

## New York now leads U.S. in confirmed coronavirus cases; county can test for virus



Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo. (Mark Mulville/News file photo)

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New York State now has more confirmed cases of the coronavirus disease than any other state. The state's count of 142 cases tops the state of Washington by one, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said Monday.

No deaths have been reported in New York State.

The vast majority of cases remain downstate, with Westchester County becoming such a hot spot that Cuomo said all schools in New Rochelle will close for “a number of weeks,” based on advice from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The state is also instituting a new protocol for all other schools across the state. If any student tests positive, the student's school will automatically close for a 24-hour period to give school and health officials the opportunity to clean the building, assess and create a plan for how to contain the virus's spread to other students and staff.

Cuomo also said that he is pushing new sick leave legislation to ensure that those who are required to stay home due to voluntary or mandated quarantine continue to be paid by their employers.

Meanwhile, the Erie County Health Department announced Monday that its Public Health Lab now has the capability to test for novel coronavirus, which causes the disease COVID-19. The lab received test supplies and materials from the CDC. The test kits were validated over the weekend. Previously, samples for individuals suspected of having the virus were driven to the Wadsworth lab in Albany.

“Depending on volume, we expect that results will be available to physicians and our department within 24 hours or less, as opposed to the longer turn-around times with commercial labs, the NYSDOH Wadsworth Center and the CDC,” said county Commissioner of Health Dr. Gale Burstein. “These kits are FDA-approved under the current Emergency Use Authorization.”

Currently, the county Health Department will authorize testing for COVID-19 for individuals when:

- An individual has come within proximate contact (same classroom, office, or gatherings) of another person known to be positive,
- An individual has traveled to a country that has a CDC-issued Level 2 or Level 3 travel health notice and shows symptoms of illness,
- An individual under mandatory or precautionary quarantine shows symptoms of COVID-19,

- An individual shows symptoms consistent with COVID-19 and who has not tested positive for any other infection
- Other cases where the facts and circumstances warrant as determined by the treating clinician in consultation with state and local health officials.

The county lab is currently accepting testing samples from other county health departments. If a physician authorizes the diagnostic test for a patient who meets the above criteria, the patient would be immediately placed in mandatory quarantine, which would be lifted if the test result is negative.

At the state level, Cuomo said he asked Vice President Mike Pence to permit private, commercial labs to do automated testing, which would dramatically increase the number of samples that could be tested per day.

To address the shortage of hand sanitizer and price gouging associated with the retail sale of hand sanitizer, the state is also introducing its own brand of much cheaper sanitizer, made by inmates, which will be available to government and public agencies, Cuomo said.

Westchester County had 98 confirmed cases, with 16 more people testing positive, the governor said. New York City and Nassau Counties have the next highest totals, each with fewer than 20 confirmed cases.

Cuomo pointed out, again, that while seniors and those with underlying health conditions remain at higher risk for contracting the virus, or COVID-19, only 6% of all confirmed cases in New York result in hospitalization.

"This is not ebola. This is not SARS," Cuomo said. "This is not some science fiction movie come to life."

As testing capacity for the virus increases in New York State, the governor said he expects the number of confirmed cases will continue to rise.

"These numbers are going to go in one direction, and that is up," Cuomo said. "You're going to see the numbers go up exponentially every day because it's mathematics."

**Story topics:** COVID-19

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