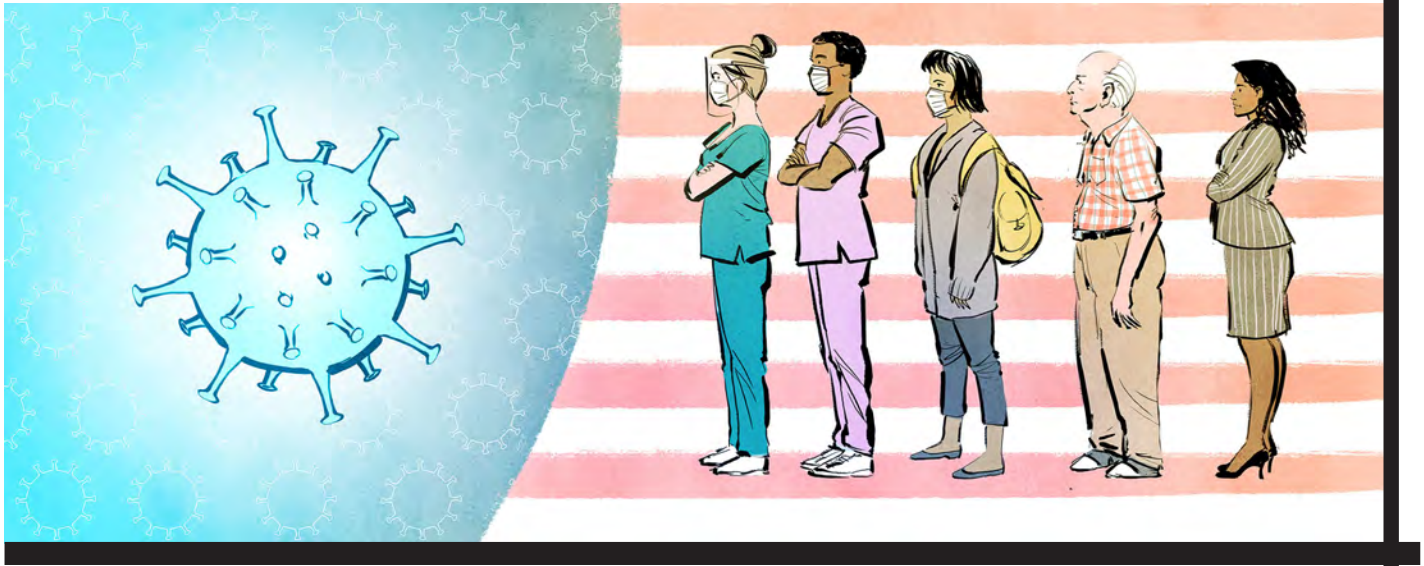




# INTERNATIONAL COVID-19 IN THE UNITED STATES

– THE GOVERNMENT REACTS AS THE DEATH TOLL RISES



Throughout April, COVID-19 continued to spread worldwide. By mid-May, 187 countries reported some four million confirmed cases. About 270,000 people had lost their lives.

The United States alone had more than 1.3 million cases. That's five times as many as any other country.

Worse, almost every day, doctors were finding at least 25,000 new cases in the U.S. That means the total number of cases was increasing by between two and four percent every 24 hours.

## IMPROVEMENTS AND SPIKES

The good news is that the spread of the disease has been easing up in some places that have been hard hit. New York City, the site of the nation's worst outbreak,

is one example. On April 5, America's largest city reported 6000 new cases per day. But by May 5, thanks to self-isolation and social distancing rules, that number dropped to about 500.

The bad news? Incidents of the disease were spiking elsewhere.

"If you include New York, it looks like a **plateau** moving down," said public health expert Andrew Noymer, describing the line on a COVID-19 graph. "If you exclude New York, it's a plateau slowly moving up."

In rural towns that have been virus-free, for example, there has been a scary increase in cases. And in many places, long-term care homes and prisons are just now starting to feel the impact.

Food production facilities have become hotbeds of outbreaks as

well. So many new cases have occurred in meat packing plants that some of these facilities have shut down. As a result, the U.S. may soon face a shortage of beef, pork, and chicken.

## TESTING AND SUPPLY PROBLEMS

How is it that the U.S., usually a leader in disease prevention, finds itself in this grave dilemma? Many observers say officials didn't act quickly enough to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

Inadequate testing was one culprit. Testing is vital because people found to be infected can be quickly isolated to prevent spreading the virus. And the sooner people are treated, the more likely they are to recover.

## DEFINITIONS

**PLATEAU:** a period when something does not increase or advance any further



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Early testing also helps with contact tracing. Contact tracing involves finding those who interacted with an infected person so they can be tested and treated, too.

Yet back in February, the U.S.'s first tests for the virus proved unreliable. Scientists developed new ones, but faced **red tape** to get them approved. Meanwhile, the disease was tightening its grip across the nation.

As well, the U.S. federal government quarreled with some states over who would carry out tests. So the roll-out of testing was disorganized. By early May, when the U.S. should have been testing about 500,000 people a day, it was only screening about half that number.

How else was the U.S. unprepared? Front-line workers began to run out of masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE) in the early spring. That meant many doctors, nurses, and other health care workers could not safeguard their own health or protect patients properly.

This situation arose because the U.S. federal government waited until mid-March before

beginning to order a stockpile of these supplies. By that time, many states were trying to track down their own equipment. That meant states were forced to compete with each other and Washington for the PPE they needed.

## AN ECONOMIC TAILSPIN

In March, U.S. President Donald Trump issued social distancing and shelter-in-place guidelines to try to stop the virus's spread. Frightened Americans listened, and stayed home.

It was the right move, but the economy suffered severely. Without customers and employees, restaurants, nail parlours, sports facilities, clothing stores, and more, closed. Many big firms weren't selling goods or services.

**Commercial** activity plunged.

As a result, by early May the U.S. economy had lost over 20 million jobs. That caused the unemployment rate to rise to 14.7 percent – the highest since the **Great Depression**. Black and Hispanic-American minority communities were hardest hit.

To ease the economic crisis, U.S. leaders voted to enact about \$3 trillion in assistance

programs. That's the largest economic **stimulus** package in U.S. history. The money will help people and businesses of all sizes weather the storm. Still, people were desperate to get back to work.

## OPEN UP OR ELSE!

Now some are getting the chance.

Mr. Trump's shelter in place advisories were just guidelines. Under U.S. law, only state governors can actually order people to stay home. Some governors didn't want to shut their economies. In other places, angry residents insisted that states reopen for business.

Many health officials warned that reopening too quickly would be a serious mistake. Still, by early May, about half of U.S. states were partially reopening. Among them were states like Montana, which had fewer than 500 known cases. But so were states like Indiana, which had over 20,000 cases.

"The math is unfortunately pretty simple. It's not a matter of whether infections will increase but by how much," said **epidemiologist** Jeffrey Shaman. ★

## DEFINITIONS

**COMMERCIAL:** relating to the buying and selling of goods and services

**EPIDEMIOLOGIST:** a scientist who studies the incidence, distribution, and control of disease in a population

**GREAT DEPRESSION:** a severe worldwide economic depression that took place mostly during the 1930s

**RED TAPE:** a series of complicated tasks that seem unnecessary but that a government requires you to do

**STIMULUS:** something that causes something else to happen, develop, or become more active – in this instance, the economy



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**COVID-19 IN THE UNITED STATES**  
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**ON THE LINES**

Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. How many COVID-19 cases were reported worldwide in mid-May?

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2. How many COVID-19 cases were reported in the United States by mid-May?

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3. Which U.S. city has been most affected by COVID-19?

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4. Describe the latest developments in this densely-populated city.

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5. List at least two reasons why testing is so important in trying to slow the spread of COVID-19.

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6. What problems occurred in the U.S. with COVID-19 testing in February?

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7. Why did the U.S. federal government and some states argue about COVID-19 testing?

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8. What directives did the U.S. president give in March to try and contain the virus?

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9. Describe the impact this directive had on the U.S. economy.

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10. How many jobs were lost by early May?

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