

HEALTH

NY officials are braced if outbreak spreads widely

David Robinson

New York State Team USA TODAY NETWORK

Schools and colleges in New York are racing to keep pace with the rapidly evolving public-health response to the coronavirus spreading from China across the globe. While federal officials warned that the deadly virus could cause “severe” disruptions in the USA, some colleges last week restricted and suspended study abroad programs in countries such as Italy and South Korea that are already seeing surges in coronavirus cases.

And K-12 school officials in New York

and across the country braced for fallout if the outbreak spread widely in the U.S. Administrators have updated contingency plans to limit disruptions to children’s education, preparing for everything from quarantines to school closures seeking to contain the virus.

The global death toll from coronavirus rose to 2,810 on Thursday, with more than 82,550 confirmed cases, including 60 in the U.S. There are no confirmed cases in New York.

Central to the preparations are health officials ongoing efforts to issue travel advisories and trigger emergency responses to the outbreak. But the likely ripple effects of potential school closures on all aspects of life loomed large over the talks.

“The implications of closing schools are a cascade of very difficult problems,” said Dr. Irwin Redlener, a Columbia University professor specializing in disaster preparedness and public health.

The preparations come as New York deals with a record number of flu cases since the state started keeping track 30 years ago, hitting 131,604 laboratoryconfirmed cases so far this season as of last week.

In the meantime, Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Wednesday asked the state Legislature for \$40 million for the state Health Department to prepare for the coronavirus, and he said the state will ask the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to allow New York to test for the virus at its lab in Albany.

Some New Yorkers have completed the 14-day selfisolation without showing signs of illness, and other people were still be monitored by county health departments.

State health officials would not provide the tally of people currently on quarantine in specific communities, noting the number is changing almost daily due to ongoing travel from China and people being cleared of self-isolation.

New York City health officials declined to provide the number of people on voluntary quarantine in New York City.

Remote learning plans would typically consist of teachers sending home class work electronically, the state education department letter noted.

Similarly, federal health officials last week urged companies to shore up telecommuting plans for workers who may be forced to stay home during quarantines, or to care for children if schools closed.

Meanwhile, schools across Japan will shut down Monday through early April to help curb the spread of the coronavirus blamed for three deaths there, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Thursday.

Japan has almost 200 confirmed cases of the deadly virus, the fifth-most cases among countries outside China.

“Efforts have been made to prevent the spread of infection among children in each region, and

travel to South Korea and noted it was prepared to suspend additional study abroad programs if the need arises.

At Cornell University in Ithaca, college officials issued an alert Thursday advising students of its latest plan to suspend programs in China and South Korea. That’s because the countries have a CDC level 3 travel advisory, meaning “avoid nonessential travel.”

Cornell noted that similar suspensions could imposed for other countries if they are upgraded to CDC level 3 travel advisory. Italy, for example, on Thursday was a level 2 travel advisory, meaning practice enhanced precautions.

In New Jersey, Seton Hall University said Wednesday night that it is cancelling all spring study abroad trips because of the coronavirus.

“The latest updates from the Centers for Diseases and Prevention have led us to take this action,” Seton Hall said in its statement.

While this decision only affects spring trips and those already underway, the university said, “We encourage those on the trip to strongly consider returning home as soon as feasible.”

*USA TODAY Network contributed to this report David Robinson is the state health care reporter for the USA TODAY Network New York. He can be reached at [drobinson@gannett.com](mailto:drobinson@gannett.com) and followed on Twitter: @ DrobinsonLoHud .*

“One of the issues we now have is it takes a couple of days to get the testing results back,” Cuomo said. “If we could accelerate that by doing testing in the state, and the CDC allowed that, that would be very helpful.”

**What New York schools are doing about coronavirus**

Since early February, educators statewide have been preparing school nurses and medical directors to handle cases of students returning to New York from travel to areas affected by coronavirus, now called COVID- 19.

The effort included everything from rules for notifying local health departments of sick kids to dealing with students missing classes due to quarantine, according to a letter to school administrators jointly issued by the state education and health departments on Feb. 5.

“The Education Department strongly encourages all schools to send classroom work to students who have monitoring and movement restrictions in place due to the 2019 Novel Coronavirus,” the letter stated.

About 700 people who returned to New York have been reviewed for potential voluntary coronavirus quarantines in communities outside New York City since Feb. 3.

these (next) one or two weeks will be an extremely critical period,” Abe said.

In New York, parents and teachers with questions about the coronavirus were directed to visit the state Health Department’s [health.ny.gov](http://health.ny.gov) website, or to call its coronavirus hotline, (888) 364-3065.

**Why study abroad programs are being suspended due to coronavirus** Colleges across the U.S. have been regularly updating travel restrictions on students and staff as coronavirus infections emanated from the epicenter in Wuhan, China.

Many of the moves stemmed from changes to travel advisories issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC.

Syracuse University last week suspended its academic program in Florence, Italy. Chancellor Kent Syverud said the decision was “based on Italy’s very aggressive stance toward virus containment and travel restrictions.”

“Students from Florence will not return to the Syracuse University campus until after spring break, which is consistent with the CDC’s 14-day incubation period guideline,” Syverud said in a statement.

He added the university and related officials were “working around the clock to help our students get home safely as quickly as possible.”

SU also restricted university-related



**Workers wearing protective suits spray disinfectant as a precaution against the coronavirus at a bus garage in Seoul, South Korea, on Thursday. The number of new virus infections in South Korea jumped again last week. AHN YOUNG-JOON, AP**