

CONFRONTING THE PANDEMIC

Almost 26,000 Americans died from COVID-19 in nursing homes

The report prepared for governors comes as lockdowns ease across the nation and world.

By **RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR** and **CURT ANDERSON**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — At least a quarter of the COVID-19 deaths in the United States were among nursing home residents, a new report said, a disclosure that came as coronavirus restrictions eased Monday even as U.S. protests against police brutality sparked fears of new outbreaks.

The Florida Keys welcomed visitors for the first time in two months, the Colosseum opened its ancient doors in Rome, ferries restarted in Bangladesh and golfers played in Greece. But as tourist destinations worldwide reopened for business, new rules were in place to guard against the virus' spread.

"Bring facial coverings, gloves, hand sanitizer, reef-safe sunscreen and personal essential medicines. If you're feeling unwell, please stay home," the Monroe County Tourist Development Council, which includes the tourist-dependent Keys, said on its website.

Electronic signs warned travelers to two of the world's largest casinos about COVID-19 on the first day they partially reopened over Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont's objections. "Avoid Large Crowds, Don't Gamble With COVID," flashed the signs near Foxwoods Resort Casino and Mohegan Sun as cars — many with Massachusetts, Rhode Is-



David Maialetti/The Philadelphia Inquirer via AP
Preston Griffin, who runs First Class Mortuary Transport, leaves a nursing home with a body in Philadelphia last month.

land and New York license plates — passed by.

Meanwhile, the scope of the devastation in the nation's nursing homes became clearer in a report prepared for U.S. governors that said nearly 26,000 nursing home residents have died from COVID-19 — a number that is partial and likely to go higher.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported 60,000 cases of coronavirus illness among nursing home residents, according to a copy of a letter addressed to the governors and an accompanying chart provided to The Associated Press.

The data was based on reports received from about 80 percent of the nation's 15,400 nursing homes as of May 24. But some states with high rates of nursing home deaths appeared to

have low levels of response to the survey, intended as a first step toward developing policy changes.

"This data, and anecdotal reports across the country, clearly show that nursing homes have been devastated by the virus," wrote CDC Director Robert Redfield and CMS Administrator Seema Verma.

The U.S. has seen over 104,000 deaths and nearly 1.8 million infections in the pandemic.

And although the first wave of the pandemic may be easing in much of the U.S., that doesn't mean nursing homes are in any less danger: Experts say in a virus rebound they can again become the stage for tragic scenes of death and despair, as well as a risk for the broader community.

"What is going on in a nursing home can be a barometer for where the virus is," said Tamara Konetzka,

a research professor at the University of Chicago, who specializes in long-term care issues.

Roadblocks were taken down shortly after midnight near Key Largo, the northernmost island in the Florida chain, where almost half of all workers are employed by hotels, bars and other hospitality industries, and many of the rest are involved in commercial and sport fishing.

Countries around the Mediterranean Sea also tentatively kicked off a summer season where tourists could bask on their beaches with distancing measures in place.

"We are reopening a symbol. A symbol of Rome, a symbol for Italy," said Alfonsina Russo, director of the Colosseum's archaeological park. "(We are) restarting in a positive way, with a different pace, with a more sustainable tourism."

Coronavirus — the latest

HARRISBURG, Pa.

Tuesday's 8 primaries test getting out the vote

Tuesday's primaries in eight states are the biggest test to date of campaigning during the coronavirus era, a way for parties to test-drive new ways of getting out the vote during a time when it can be dangerous to leave your home.

Voters from Pennsylvania to Iowa to New Mexico will cast ballots in both the Democratic presidential contest, where former Vice President Joe Biden is the only contender with an active campaign, and a host of down-ballot primaries for everything from governors to state representatives. Many states postponed elections scheduled between mid-March and May to the date because of the coronavirus outbreak.

Unable to send candidates out to barnstorm the states or volunteers to knock on voters' doors, campaigns have had to improvise.

Also conducting primaries Tuesday are Indiana, Maryland, Rhode Island and South Dakota.

CANCUN, Mexico

President kicks off 'new normal' phase

Amid a pandemic and a brewing tropical storm, Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador kicked off Mexico's return to a "new normal" Monday with his first trip in two months as the nation began to gradually ease some restrictions.

López Obrador said he's taking all necessary precau-

tions — he drove the 1,000 miles from Mexico City over the weekend rather than flying — on a trip to promote construction of one of his signature infrastructure projects, the Mayan Train.

While the federal government's nationwide social distancing rule formally ended Monday, it is urging people in so-called "red" zones to maintain most of those measures.

Mexico is nearing 100,000 confirmed infections and nearly 10,000 deaths.

RIO DE JANEIRO

South America reopens with virus peak nearing

South American countries on Monday began easing COVID-19 restrictions even as the region hurtles toward its viral peak.

Some of Brazil's hardest hit cities, including the jungle metropolis Manaus and coastal Rio de Janeiro, are starting to allow more activity. Bolivia's government authorized reopening most of the country and the government of Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro unwound restrictions. Ecuador's airports were resuming flights and shoppers returning to some of Colombia's malls.

Rolling back measures runs counter to Europe's approach of waiting for the worst to pass before resuming activity, and South America trails much further behind on its viral curve. Data from the WHO's Pan American Health Organization shows the region's seven-day rolling average of new cases continues rising.

— From news service reports

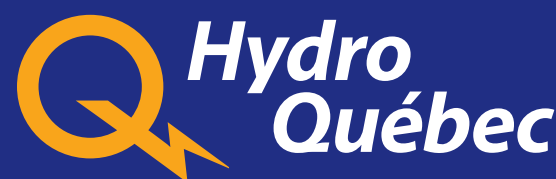
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