

TRUMP, PENNSYLVANIA, & COVID-19

August 2020

Since the beginning of the pandemic, President Trump has downplayed the threat of the virus, declined to listen to experts, and refused to take action to protect Americans from the health and economic toll of the outbreak. In states like Pennsylvania, his failures have exacerbated the consequences of the crisis.

QUICK LOOK:

- President Trump's failure to build out a national testing infrastructure and fortify the domestic supply chain has hit Pennsylvania especially hard.
 - Five months into the pandemic, Pennsylvania is still struggling to maintain test capacity due to a shortage of test materials, and as of July the state ranked 46 in the nation for testing per 1,000 people.
- President Trump's refusal to invoke the Defense Production Act to shore up supplies of protective equipment put health care workers at risk amid one of the country's biggest outbreaks.
 - By May, nearly 3,000 health care workers in Pennsylvania had contracted the virus.
 - Meanwhile, smaller clinics and private practices continue to face unprecedented difficulty in obtaining PPE, putting carers in physical and financial jeopardy.
- President Trump has put seniors in Pennsylvania at risk – especially those in nursing facilities. 67% of the state's deaths to COVID-19 are among those in assisted living facilities.
- 40% of Pennsylvania's workforce has filed for unemployment since the pandemic began – the highest rate in four decades. Rather than extending a lifeline for working families, President Trump and Republicans slashed benefits and complicated the system for delivering funds to Pennsylvanians.
- Whether from the failure to ramp up testing, denying science and the facts, or flouting Governor Wolf's attempts to keep Pennsylvanians safe, President Trump and Republicans have made things worse for the people of Pennsylvania at every juncture throughout the pandemic.

CASES & DEATHS

- As of August 20, Pennsylvania [had reported](#) 126,940 COVID-19 cases.
- As of August 20, 7,538 Pennsylvanians [had died](#) of coronavirus.

TESTING DISASTER

- Trump's failure to ramp up testing hit Pennsylvania especially hard. In July, the state [ranked](#) 46 in the nation in testing per 1,000 people.
- Five months into the pandemic, Pennsylvania is [struggling](#) to maintain testing capacity due to a shortage of necessary materials, resulting in delays in turnaround time for test results. This delay is [hindering](#) the state's ability to effectively contact trace.
- Rep. Conor Lamb [said](#) testing: **"is a failure of the federal administration to really coordinate that and to make sure that people are able to solve these problems."**

FUDGING THE NUMBERS

- The Trump administration's lack of transparency with regard to COVID-19 data has undermined Pennsylvanian confidence in the numbers.
 - After the administration [forced states](#) to report hospitalization data to the Department of Health and Human Services, rather than the Centers for Disease Control, reported hospitalizations in Pennsylvania dropped a stunning 30%.
 - Republican Rep. Seth Grove said of the numbers, **"A massive drop in hospitalizations? What the heck is this?"** Grove also said that sudden changes are undermining public trust in the numbers.
- The Trump administration's [failure](#) to implement clear national guidelines on reporting testing data led states like Pennsylvania to confuse metrics such as viral and antibody results. The conflation of such data made it

impossible, amid one of the worst outbreaks in the country, to interpret accumulated data.

ONGOING PPE / SUPPLY SHORTAGES

- President Trump's [sparing use](#) of the Defense Production Act failed to fortify the domestic supply chain and exacerbated PPE and medical equipment shortages that impacted Pennsylvanians. Hit hard and early by the pandemic, Pennsylvania saw massive supply shortages that jeopardized nurses and care providers.
- Until mid-April, N95 masks in Pennsylvania [were in](#) such short supply that hospital systems like Penn Medicine dictated that nurses not use them for COVID-19 patients, reserving them only for nurses who were treating patients that were in isolation or undergoing procedures such as intubation.
- By May, nearly 3,000 health care workers [had contracted](#) COVID-19.
- The Trump administration's failure to procure and distribute PPE also left states to compete against one another for supplies. This failure took an extra toll on private practices, smaller clinics, and volunteer ambulance services which struggled to adjust to inflated prices especially while [in competition](#) with larger hospitals.
 - By June, a Pennsylvania Medical Society survey [showed that](#) more than half of outpatient practices in the state had only a two-weeks supply or less of PPE. The lack of protective gear put such clinics at great financial risk, because the entire clinic would be forced to shut down if any employee got sick.
 - Max Mercado, a Philadelphia doctor in private practice, [said](#) doctors are paying up to ten times as much for PPE as usual, seeking supplies through Amazon.
- Even large hospitals in Pennsylvania, which are better supplied than smaller clinics, still [struggled](#) with supply shortages by the end of June, and continued to rely heavily on donations to keep workers and patients protected.

TRUMP/RUSHED REOPENING

- On May 11, Trump [recklessly](#) pushed for Pennsylvania to reopen while cases and deaths were still spiking in the state, tweeting, "The great people of Pennsylvania want their freedom now."
- Pennsylvania Republicans joined protestors pushing to reopen the state before it was safe to do so. Some counties with Republican leadership even [defied](#) stay-at-home orders and reopened businesses before they were approved to do so.

LONG TERM CARE FACILITIES UNDER SIEGE

- Before the pandemic, the Trump administration rolled back oversight of nursing homes and assisted care facilities [by lowering](#) fines against facilities that had been found to have endangered residents.
- President Trump also failed residents of long-term care facilities in Pennsylvania by refusing to shore up supplies of protective equipment and exacerbating persistent testing shortages. Long-term care facilities across the state require funding to acquire critical supplies, as the Trump-induced shortages have led prices to skyrocket.
- President Trump pushed junk science and phony treatments like hydroxychloroquine, which has impacted residents at Brighton Rehabilitation and Wellness Center in Beaver, Pennsylvania. The facility has reported 80 deaths due to COVID-19 – more than any facility in the state – and is [under investigation](#) for [reportedly](#) giving hydroxychloroquine to residents.
- More than [5,000 people](#) have died of coronavirus in Pennsylvania long term care centers – [constituting](#) 67% of the state's total death toll. 895 Pennsylvania nursing and personal care homes have reported 20,413 cases among residents and 4,244 cases among employees.

ECONOMY

- President Trump's mishandling of the virus has led to catastrophic economic consequences – including for the people of Pennsylvania. Since March 15, 40% of Pennsylvania's workforce – roughly 3.3 million people – [have sought](#) unemployment benefits, the highest rate in four decades.
- When President Trump and Senate Republicans allowed enhanced unemployment benefits to expire, Governor Tom Wolf sent a letter to Pennsylvania's Congressional delegation reaffirming his support for \$600 weekly payments. Wolf [wrote](#): "**The president's convoluted and temporary idea will leave families waiting weeks just to get less... As I have said before, the extra \$600 per week is vital for families to get by and the federal government should extend it. The additional unemployment benefit was helping many working families to pay their bills and put food on the table.**"

- Ultimately, Pennsylvania was forced [to adopt](#) President Trump’s slashed extension of supplemental benefits – just half of what was paid out under the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation program.
- The nature of the executive order even [makes it harder](#) for eligible Pennsylvanians to get the money. According to Jerry Oleksiak, secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, **“The convoluted program, which is a Band-Aid rather than an actual solution, is responsible for delaying getting this supplemental funding to people who need it now to pay bills and feed their families... Hardworking Pennsylvanians need more than a temporary program that is forcing us to recreate the wheel.”**

SCHOOLS

- President Trump has urged schools across the country to reopen without regard for community spread, rising cases, or safety protocols. In doing so, he has falsely claimed that children are immune to the virus.
- Far from immune, children have been shown to contract, spread, and fall gravely ill from COVID-19.
 - Pennsylvania happens to be among the states [hardest hit](#) by multisystem inflammatory syndrome, diagnosed in children who have been battling coronavirus. Of nearly 600 children [diagnosed](#) with MIS-C nationwide, at least 42 cases are in Pennsylvania.
 - Nearly 8,000 children across Pennsylvania have thus far been [diagnosed](#) with COVID-19.
- In contrast with President Trump, Governor Tom Wolf has [encouraged](#) schools to adopt reopening plans based on the rate of virus transmission in a given area, basing guidance on whether transmission is “low, moderate, or substantial.”

MASKS/ DOWNPLAYING THE VIRUS

- President Trump has routinely [ridiculed](#) masks and [refuses](#) to implement a nationwide mask mandate – despite that research [suggests](#) masks could reduce transmission of the virus by as much as 80%.
- Nonetheless, the administration of Governor Tom Wolf [expanded](#) Pennsylvania’s mask-mandate on July 1.
- Though the mandate was designed to ensure the safety of Pennsylvanians, it was immediately attacked by Pennsylvania Republicans, following the lead of President Trump.
 - Following the order, five state House Republicans signed a letter questioning the science behind masks.
 - The same week as the order, the Republican party of Lebanon County posted photos of a dinner meeting at which no members were wearing masks.
- Unfortunately, the Republicans failure to embrace masks has catalyzed conflict across Pennsylvania: one man [ripped a](#) facemask off of an employee at a beer store in Enola, while a shopper in Wayne County [spit in the face](#) of a Walmart employee who asked him to wear a mask.
- Even so, a July survey by Advance Local [showed that](#) at least 80% of respondents think a mask should be mandatory at least some of the time.
- In addition to downplaying the science around masks, Pennsylvania Republicans have [actively](#) put their Democratic colleagues at risk. In May, Democrats in the state legislature found out that a GOP colleague had tested positive for the virus. While the Republicans notified one another, they failed to inform the Democrats.

RACIAL DISPARITIES

- President Trump’s failure to contain the virus has disproportionately impacted Black people and people of color across the country, including in Pennsylvania.
- While Black Pennsylvanians account for only 11% of the state’s population, they [make up](#) nearly 30% of COVID-19 cases and more than 20% COVID-19 deaths in the state.
- While Hispanic or Latino people account for only 7% of Pennsylvania’s population, they [make up](#) one quarter of the state’s cases.
 - In York City specifically, Latinos represent 33% of the city's population but [made up](#) 72% of confirmed COVID-19 cases in April.