

STATE: Philadelphia, Montgomery counties lead in case numbers

FROM PAGE A1

Philadelphia (865) and Montgomery (488) lead the state in countywide cases. The five-county region near Philadelphia has accounted for 58% of the COVID-19 cases in the state and 15 deaths.

For most people, the virus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia. The vast majority of people recover.

A look at coronavirus-related developments in Pennsylvania:

Nursing home

The medical director at a western Pennsylvania nursing home said 14 residents have become infected with the coronavirus and addi-



Geraldine "Gerrie" Mitchell, left, a resident at St. Joseph's Apartments, is greeted by her granddaughter, Jennifer Frick, on Saturday in Erie.

JACK HANRAHAN / ERIE TIMES-NEWS VIA AP

tional tests are pending. Dr. Dave Thimons told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette that staff are doing what they can to help those affected at the

Brighton Rehabilitation and Wellness Center in Beaver.

There have been 64 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in nursing homes across Penn-

sylvania, and most of them are in the state's southeastern region of Philadelphia and its suburbs.

Thirty-six of the state's 695

nursing homes have confirmed cases. As of three days ago, there had been 33 confirmed COVID-19 cases in 17 Pennsylvania nursing homes, the Health Department said.

At the Brighton facility, most of the positive tests were received on Saturday, the paper said. At least one patient with more severe symptoms was transferred to a hospital but most remain in the 500-bed nursing home. The facility has set up a COVID-19 unit to address the outbreak.

Immigration detainees

Migrant advocates told The Philadelphia Inquirer that immigration detainees began a hunger strike in a central Pennsylvania prison to demand release during the coronavirus pandemic.

Federal immigration authorities told the paper Saturday that some detain-

ees at the York County Prison had recently refused meals, while advocates said it was at least 180 people.

Participants in the hunger strike are worried that prison staff could spread COVID-19 and that detainees who get sick may not receive proper medical care, the paper reported.

Federal help?

Pennsylvania's governor says the state's COVID-19 outbreak response would be helped by a federal major disaster declaration.

Gov. Tom Wolf made a formal request for the declaration on Sunday, saying it would provide additional help to governments responding to the crisis.

Wolf, a Democrat, signed a disaster emergency proclamation for Pennsylvania on March 6 and it remains in effect.



JILL WHALEN / STAFF PHOTO

Justine and Jim Secara of Tommy's Italian Specialty Shop near the five points intersection in Tamaqua are shown with pizzas they gave to the community for free Sunday morning.

PIZZAS: Distribution aimed at needy, elderly

FROM PAGE A1

"We were hoping it would last a little longer but they're dwindling fast," Justine said.

From a counter usually shared by diners who grab over meals and cups of coffee, Jen Lockard ladled sauce onto pizza dough. From there, the rectangular pies got a generous sprinkling of cheese and a few spices. Pizzas were boxed and stacked, only to be handed out within minutes.

Employees prepped 200 pizzas.

"We do have some spare, too, so if we have to run into that, we will," Justine said.

The distribution was aimed at the needy, the elderly and large families.

"If they had five or more kids, we gave them two pizzas," Justine said. "Because what is one pizza going to do for a family of seven or eight?"

Homebound residents were offered home delivery thanks to Mike's Gyros on

East Broad Street, Tamaqua.

"They're the ones who actually came to us to volunteer to deliver the pizzas to people who can't make it here," Justine said. "They're wonderful people. We did come together which is so nice."

Tommy's employees also volunteered their time.

The Tamaqua Drama Club donated cookies, which employee Amy Walburn handed out with the pies.

"We had people lined up at 9 o'clock," she said, even though the distribution was scheduled to begin at 10:30 a.m.

Despite the apparent enthusiasm, people practiced social distancing and arrived at the door one at a time.

Walburn, who wore protective gloves, said folks were very thankful.

"A lot of people said it's an amazing thing you're doing," Justine added.

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CONNECTED: Students missing socialization

FROM PAGE A1

writing a manual for a teenagers survival through a pandemic.

Though the teenagers may have different life experiences, there are common threads to get the conversations started like music, video games, fashion and food, she said.

Students are missing the socialization they get at school and staying inside can tire fast.

"They're getting cabin fever," said Bene'sova.

Perhaps one of the students in Europe will be a history maker like Bene'sova. While at Hazleton Area, she became the first member of the Cougars' swim team to

win a District 2 championship.

In 1994, she earned a district gold medal in the 100-yard butterfly, posting a school-record time of 1:05.68. There was no need for school officials to change the name in the record book — Bene'sova' had been the previous record holder, setting the mark during the 1993-94 season.

To set up a chance to chat with one of Bene'sova's students, contact her at monika.benesova@soskolin.cz or on Instagram at https://www.instagram.com/sosinforma_tikykolim/

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Virus challenges campaigns seeking money

BY BRIAN SLODYSKO
 ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — White House candidates aren't usually bashful about asking supporters for money.

But as the coronavirus upends everyday life, inundating hospitals, tanking financial markets and putting 3.3 million Americans out of work, President Donald Trump and his likely Democratic rival, Joe Biden, suddenly find themselves navigating perilous terrain.

What used to be a routine request for political cash could now come across as tone-deaf or tacky. The two also run the risk of competing for limited dollars with charities trying to raise money for pandemic relief. With a recession potentially on the horizon, there's a question of whether wealthy donors are in a giving mood and whether grassroots supporters who chip in small amounts will still have the wherewithal to keep at it.

That presents a delicate challenge as both candidates try to stockpile the massive amounts of cash needed for the general election campaign.

"It's hard to have a conversation with someone right now to ask how they're getting by, and then ask them for financial support in the next sentence," said Greg Goddard, a Democratic fundraiser who worked for Amy Klobuchar's presidential campaign before the Minnesota senator dropped out of the Democratic race.

To Tim Lim, a Democratic consultant who worked for both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, "it's a world where no one has a good answer." He said that "on the fundraising side, we are going to take some massive hits as a party."

The task is particularly acute for Biden. The former vice president is trying to pivot from the primary to the general election in a race essentially frozen by the virus.

He lacks Trump's reelection cash reserves, which were built up over the past three years of his presidency.

Biden also has yet to clinch the nomination and won't be able to do so until postponed primary contests are held in the months ahead.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, his sole remaining 2020 rival, has given no indication that he will back out, despite Biden's virtually insurmountable lead in the delegate race.

The pandemic has put all big-dollar fundraisers on hold, like all in-person political events. That's forced Trump and Biden, for now, to rely on online fundraising.

Biden is holding virtual fundraisers via video conferences. But they lack the exclusivity and tactile nature of an in-person event, where donors can network, see and be seen. Biden and Trump continue to send out fundraising emails and texts.

"It isn't easy for me to ask you for money today," Biden campaign manager Jen O'Malley Dillon said in a fundraising email Thursday, seeking contributions as low as \$5. "There are so many deserving charities and small businesses in your community where your money makes a huge difference right now. And of course, your own needs and the needs of your family take precedence."

Trump repeatedly played down the threat posed by the virus in the early days of the outbreak, and his campaign was no exception. It blasted out fundraising texts with familiar themes, such as attacking Biden, Sanders and the media. The campaign enticed donors by offering Trump-themed items, including a set of shamrock whiskey glasses offered up in exchange for a \$35 contribution around St. Patrick's Day.

But in a March 12 message, his campaign also texted supporters a "coronavirus update," which reflected Trump's newfound concern over the virus and did not include a request for money.

"The safety, security, and health of the American People is President

Trump's top priority right now," the message said. It also urged supporters to visit the U.S. government's coronavirus website to "learn ways to keep you, your family, and your community safe."

On Saturday, the Biden and Trump campaigns sent out multiple fundraising requests over email and text.

Biden asked for \$5 while suggesting that Trump's early minimizing of the virus means it "will hit all of us harder than it otherwise might have, and it will take us longer to recover."

Trump sent out an email with the subject line: "LET'S CRUSH IT." The email asked supporters to "keep America great" and suggested that donations would help block "radical SOCIALISTS like Crazy Bernie or Quid Pro Joe gain an ounce of momentum."

Sanders has earned praise for turning to his army of small-dollar donors to raise \$3.5 million for virus relief instead of his campaign. The senator, whose campaign is fueled by grassroots online donors, has stopped sending out fundraising emails.

"Right now my focus is on this extraordinary crisis," Sanders told The Associated Press on Wednesday, after declining to discuss the future of his campaign.

While the virus has disrupted many facets of life, Democratic fundraisers are optimistic that a degree of normalcy will return eventually. That will be a benefit to Biden.

Trump, as the incumbent, controls the Republican National Committee, giving him a major fundraising edge Biden lacks because he is not the nominee. Fundraising committees controlled by political parties can take in massive sums for candidates, such as Trump, with whom they have entered into joint agreements.

The DNC does not yet have a similar arrangement with Biden. His supporters are laying the groundwork for when it does.

FIGHT: Trump says he wants 'our life back'

FROM PAGE A1

"I want our life back again," the president told reporters in the Rose Garden.

Trump, who has largely avoided talk of potential death and infection rates, cited projection models that said potentially 2.2 million people or more could have died had the country not put social distancing measures in place. And he said the country would be doing well if it "can hold" the number of deaths "down to 100,000."

"It's a horrible number," Trump said, but added: "We all together have done a very good job."

Brought forward by Trump at the outdoor briefing, Trump said his projection of a potential 100,000 to 200,000 deaths is "entirely conceivable" if not enough is done to mitigate the crisis. He said that helped shape the extension of the guidelines, "a wise and prudent decision."

The federal guidelines recommend against large group gatherings and urge older people and anyone with existing health problems to stay home. People are urged to work at home when possible and avoid restaurants, bars, non-essential travel and shopping trips.

The extension would leave the federal recommendations in place beyond Easter, April 12, by which time Trump had hoped the country and its economy could start to rev

up again. Alarmed public-health officials said Easter was sure to be too soon.

The U.S. had more than 139,000 COVID-19 cases reported by Sunday evening, with more than 2,400 deaths. During the course of the Rose Garden briefing, reported deaths grew by several dozen and the number of cases by several thousand.

As some of his allies had predicted, Trump was clearly rattled by the haunting images coming out of New York, some from Elmhurst Hospital in his native Queens.

"I've been watching that for the last week on television," he said. "Body bags all over, in hallways. I've been watching them bring in trailer trucks — freezer trucks, they're freezer trucks, because they can't handle the bodies, there are so many of them. This is essentially in my community, in Queens, Queens, New York," he continued. "I've seen things that I've never seen before."

One in 3 Americans remain under state or local government orders to stay at home to slow the spread of the virus, with schools and businesses closed and public life upended.

Dr. Deborah Birx, head of the White House coronavirus task force, said parts of the country with few cases so far must prepare for what's to come. "No state, no metro area, will be spared," she said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Most people who contract COVID-19 have mild or moderate symptoms, which can include fever and cough but also milder cases of pneumonia, sometimes requiring hospitalization. The risk of death is greater for older adults and people with other health problems. Hospitals in the most afflicted areas are straining to handle patients and some are short of critical supplies.

Fauci's prediction would take the death toll well past that of the average seasonal flu. Trump repeatedly cited the flu's comparatively much higher cost in lives in playing down the severity of this pandemic.

Trump had eyed a "reopening" of the U.S. economy by Easter, but in recent days medical professionals warned that would be far too soon for the nation's heavily affected urban areas.

Just on Saturday, Trump was discussing tightening restrictions, suggesting then backing away from an "enforceable" quarantine of hard-hit New York, Connecticut and New Jersey. Instead, the White House task force recommended a travel advisory for residents of those states to limit non-essential travel to slow the spread of the virus to other parts of the U.S.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi suggested that Trump shouldn't be so quick to reverse the social distancing guidelines, saying more test-

ing needs to be in place to determine whether areas currently showing fewer infections are truly at lower risk.

Trump's "denial" in the crisis was "deadly," she told CNN.

"As the president fiddles, people are dying, and we have to take every precaution," she said. She promised a congressional investigation once the pandemic is over to determine whether Trump heeded advice from scientific experts and to answer the question that resonates through U.S. political scandals: "What did he know and when did he know it?"

Trump minimized the gravity of the pandemic for weeks. Asked whether she is saying that attitude cost American lives, Pelosi said: "Yes, I am. I'm saying that."

It put Pelosi out of lockstep with former Vice President Joe Biden, the likely Democratic presidential nominee, who said he wouldn't go so far as to lay the blame for deaths on the president. "I think that's a little too harsh," he told NBC.

Biden faulted Trump for holding back on using his full powers under the recently invoked Defense Production Act to spur the manufacture of the full range of needed medical supplies — and for making erratic statements about the pandemic.

"He should stop thinking out loud and start thinking deeply," Biden said.