

States Take Harder Line on Fighting Virus

Half of the deaths so far are from Washington

(AP) -- Nearly 7 million people in the San Francisco area were all but confined to their homes Tuesday, while Florida put a damper on spring break and St. Patrick's Day by ordering the closing of all bars, as state and local officials took an increasingly hard line against the coronavirus.

Ohio canceled its presidential

primary hours before the polls were to open, but three other states pressed ahead with their elections, recommending such precautions as putting tape on the floor to keep voters a safe distance apart.

On Wall Street, stocks bounced around in early trading, one day after the worst market loss since the Black Monday crash of 1987.

With the economy grinding to a halt, the White House proposed a roughly \$850 billion rescue package — a sweeping stimulus not seen since the Great Recession of 2008 — and called for its rapid approval.

It would provide relief for small



People wear masks as a precaution to spreading the coronavirus as they commute during rush hour on a subway Tuesday in New York. (AP photo)

businesses, \$50 billion for the airline industry and a big tax cut for wage-earners, said two people familiar with the request who described it on the condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak publicly.

"If we do this right, our country and the world, frankly, but our country can be rolling again pretty quickly," President Donald Trump said.

Officials in six San Francisco Bay Area counties issued a "shelter-in-place" order that went into effect Tuesday, requiring most residents to stay inside and venture out only for food, medicine or exercise for three weeks — the most sweeping lockdown in the U.S. against the outbreak.

"It's really a scary situation for us because if we don't work, we don't eat," lamented Miguel Aguirre, a janitor at San Francisco's Boys and Girls Club.

Coronavirus infections across the country reached approximately 5,200, and the death toll climbed to at least 100, with more than half of the dead from Washington state. Worldwide, more than 7,300 have died.

Over the past day, new and more urgent warnings have come from the White House, which has called on Americans not to gather in groups of more than 10 and advised older people to stay home.

Still, the response across states varied.

While beaches on Florida's Gulf Coast were still open, and at least one was full of spring breakers, Gov. Ron Desantis ordered all the state's bars and nightclubs closed for 30 days and asked Florida's university system to send students home for online instruction for the rest of the spring semester.

Desantis has said he would leave beach restrictions up to local authorities.

In Texas, Gov. Greg Abbott has left many decisions up to local governments. Unlike other governors of heavily populated states, Abbott has not made explicit calls for limiting mass gatherings.

Election officials in Illinois' Cook County, home to Chicago, urged poll workers to use blue painter's tape to mark the floor every 6 feet so voters could keep their distance while waiting in

line.

Meanwhile, millions of Americans were holed up at home, many thrown out of work until further notice as offices, stores and other businesses shut down. School was canceled for tens of millions of students, forcing parents to scramble for child care or find ways to entertain their children.

The rapid work stoppage had Americans fretting about their jobs and their savings, threatened to overwhelm unemployment benefit programs, and heightened fears the country could plunge into a recession.

Most people who come down with the disease have relatively mild symptoms, but it can be deadly for some, especially the elderly and those with underlying health problems. Most people infected with the virus recover in a matter of weeks.

Health officials say that "social distancing" — encouraging people to avoid close contact with others — is a key to slow the spread of the virus and keep U.S. hospitals from being overwhelmed with a sudden deluge of patients.



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