

COVID-19 Fact Sheet: North America – April 9 2020

Author: Josh Strongin, *Lead Intelligence Analyst – North America*

Contact: Josh.Strongin@everbridge.com



North America

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Overview

As of Thursday, April 9, novel coronavirus (COVID-19) cases and deaths continue to increase across North America; however, there are some initial signs that the apex of cases may occur within the next few weeks, much earlier than initial projections forecast. The United States has reported at least 464,824 cases, three times as many as any other country, and at least 16,508 deaths. By the end of the week the U.S. is expected to also begin reporting more deaths than any other country in addition to total cases. Canada has so far reported at least 20,765, cases and 509 deaths. Social distancing measures in both countries appear to be working as infections have begun to slow; however, the U.S. continues to significantly underreport both total cases and deaths.

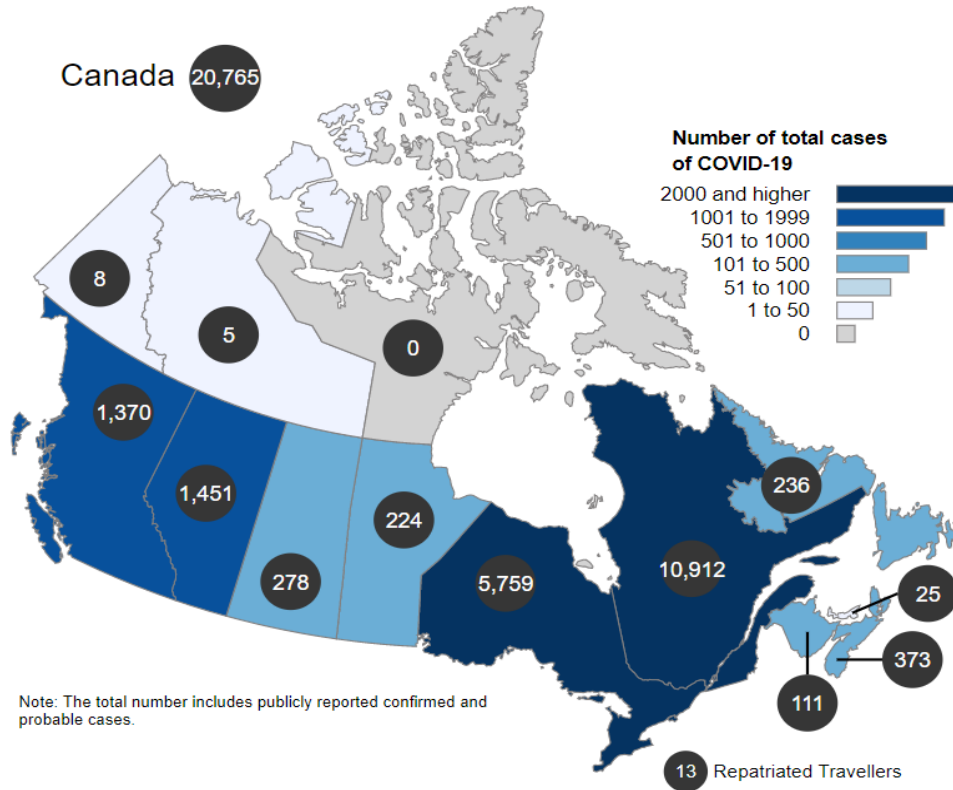
The pending Easter holiday and forecasted severe weather for parts of the U.S. have officials worried that new outbreaks may occur due to the potential for these events to bring large groups of people together in confined areas. There also continues to be concern that the shortage of U.S. testing will make full mitigation efforts difficult, which could allow for additional large-scale outbreaks later this summer or fall. Healthcare resources continued to be strained due to a shortage of supplies and a lack of federal intervention to help redistribute incoming supplies. Developments related to the COVID-19 situation should continue to be monitored closely as restrictions are expected to continue through at least April and may lead to additional or worsening supply chain disruptions.

COVID-19 Spread Within North America

Canada

As of Thursday, April 9, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has reported at least 20,765 positive or presumptive cases of COVID-19 and at least 509 deaths across the country.

Canada COVID-19 Cases as of Thursday, April 9



Source: PHAC

Nunavut continues to be the only province or territory not reporting any cases. Quebec (10,912 cases) is reporting almost double the number of cases as the next highest province, Ontario (5,759). Meanwhile, the two provinces are reporting almost identical numbers of deaths (200 in Ontario and 216 in Quebec).

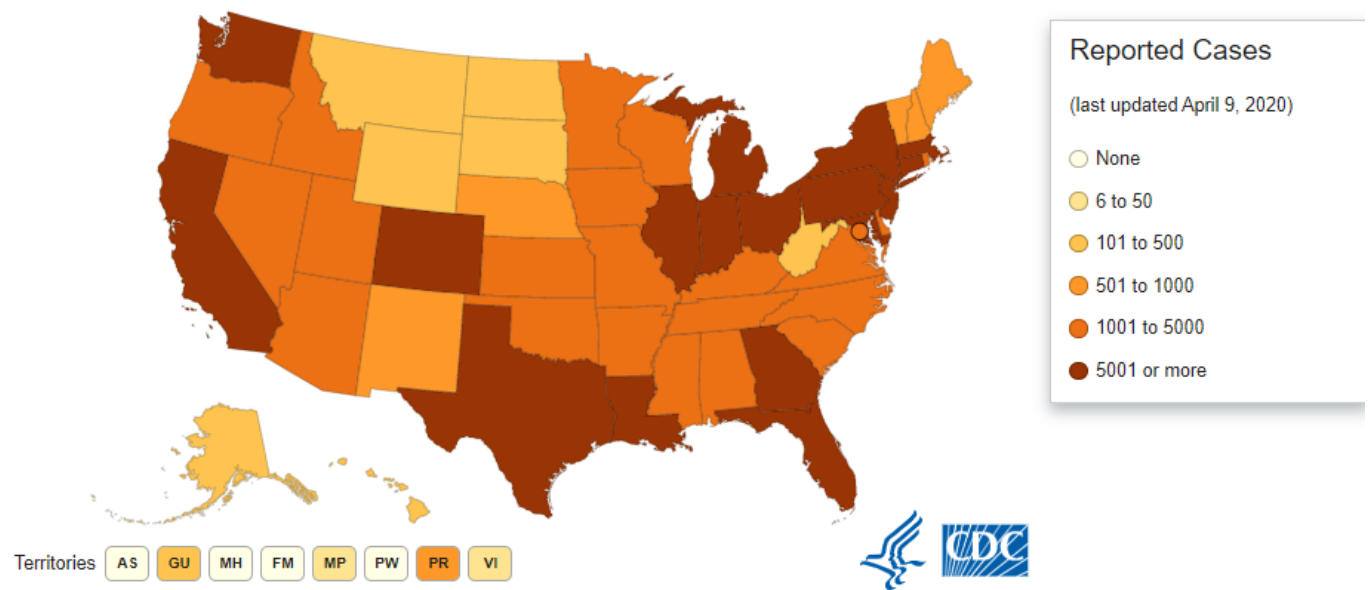
United States

As of Thursday, April 9, according to state health departments and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), at least 464,824 COVID-19 cases have been reported across all 50 states and Washington DC. At least 16,508 deaths have been reported and Wyoming continues to be the only state that has not recorded a death. New York (161,504) is now reporting more cases than any other country in the world and three times as many cases as the next closest state, New Jersey (51,027).

New York (7,067) continues to report over 40 percent of total deaths in the country while New Jersey (1,700) and Michigan (1,076) are the only other states reporting more than 1,000 deaths.

U.S. States Reporting COVID-19 Cases as of Thursday, April 9

States Reporting Cases of COVID-19 to CDC*



Source: CDC

Trends to Follow

While numbers in the U.S. continue to climb, the rates of increase have finally begun to show signs of slowing. This time last week saw more than 241,600 cases and 5,900 deaths. At least 17 states are now reporting at least 5,000 cases while 11 states (New York, New Jersey, Michigan, California, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Florida, Illinois, Georgia, and Texas) are reporting at least 10,000 cases. The last two days have seen daily death tolls in excess of 1,900 and every day over the last week has seen a death toll of at least 1,000.

The U.S. has thus far carried out an estimated 2.2 million COVID-19 tests; however, there continues to be an overall lack of testing. Many states continue to advise residents to only get tested if they are outwardly showing symptoms or in need of treatment.

Additionally, private labs, which have largely taken over testing from state labs due to their ability to run thousands more tests per day, have reported a significant backlog of upwards of 80,000 tests waiting to be processed. The backlog in combination with the continued lack of testing has led to consistently underreported numbers of U.S. COVID-19 cases. Some experts have estimated there may be as many as ten times more cases than are being reported due to the lack of testing and the large number of people who never show any symptoms.

While the testing issues and subsequent undercounts have been known for the majority of the outbreak, recently there have been reports that deaths are also being underreported due to a myriad of reasons. One of the main reasons is that the majority of coroners are not conducting postmortem tests on individuals who had not been diagnosed previously due to both the aforementioned lack of tests overall and due to current guidelines. Officials also now believe that deaths early on in the outbreak, in late February and early March, were being overlooked as COVID-19-related and many were treated as influenza-related due to the similar symptoms. New York City is also experiencing a major increase in at-home deaths over the last month, including many individuals who had not previously tested positive for COVID-19 and so are not being counted in official COVID-19 death numbers. The number of daily at-home deaths rose from 167 to 241 between March 31 and April 5 in New York City. Officials also noted that the city saw an average of ten to 20 such cases per day of at-home deaths prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. While not happening exclusively in New York City, as the continued epicenter of the U.S. outbreak, New York City is seeing the highest numbers of these at-home deaths. On Wednesday, New York reported that it would begin including suspected COVID-19 at-home deaths in its overall death totals and officials have speculated that this may significantly increase the current death toll there. All of these things combined have likely led to a significant underreported death toll nationally, making it hard to fully understand the scope of COVID-19 across the country.

Both the states of Washington and California have reported noticeable flattening of their rates of infection. This can be largely attributed to both states seeing outbreaks much earlier on than the rest of the U.S., leading them to institute restrictions on day-to-day life much earlier in March. The benefits of these earlier restrictions can now be seen in the smaller increase in case rates. These two states are a month into restrictions while several other states this week announced extensions on restrictions, including stay-at-home orders, through the end of April or into May. In addition, several models are predicting the United States is close to reaching the overall apex of growth in cases within the next few weeks.

The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), a research center at the University of Washington in Seattle, predicts that the U.S. will reach its peak healthcare resource use and number of deaths per day within the next week.

Recent Developments

- On Thursday, the CDC issued new guidance for workers considered essential, such as those in health care and food service. The new guidance is aimed at allowing workers to return to work more quickly after being exposed to COVID-19 and includes recommendation on pre-screening, monitoring, wearing masks, social distancing, and regular cleaning and disinfecting of workspaces. The full guidance can be found at the following link: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html>.
- In Canada last weekend, a reported ten percent of motorists were turned away at checkpoints set up at the Ottawa-Gatineau (Ontario-Quebec) border after both provinces issued stay-at-home orders with limits on nonessential travel.
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has received requests for at least 750 field hospital sites across the country as hospitalizations continue to increase and strain local healthcare systems.
- Walkouts, strikes, and threats of other labor action have continued across the U.S. as workers demand better protections from COVID-19, increased pay, and paid sick leave. This includes workers from at least 30 different restaurants in California and 13,000 carpenter workers in Massachusetts.
- U.S. economic experts estimate that daily economic output has dropped 29 percent since the beginning of March.
- At least 6.6 million, the same number as last week, Americans applied for unemployment this week. Over 16.8 million people have now filed for unemployment over the last three weeks.
- Since March 15, at least five million Canadians have applied for unemployment and Canadian officials reported an estimated one million jobs were lost during March.
- The U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) reports that airport traffic has declined even further, with last week seeing 96 percent fewer people passing through security checkpoints compared to the year prior. In Canada, Edmonton International Airport (YEG) became the first major airport there to close a portion of its terminal due to the reduction in passengers and flights.
- JetBlue Airways has asked for emergency approval to temporarily suspend service at 11 airports in the U.S. due to the continuing drop in demand. The suspension would last through June 10.

- The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) reported a ten percent drop in truck driver crossings from the United States into Canada from the week prior and a 29 percent drop compared to this time last year. There are no reports of disruptions to cross-border supply chains.
- The U.S. State Department reported that at least 50,000 U.S. citizens have been repatriated since January 29.
- U.S. hotels have announced an 80 percent vacancy rate across the country, a 68 percent drop from the same time last year.
- Under current conditions and social distancing measures, the IHME estimates around 60,000 Americans could die from COVID-19. Canadian officials currently estimate somewhere between 11,000 to 22,000 Canadians could die from the virus.

Assessment

While numbers of cases and deaths continue to climb, this is the first week that the U.S. has begun to show some signs of containment and states reaching the apex of their curves. This is largely attributed to the various stay-at-home orders issued by states and citizens' adherence to social distancing guidelines. Officials, though optimistic now that the country may be reaching the apex of the outbreak, continue to caution that people need to continue following social distancing orders or infections will likely begin to increase again.

To that end, there is some concern that several recent and expected events may cause a spike in infections. Earlier this week, Wisconsin held its presidential primary and continued with in-person voting, with limited polling sites open leading to long lines and large numbers of people confined to small areas. Much of this week and this weekend, parts of the country have experienced or are forecast to have severe weather, especially in the South. Officials are worried that the potential need for evacuations due to flooding or use of public storm shelters for tornadoes may lead to increased COVID-19 cases in affected areas. Additionally, this weekend is also the Easter holiday and several states, including Florida and Texas, have exemptions for churches in their stay-at-home orders. Religious services have already been reported as major spread areas in a variety of countries and in-person Easter services may lead to new outbreaks in some states. An increase in infections related to these three events likely won't be known for several weeks due to the incubation period of COVID-19.

Officials have continued to warn that the ongoing shortage of tests will hamper U.S. efforts to return to normal day-to-day life and decrease COVID-19 cases. There have been several studies suggesting COVID-19 may be a seasonal virus similar to the flu, though the extent of this remains unclear at this time.

Moreover, numerous public health experts are anticipating a resurgence is expected in the fall. As such, a “second wave” could occur at that time and if large-scale testing is still not implemented to help track and contain virus spread, a similar scenario to what is happening now will likely play out. In addition, officials continue to warn that if social distancing measures are let up too early, infections will begin to rise on exponential trajectories again. This scenario could also lead to much higher death tolls due to the potential of hospitals already at capacity from continuing treatments for this initial outbreak in COVID-19 cases. The testing shortage may worsen in coming weeks as the federal government is expected to end funding for testing sites beginning on Friday, April 10. States will likely be unable to maintain the number of sites currently operating without federal assistance, leading to numerous testing sites being closed and further decreasing testing abilities across the country.

There continues to be a significant disconnect between the state-level and federal response to the outbreak. States have largely led the charge in creating restrictions while the CDC and the White House have only recommended following social distance guidelines. This has led to variants of stay-at-home directives from each state and some medical experts have pointed to these discrepancies as one of the reasons the outbreak has spread so much across the country. The federal and state discrepancies have also led to significant shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) and other medical supplies, such as ventilators, according to a Department of Human and Health Services (HHS) Inspector General (IG) report that was published earlier this week. A U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) official was quoted as saying that approximately 50 percent of current supplies coming into the U.S. is going to designated “hot zone areas” such as New York City, while the other 50 percent is going to private companies. In order to acquire additional equipment beyond what is directly provided by the federal government, states are competing in a marketplace of supplies sold by the federal government to private companies performing commercial distribution within the country. The competition for equipment can make it extremely difficult for states with fewer resources to obtain supplies even if they have shortages or are otherwise experiencing a higher need. As such, ongoing shortages in PPE and other medical supplies are likely to continue and potentially worsen as case numbers rise.

Restrictions in Canada and the U.S. have been largely extended through at least the end of April, with many lasting through at least a portion of May. Thus far, these have not been overly detrimental to major supply chains as cargo and essential goods industries have been exempted from most restrictions, including in cross-border commerce. Disruptions have mainly been caused by strikes or walkouts by workers who are protesting their safety and working conditions as COVID-19 continues to spread.

An exception to this has been food processing facilities, which have had numerous closures across both countries due to reports of workers testing positive for the virus. The temporary shutdowns have been used to deep clean facilities. Auto manufacturers have also largely shut down North American facilities through at least April. No major disruptions to food supply have been reported to date and the strikes and/or walkouts have been largely localized to specific facilities and have only lasted a few days at most at a time. However, due to the large scope of the outbreak, additional or worsening supply chain disruptions cannot be ruled out.

The public is reminded to heed all instructions from local authorities and public health officials, and anyone exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms (such as fever, shortness of breathing, or coughing) should begin self-quarantining and contact a healthcare provider immediately. The CDC and PHAC both have dedicated pages on the ongoing outbreak, which can be accessed at the following links: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>; <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>.

About the Author

Josh Strongin is a Lead Intelligence Analyst and the Risk Intelligence Monitoring Center's (RIMC) Regional Analyst for North America. Josh holds a BA in Political Science from The George Washington University, with a concentration in Intelligence and National Security. Josh also has comprehensive experience as a real-time domestic and international analyst.

He can be reached at: Josh.Strongin@everbridge.com.