All: Below is a sampling of the massive amount of media coverage which has mentioned the New York National Guard COVID-19 response since March 13.

Emergency Response

New York National Guard springs into action to fight the coronavirus:
Connectingvets, March 18, 2020:

Hundreds of New York National Guard members respond to COVID-19:
Army.mil, March 18, 2020:

Guard members continue to assist in COVID-19 response:
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National Guard call-ups may double by the weekend, chief says:
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Pentagon reluctantly moves to help combat coronavirus: US defence officials warn that calling up the National Guard could be counterproductive:
Financial Times, March 19, 2020

In Virus Hot Spot, Lining Up and Anxious at Drive-in Test Center: In New Rochelle, the early epicenter of the coronavirus in New York, the state's first drive-in facility serves those at risk or with symptoms:
New York Times, March 17, 2020:

Cuomo mobilizing National Guard to find buildings to convert to emergency hospitals, calls for federal help:
; NBC NEWS, MARCH 16, 2020:

DOD Officials Explain New Coronavirus Domestic Travel Restrictions - Note: This article features NYNG photos:
Defense.gov, March 15:

More states increase National Guard’s role in coronavirus response:
Military Times, March 16, 2020:

Daily Uploader
New York National Guard springs into action to fight the coronavirus

Connectingvets, March 18, 2020 ::

The New York National Guard has sprung into action, first establishing a containment zone in New Rochelle with a mission set that is quickly expanding to other locations.

"The state is standing up four more locations in Westchester, Jones Beach, Sony State Park in Rockland, and tomorrow a site in Staten Island and Stony Brook," a spokesman for the New York National Guard told Connecting Vets.

These locations will be drive-thru test sites where individuals who think they may be infected with COVID-19 drive-up and remain in their car while a health care professional administers the test.

Meanwhile, the mission in New Rochelle continues inside the containment zone where National Guard soldiers, including medics, are sterilizing high touch areas such as railings, tabletops, doors, and water fountains.

"They also did the Jewish Community Center, the town hall, and the high school is on the list," a National Guard spokesman said.

The sanitizer used to sterilize these areas is manufactured by inmates in upstate NY who then ship it to Camp Smith where the National Guard has headquartered its anti-coronavirus mission. The Guardsmen also aid in the distribution of food to those in the containment zone.

"But we don't go door to door, it is not National Guard Grubhub," the spokesman said.

Instead, the food is trucked to distribution centers where citizens can pick it up. This is done out of a concern for low-income families who have difficulty feeding their kids now that schools have been shut down and they can no longer access the free lunches and breakfasts offered.

National Guard soldiers are also helping run several different call centers around the state assisting the Department of Health.

In all, nearly 900 Army National Guard, Air Force National Guard, as well as state militia are currently on these missions in New York.

This afternoon, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced the USNS Comfort hospital ship is en route to New York City in order to assist hospitals that are forecasted to become overcrowded as COVID-19 infects more New Yorkers.
Hundreds of New York National Guard members respond to COVID-19

Army.mil, March 18, 2020 ::

LATHAM, N.Y. – A week into a mission to help contain the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, the New York National Guard had 900 personnel on duty from Long Island to New York City to the Albany area March 17.

New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen are providing logistical and administrative support to state and local governments; staffing two state call centers handling questions from the public; assisting at three drive-thru COVID-19 testing stations; cleaning public buildings in New Rochelle; warehousing and delivering bulk supplies of New York State sanitizer to local governments; and helping the New Rochelle school district deliver meals to students not in school.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo declared a state of emergency March 7, which allowed the state to move more rapidly to assist local governments in dealing with the disease.

On March 10, the governor directed Army Maj. Gen. Ray Shields, the adjutant general of New York, to deploy troops to assist local officials and residents in New Rochelle as the state established a containment zone to control the COVID-19 virus in the small city just north of New York City.

"New Rochelle at this point is probably the largest cluster in the United States of these cases and it is a significant issue," the governor said in a press release.

"The numbers have been going up, the numbers continue to go up, the numbers are going up unabated and we do need a special public health strategy for New Rochelle," he said. "What we are going to do is focus on an area concentric circle around the sites of the majority of the cases in New Rochelle."

Schools and places of worship in a zone centered on New Rochelle closed to contain the spread of the virus.

The New York National Guard initially mobilized 300 Soldiers and Airmen, along with members of the New York Naval Militia and the New York Guard, the state defense force, to support the effort.
On March 12, the support effort began with Guard Soldiers and Airmen distributing food bags prepared at Feeding Westchester, the regional food pantry in the county.

The primary concern was that schoolchildren relying on low-cost or free breakfast and lunch at school would miss meals.

Distribution points were established at local community centers. Food was passed out to school families and other residents who were not able to get food because of the situation.

"We're here to show them we will do anything we can to help them out," said Army Sgt. Corey Smith, a member of the 1156th Engineer Company, who was in charge at one site. "The community is actually extremely happy that we are here," he added. While some people might be concerned about working in the area, his troops were not, Smith said.

"None of our Soldiers here are scared," Smith said. "We are just here to hand out food and make sure everybody feels comfortable and safe."

The arrival of the National Guard in New Rochelle reduced fears among residents, said Frank Giordano, a member of the Mamaroneck Department of Sanitation, as he helped unload hand sanitizer from a National Guard team March 13.

"I know I feel safer seeing the Guard here," Giordano said. "It's good; good just knowing you're here."

New York National Guard Soldiers staffed a call center established by the Department of Health at the Hudson Valley Transportation Center in Hawthorne.

The Soldiers' mission is to take calls from residents seeking information and follow a script to help answer their questions or pass them along to a medical professional. A second call center in Rotterdam was established to handle calls and staffed by New York National Guard personnel.

On March 16, officials monitoring the call centers reported that New York National Guard personnel and state employees handled 13,775 calls.

Sanitizer manufactured at a Department of Correctional and Custodial Services facility north of Albany is being shipped into the Hudson Valley for use by individuals and on surfaces.

Bulk deliveries are being received at Camp Smith Training Site, the New York National Guard's facility near Peekskill. Boxes of the "NYS Clean" sanitizer are then delivered to local users by the Guard.

Camp Smith also served initially to house the troops deployed in the Hudson Valley. As the force grows, troops are also billeted in local hotels.
The governor also directed the Guard to assist localities in cleaning public spaces. So far, New York National Guard Soldiers and Airmen cleaned critical surfaces in the New Rochelle City Hall and the Westchester County Jewish Community Center.

National Guard Army medics and Air Guard medical technicians are also helping collect samples at drive-thru testing locations. While medical personnel assist in sample collection, other Soldiers and Airmen assist in logistics tasks and traffic management.

Testing locations are running in Westchester, Nassau, and Suffolk Counties on Long Island and Rockland County, across the Hudson River from Westchester.

"We are here to screen the community to keep the community safe and try to prevent the spread of the virus," said Army Pfc. Class Justin Zammit, a medic in the 369th Sustainment Brigade.

Zammit was trained to assist in record-keeping at the testing location in Westchester County.

"I would say it is a scary situation. But we are here to serve," Zammit said. "That is what we signed up for. We're proud that we're allowed to be here in the community and help everyone out here."

Initially, the New York National Guard operated with a task force based at Camp Smith Training Site.

To staff testing sites on Long Island, the New York Air National Guard's 106th Rescue Wing set up their task force headquarters at Gabreski Air National Guard Base in Westhampton Beach.

The 109th Airlift Wing, based at Stratton Air National Guard Base near Schenectady, established a task force headquarters to handle missions that might arise in the Albany area.

In a message to leaders, troops and civilian employees, Shields, the adjutant general of New York, emphasized the need for all parts of the force to work together and support state efforts.

"This crisis is a true crisis," Shields said. "I believe the fight against COVID-19 will exceed what we did in response to the attacks of 11 September 2001 and our response to Super Storm Sandy. This is that serious."


Guard members continue to assist in COVID-19 response
ARLINGTON, Va. – National Guard members continue to assist state and local authorities responding to COVID-19, or the coronavirus. More than 1,560 Guard members in 22 states are on duty.

New York National Guard members have been working with state and local officials to distribute food, disinfect public spaces and help run mobile screening facilities.

“We’re here screening the community, trying to keep the community safe and trying to stop the spread of the virus,” said Army Pfc. Justin Zammit, with the New York Army National Guard’s 369th Sustainment Brigade, who was working at a mobile screening facility in New Rochelle, New York.

The COVID-19 virus has been especially active in New York state, with more than 720 reported cases as of Monday, according to the New York Department of Health. That’s left schools and other institutions closed and many grocery store shelves empty.

New York Guard members have been working with local officials to distribute food to those who need it.

“The community is extremely happy that we’re out here,” said Army Sgt. Corey Smith, with the New York Army Guard’s 1156th Engineer Company. “They’ve been sharing stories with us about how tough it’s been for them getting food at the grocery store.”

Smith added he’s just as glad to be helping.

“We’re all very happy to be here,” he said. “We’re just here to help out, hand out food and make sure everybody feels comfortable and safe.”

Working with the New Rochelle Housing Authority to distribute the food, New York Guard members have set up in prominent locations in the New Rochelle area.

“We have canned fruit and vegetables,” said Smith. “We have bags of rice, pancake mix, granola bars and assorted non-perishable items.”

Thousands of bags of food have been distributed, said Smith, adding that Soldiers are taking precautions to limit possible exposure to the virus.

“We have gloves,” he said. “We do have hand sanitizer on ground that we can use at any time.”

For Zammit, working in the mobile screening facility, the protective measures in place go further.
“We have sanitizer on hand and when we do the screening process the windows of the vehicles are closed,” he said. “We’re trying to minimize contact between us and possibly infected individuals.”

Zammit added that Guard members in the screening lanes also wear personal protective equipment to further protect against potential transmission of the virus.


National Guard call-ups may double by the weekend, chief says

Politico, March 19, 2020 ::

The number of National Guardsmen called up to deal with the coronavirus response may double by the weekend, and a top general says they may help with local law enforcement.

The Pentagon, meanwhile, announced on Thursday that the administration has no plans to put Guardsmen under federal control.

More than 2,000 Guardsmen have already been deployed in 27 states to respond to the pandemic, Air Force Gen. Joseph Lengyel told reporters Thursday. After possibly doubling in days, the number could rise to tens of thousands as the crisis deepens, he said.

“When there is a hurricane you can see it on a map, you have a sense of how hard the storm will hit and how long the storm will last,” said Lengyel, who is chief of the National Guard Bureau. "With Covid-19, it's like we have 54 separate hurricanes in every state, territory and the District of Columbia.”

Hours after Lengyel spoke, Pentagon spokesperson Alyssa Farah announced that the administration plans to keep Guard troops under state control.

"The @DeptOfDefense is not considering federalization of the @USNationalGuard," she tweeted. "The #COVID19 response is dynamic, but at this time Governors remain in control of their states’ National Guard forces & can request additional assistance from federal Title 10 forces through @FEMAgov."

During his briefing with reporters, Lengyel made the case for keeping the Guard units under state control.
In their current state-level Title 32 status, the country's 450,000 Guardsmen can be deployed by their governor to transport medical supplies, help with drive-through testing, and assist local law enforcement with enforcing curfews and other tasks, Lengyel said. He advised against federalizing the National Guard under Title 10 — one of the options the administration had been considering — because doing so means the states would lose some of those authorities.

Under the Posse Comitatus Act, the federal government is prohibited from using U.S. troops for domestic law enforcement. This limitation does not apply to the National Guard when activated by a state's governor and operating under Title 32. Louisiana state officials deployed Guardsmen in this capacity in response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

When under state control, Guardsmen have "additional authorities that can assist law enforcement and they maintain their direct command and control links within their states," Lengyel said. This "makes it a faster, more rapid, more efficient response for the government and the state emergency response network to use them."

The primary reason to federalize the National Guard would be in a "World War III" scenario where additional forces are needed rapidly to go to war "with a major peer competitor," Lengyel explained. But in the case of the coronavirus, no such action is needed, which he said would cost "billions and billions of dollars."

"I think you can get everything you need more efficiently and more effectively if you leave them in a state status," Lengyel said. "There is no need right now to have 450,000 Guardsmen on duty in any given state."

National Guard head: 'Tens of thousands' of Guardsmen could be used to help with coronavirus

The Hill, March 19, 2020::

Tens of thousands of National Guard troops could be activated in states across the country in the next several weeks to help deal with the coronavirus pandemic, the head of the National Guard said Thursday.

“It’s hard to tell what the exact requirement will be, but I’m expecting tens of thousands to be used inside the states as this grows,” National Guard Bureau Chief Gen. Joseph Lengyel told reporters at the Pentagon.

“I think that this could quickly blossom in the next couple of weeks as governors and states determine their needs and ways to use their National Guards.”
All 54 states, territories and the District of Columbia have declared a state of emergency in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

As of Thursday, governors in 27 states have activated a total 2,050 Guardsmen.

Lengyel said the bureau anticipates that number will go up “relatively quickly, in fact, doubling by this weekend.”

Asked if the White House could federalize the Guard to respond to the illness, Lengyel said that President Trump could do so if desired but that such a move “would not make sense in this situation.”

“Every state has a different way to deal with disasters. If you were to federalize [the Guard], you would lose that ability.”

He added: “There’s no plans that I’m aware of to take the National Guards in the states and put them in a federal status. They’re much better used in a state status under the command and control of the governors.”

Lengyel likened the coronavirus pandemic to dealing with “54 separate hurricanes in every state, territory and the District of Columbia … unlike a hurricane we don’t know when this is going to dissipate or move out to sea.”

Currently the Guard is providing medical testing and assessments, facilities, ground transportation and logistics and planning, among other services across the states.

The Tennessee National Guard, for example, on Wednesday helped deliver 500,000 coronavirus testing swabs brought to the United States from Italy earlier this week.

Lengyel said there are six Guardsmen who have tested positive for coronavirus. In the active-duty force there are 51 confirmed cases, as of Thursday morning.


National Guard response to coronavirus tops 2,000 troops as outbreak worsens

Stars and Stripes March 18, 2020 ::
More than 2,000 National Guard members have been deployed as of Wednesday to help combat the spread of coronavirus as Defense Department officials weigh giving those troops federal status, which would put them under the direction of President Donald Trump and on the federal government payroll.

Governors in 23 states have authorized the deployment of National Guard soldiers and airmen to assist rapidly changing efforts to control the virus outbreak as the number of infected Americans across the country topped 7,300.

But no requests for Guard support have been issued by the federal government as of Wednesday, according to a news release from the National Guard Bureau. But that could change as the Trump administration reviews options for military support to help control the spread of the virus.

“We are considering activating National Guard and Reserve units to assist states with planning, logistics and medical support as needed,” Defense Secretary Mark Esper said Tuesday during a news conference. “In my conversations with governors and members of Congress about DOD’s resources, I’ve made it clear that we will continue to support the administration's comprehensive efforts and the country every step of the way, while ensuring our nation’s security remains the top priority of the Department of Defense.”

However, Esper clarified he sees a federal deployment of troops as a “last resort.”

“We can come in, rather than being the first, and really help enable through the Guard and Reserve to play that role initially,” he said.

article continues below

Across the states, troops continue forward with a variety of missions.

In an effort to better protect health care workers, more than 20 National Guard Civil Support Teams, which aid civil authorities with chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear high-yield explosives, have provided training on the appropriate use of personal protective equipment for first responders in 13 states, according to the National Guard Bureau.

Other missions have primarily remained the same since the first troops were called up last week and vary among the states. They include response planners, support to medical-testing facilities, response liaisons and support to state emergency operations centers, support to health care professionals, logistics support, assisting with disinfecting and cleaning common public spaces, providing transportation for health care providers, collecting and delivering samples and assisting with sample administration.

In Maryland, about 1,000 service members were activated this week with another 1,200 on standby, according to a news release from the state’s Guard. Eight of those troops worked with the Maryland Department of Health to get passengers from the Grand Princess cruise
The people arrived at the Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport on Tuesday after a quarantine period at Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Ga.

The airmen, all from the 175th Wing, also brought food and essential supplies to allow the passengers to self-quarantine for at least two weeks, according to the release.

“This is just another example of Marylanders helping their fellow Marylanders throughout this crisis situation,” Army Maj. Gen. Timothy E. Gowen, the adjutant general for Maryland, said in a statement. “The Maryland National Guard is here to help our neighbors wherever and however we can.”

The Louisiana National Guard activated 155 soldiers and airmen Wednesday and anticipate the number to increase until the coronavirus stabilizes, according to a news release from the Louisiana National Guard. Missions include medical support, engineering assessment support, shelter security, traffic control point and drive-through testing site support and providing liaison officer teams to area operations centers.

“Aside from our Guardsmen already responding, we are continuing to lean forward and plan for possible follow-on missions that we may be called upon to perform,” Brig. Gen. D. Keith Waddell, adjutant general of the state Guard, said in a statement. “As our missions develop and increase, today’s preparations will lead to tomorrow’s success.”

Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker has activated about 60 National Guard service members, comprised of 43 airmen from the Peoria-based 182nd Airlift Wing’s Medical Group and 17 planners and liaison officers from Army National Guard and Air National Guard units from across the state, said Lt. Col. Brad Leighton, spokesman for the Illinois National Guard. Troops will assist with the anticipated need for logistic support and medical staffing.

The activated troops join about 40 National Guard cyber experts who are on active-duty to assist with cyber security of election networks, he said.

The New York National Guard has upped its number of troops from about 300 to 900, working most visibly in New Rochelle, a New York City suburb, where personnel continue the delivery of school lunches and breakfasts to neighborhood community centers and cleaning of public buildings, said Col. Richard Goldenberg, spokesman for New York National Guard. Joint Task Force headquarters have been stood up on Long Island, in New York City, the Hudson Valley and the Albany area.

Troops are supporting five drive-thru testing sites on Long Island and Staten Island and in Rockland and Westchester counties. Troops are also helping at call centers in Hawthorne and Rotterdam that are operated by the Department of Health and the Department of Taxation and Finance.

Warehouse operations at Camp Smith Training Site in Cortlandt are helping distribute hand sanitizer across the Hudson Valley area, Goldenberg said. Logistics and medical experts are
working with the New York State Department of Health to identify facilities and spaces that can be converted into temporary hospital space.


Pentagon reluctantly moves to help combat coronavirus: US defence officials warn that calling up the National Guard could be counterproductive

Financial Times, March 19, 2020:

The US military has begun to slowly step in to aid the federal government’s coronavirus response despite reluctance among Pentagon leaders, who are concerned the domestic deployments could distract from their primary mission of protecting national security.

The military’s reluctance has become a lightning rod in some state governments, which have called on the Pentagon to, among other things, deploy the Army Corps of Engineers, a 37,000-strong public works agency in the Department of Defense.

Andrew Cuomo, the governor of New York, which now has the most Covid-19 cases in the US with more than 4,100, has been particularly vocal, calling on the Corps to build new overflow hospitals.

“Just give me control of the Army Corps of Engineers and I’ll take it from there,” Mr Cuomo wrote on Twitter.

Mark Esper, the defence secretary, has responded reluctantly.

On Wednesday he ordered the US navy’s two floating hospitals to deploy stateside in order to free up beds for coronavirus patients. But Pentagon officials said it would take “weeks rather than days” for the USNS Comfort, which is undergoing maintenance at a Virginia navy base, to reach New York City.

“We want to be the last resort,” Mr Esper said, arguing there were unintended consequences of calling up the 453,000-strong National Guard and reservists to aid the coronavirus effort — especially since many work in day jobs that are also critical to the response, such as police and firefighters.

“We’ve got to be very conscious of and careful . . . that we aren’t robbing Peter to pay Paul.”
The tussle over the military’s role could prove challenging for Donald Trump, who said the US is “at war” with the pandemic and has declared a “whole of government” response after weeks of downplaying the extent of the crisis.

“Up until now the military has been heavily focused on protecting the health of their own personnel and making sure the military takes care of its own,” said Joshua Michaud, an epidemiologist who lectures at the John Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies.

“They’ve come out and said: ‘Don’t expect too much from us.’ But the pressure is building.”

Elizabeth Warren, the Democratic senator and former presidential hopeful, has pushed for Mr Trump to call up army reservists to convert or construct medical facilities and “fortify” the domestic response to the outbreak.

There have been signs both sides were seeking to tone down their war of words, at least for now.

Air Force General Joseph Lengyel, the National Guard chief, said on Thursday the Guard would ramp up its response in coming weeks, with the number of personnel called up doubling by the weekend and increasing rapidly as more test kits became available.

Thus far, 27 states have called up guard units, which are under the command of governors, deploying 2,050 in all.

In New York, 900 wiped down toys in an affected community centre, cleaned doorknobs and drinking fountains in a containment area, cooked food, manned call centres and helped with testing.

Brigadier General Thomas Hatley, a senior director at the National Guard bureau, told the Financial Times it was “striving to increase awareness in anticipation of Covid-19 requirements to ensure a unified and rapid response”.

Even Mr Cuomo appeared mollified, saying on Thursday he had a “very good meeting” with Corps leaders about rapidly expanding the state’s supply of about 50,000 hospital beds by identifying existing buildings that could be turned into healthcare facilities.

The Democratic governor also offered rare praise for Mr Trump. “He is mobilising,” Mr Cuomo said.

“He is mobilising the federal government.”

Critics said the slow Pentagon start is reflective of the giant bureaucracy’s difficulty in recalibrating its mission, with leaders focused on force protection and international challenges that have driven the military since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began almost 20 years ago.
Kelly Magsamen, a former senior Pentagon official, said the defence leadership lacked the “muscle memory” for a pandemic response.

“Yes of the steps the Department of Defense is taking right now . . . I have questions about why that didn’t happen two weeks ago,” she said, pointing to Mr Esper’s recent decision to make 14 military testing labs, 5m respiratory masks and up to 2,000 ventilators in strategic reserves available for wider civilian use.

“The Department of Defense is really good at planning for the worst-case scenario; they should be doing that,” added Ms Magsamen, citing the need to help cities and states with surge planning, logistics and drive-through testing areas.

But experts also warned there was only so much the military can do.

Gregory Gray, a former navy epidemiologist who is now professor in infectious diseases at Duke University, said a nationwide deployment could see soldiers spreading the pathogen back to their home states.

“It’s not like we can just call up the military to go and shoot coronavirus,” said Richard Fontaine, chief executive of the bipartisan Center for a New American Security think-tank. Additional reporting by Joshua Chaffin in New York

https://www.ft.com/content/7c140814-6994-11ea-800d-da70cff6e4d3

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In Virus Hot Spot, Lining Up and Anxious at Drive-in Test Center: In New Rochelle, the early epicenter of the coronavirus in New York, the state’s first drive-in facility serves those at risk or with symptoms.

New York Times, March 17 2020::

NEW ROCHELLE, N.Y. — Any other place, any other time, the three white tents set against the Long Island Sound in the middle of a public park, with a line of vehicles waiting to get in, could have easily been the scene of a wedding or a garden party.

But the appearance of the people underneath the tents — in silver hazmat suits, face shields and masks — told a different story.

It is the state’s first drive-through coronavirus testing center, set in the middle of Glen Island, a 105-acre park connected by drawbridge to the mainland in New Rochelle, an epicenter of the outbreak when coronavirus first emerged in the state earlier this month.
New York is among roughly 10 states that have set up their own drive-through testing centers, as state and local leaders look to compensate for an acute shortage of tests in the United States.

That shortage has set back the country’s efforts to respond to the pandemic, concealing the spread of the virus as unidentified cases multiply.

In the United States, only about 25,000 people had been tested as of March 11, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. South Korea has been able to test at least 10,000 people a day, for a total of 274,000 people so far, even though the two countries discovered their first cases around the same time.

Part of South Korea’s aggressive approach to testing includes drive-through facilities, and New York officials said they used South Korea’s efforts as a model for the center in New Rochelle, a Westchester County suburb five miles north of New York City’s border.

Since it opened on March 13, cars have snaked across the drawbridge here, filled with anxious people waiting to find out if they have the virus.

The cars pulled underneath the white tents where medical personnel in full-body hazmat suits, with yellow tape around their wrists and ankles to seal off any gaps, were waiting. Then the drivers were asked to roll down their window, tip their head back and submit to a series of nasal and throat swabs.

“We have to be careful, one mistake could be a big problem,” Lisa Baez-Alessandro, a nurse from Staten Island said, wearing a silver Tyvek suit inside the tent’s “hot zone,” where the swab tests are performed.

“But this is why we became nurses,” she said. “This is the time to help. If we don’t do this, what are we doing?”

In its first four days of operation, the drive-through center tested 1,882 people in New Rochelle, in which a one-mile radius was declared a containment area by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo last week.

The numbers of those tested who were found to be infected are not yet available.

The declaration became necessary after a lawyer who lives in New Rochelle and works in Manhattan attended public gatherings, including at least one at his synagogue, Young Israel of New Rochelle, before he knew he had the coronavirus.

The testing center in New Rochelle is a model for facilities being rolled out across the state; a second, in Jones Beach State Park in Nassau County, opens Tuesday, with centers to follow in Suffolk and Rockland Counties as well as Staten Island in New York City.
Federal officials are planning to open more, as well as to enable 2,000 commercial labs to use high-speed machines that can process multiple samples at the same time.

“That we are surprised in March and still scrambling to get testing in place and getting a health care system in place is inexcusable,” Governor Cuomo said on Monday.

The governor said the state’s drive-through centers, as well as state-run laboratories that have been authorized to conduct tests, are part of New York’s efforts to supplement the federal response.

Since the state began testing on Feb. 29, over 10,000 people have been tested statewide. To qualify for a drive-through or other test in New York State, patients must have qualifying symptoms or be in high-risk pools, like people who are older or those with pre-existing conditions.

They must then get a referral from a doctor to the State Health Department, which issues an appointment. But officials said that people without appointments were not being turned away.

The state is working on streamlining the process: Soon, patients will be able to call a hotline, where they can explain their symptoms. They will receive a call back with an appointment if they are eligible for testing.

As cars pulled up to the small island on Monday, police stationed at the drawbridge called out over megaphones to remind drivers to keep their windows closed. Visitors remain in their cars as they pull through the testing tents and through a series of steps. Around the tents stood uniformed members of the state’s National Guard, which had arrived as part of the governor’s containment zone efforts.

“They talk about reinventing the wheel, this is the wheel inventing right here,” said Major Patrick Cordova, a Guard spokesman. “Next time this happens, they are going to ask: ‘What did they do in New Rochelle?’”

At the opening of the tents, health care workers in protective aprons — employees from Northwell Health as well as staff from state and county health departments — approached each vehicle.

They instructed the occupants to place their identification cards on the dashboard, peering through the windshield and tapping the information into tablets they carried.

Next, the staff waved each car forward to the middle of the tent, known as the hot zone, to get tested by medical personnel.
Finally, as vehicles pulled out of the tent, those tested were given a confirmation number. The samples are sent to BioReference Laboratories in northern New Jersey, and patients would get results in two to three days.

Teams of volunteers from across the state’s agencies had spent a week or so setting up the center, a process that needed to account for the state’s immediate needs and future goals.

“It was basically building the airplane while you were flying it,” said Geza Hrazdina, an administrator in the state’s Office of Health Insurance Programs, who had spent six days helping construct and run the drive-through.

“When we built the protocols, we were doing it from two perspectives: One was how can we provide something that was efficient and effective in distributing and conducting testing for the community,” Mr. Hrazdina said. The second was creating a model that he said could “be replicated across the state or across the nation.”

At the drive-through’s third and final stop, where patients get a confirmation number, one volunteer, her mouth covered by a N95 mask, stood at the exit and waved each car goodbye. She held up a handwritten sign.

“Feel better,” it said.


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**Cuomo mobilizing National Guard to find buildings to convert to emergency hospitals, calls for federal help**

; NBC NEWS, MARCH 16, 2020:

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced Monday that he is mobilizing the N.Y. National Guard to seek out facilities that can be converted into emergency hospital space in anticipation that the curve of new infections will almost certainly not be flattened enough to prevent the state's hospital systems from being overwhelmed.

Cuomo called on the federal government, specifically the Army Corps of Engineers, to build such emergency facilities, saying they have the greatest capability to quickly expand the total number of beds throughout the country. And Cuomo said that all elective surgeries scheduled in the state could be postponed.


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Defense officials announced restrictions on domestic travel yesterday for service members, Defense Department employees and family members in response to the new coronavirus, or COVID-19.

Deputy Defense Secretary David L. Norquist signed a memorandum halting all domestic travel, to include permanent changes of station and temporary duty travel. The ban is in effect from March 16 to May 11.

Officials speaking on background said the new memo said that service members will only be authorized local leave only.

The ban is in addition to restrictions on all DOD military and civilian personnel and their families traveling to, from, or through areas for which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have issued a Level 3 Travel Health Notice. That policy also stops PCS and TDY travel through May.

There are exceptions for hardship, mission essential and humanitarian travel, but those exceptions must be approved. Domestic travel for medical treatment is excluded from the ban.

There are 10 service members who have tested positive for COVID-19. One DOD civilian and two DOD contractors have the virus, as do eight family members, officials said. There are 13 DOD laboratories that can test samples for the virus.

The officials said the new policy is aimed at preventing the spread of coronavirus. Each day tens of thousands of service members and DOD civilians are traveling. This "strategic pause" is "the best and safest route" to slowing the spread of the virus, they said.

The Pentagon reservation is also taking actions and raised the health protection condition in the building and associated properties to Bravo. This means all tours of the building are cancelled. Starting March 16, offices in the building will go on minimum manning, with vast numbers of employees teleworking.

Offices in the building will have rotating staffs and "red and blue" teams. Those employees who require access to classified information to do their mission-essential tasks will work from the building, officials said.
The Pentagon will restrict access to employees with swipe card access, and will restrict international visitors. "We are also restricting access of Pentagon officials who have been overseas in one of the CDC-defined Level 3 or 2 countries," officials said on background.

As of today, the Level 3 countries are: China, Iran, South Korea, Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Monaco, San Marino and Vatican City.

Personnel who return from these countries will be required to self-isolate for 14 days before being allowed back to work, officials said.

Pentagon officials are also closing employee fitness centers and said they are looking at other measures to lessen the chances of transmission.


More states increase National Guard’s role in coronavirus response

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The governors of New York, Maryland, Colorado and West Virginia are the latest state executives to increase the involvement of the National Guard.

“The National Guard is fully involved at the local, state, and federal level in the planning and execution of the nation’s response to COVID-19,” a National Guard Bureau press release stated. “In times of emergency, the National Guard Bureau serves as a federal coordinating agency should a state require assistance from the National Guard of another state.”

According to the National Guard Bureau, “more than 650 Air and Army National Guard professionals in 15 states are providing personnel in support of civil authority at the direction of their governors in response to COVID-19.”

All 50 states have issued emergency declarations, a critical step before mobilizing National Guard resources.
Gov. Andrew Cuomo of New York has specifically called for an increased role for the National Guard and for involvement from the Army Corps of Engineers in combating COVID-19.

Cuomo, in a press conference Monday, has now called on the New York National Guard to assist state officials in expanding in-patient hospital capabilities in anticipation of a spike in positive novel coronavirus cases requiring hospitalization.

“We are going to organize the National Guard to work with the building unions and work with private developers to find existing facilities that could most easily be adapted to medical facilities,” Cuomo said in the press conference. “Meaning dormitories, meaning former nursing homes: facilities that have that basic configuration that could be retrofitted.”

Currently, the New York National Guard has about 500 personnel activated to assist in the state’s response, a state official said. These numbers may increase given the potential for an expanded role.

The governor called on local governments to “identify” possible locations for new beds, and he cited an additional 5,000 beds in New York City as a target figure.

Cuomo was the first governor to activate the National Guard to assist in the state’s response in New Rochelle, New York, a suburb of New York City, where a “cluster” of cases were confirmed.

Guardsmen continue to assist with food delivery, logistics and cleaning services in the previously identified “containment area.”

In addition, Guardsmen, including Army National Guard combat medic specialists and Air National Guard medical technicians, are “assisting state officials with the collection of samples” at drive-thru testing locations, the official added.

Additional drive-thru testing locations are coming online throughout the state including on Staten Island, Cuomo noted.

In the press conference, Cuomo also called for the federal government to deploy the Army Corps of Engineers to increase the hospital beds available for potential patients in New York State.

“The federal government has tremendous capacity: deploy the Army Corps of Engineers to come work with states to build temporary medical facilities,” Cuomo said. “We don’t have the billions of dollars you would need to implement an immediate, emergency hospital construction program. This state can’t do it; no state can do it.”
Cuomo’s desires for increased federal involvement coincides with those from some lawmakers for greater participation of U.S. military Reserves units in the nationwide COVID-19 response.

“The federal government operates and maintains a medical emergency stock, where they have stocked medical equipment for domestic issues or for wartime,” Cuomo added. “We will continue to do everything we can, but we need federal assets and we need federal assistance.”

On his call for the Army Corps of Engineers, Cuomo said there have been "ongoing conversations, none of which have been conclusive.”

According to the state’s health officials in the press conference, New York has tested over 7,000 individuals with 950 positive cases and 7 deaths.

In Maryland, Gov. Larry Hogan activated around 400 Guardsmen from the Maryland Army and Air National Guard over the weekend to augment the state’s capabilities.

In a press conference Monday, Hogan said a total of 1,000 Guardsmen will be activated by the day’s end with an additional 1,200 on “enhanced readiness” status, expected to be activated this week.

“Decision-makers at the federal, state, and local level are going to take drastic actions right now that may seem scary, that may sound extreme,” Hogan said. "They will be terribly disruptive, but they will be absolutely necessary to save the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans.”

These Guardsmen include two Area Support Medical Companies to assist state health officials in screening patients, transporting supplies and distributing food.

“One of things that the governor mentioned was the distribution of the Strategic National Stockpile mission, particularly personal protective equipment,” said Maj. Gen. Timothy E. Gowen, Maryland adjutant general, in the press conference. “That’s always been a standing mission for us, and we are going to execute that in the coming days.”

Gov. Hogan also ordered the Maryland Department of Health to identify and “open closed hospitals” to increase bed capacity. The state currently has 37 confirmed cases, according to the governor.

In Colorado, 145 Guardsmen have been mobilized to assist state officials in COVID-19 response and mitigation efforts, including manning drive-thru screening areas.

“These National Guard members are the state’s resident trained and equipped experts in biological hazards,” the press release stated. “[The Guardsmen] are assisting with testing and testing support and advising Colorado local and state partners with validated tactics, techniques and procedures for future screening missions in Colorado.”
As of Monday afternoon, Colorado reported 131 confirmed cases of COVID-19.

In West Virginia, National Guard personnel provided local first responders from West Virginia and Kentucky with specialized training.

“Participants learned best practices to mitigate responder and employee exposure to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), as well as other radiological, biological and chemical (CBRNE) responses, and how to enhance personal protective actions and protocols during daily operations,” the release stated.

As of Monday, several other states have continued utilizing components of their National Guard to assist in response and mitigation efforts, although in a lower volume that New York’s response.

A small contingency of Iowa National Guard liaisons officers are assisting in the State Emergency Operations Center, the Iowa Air National Guard is providing facilities and flight line support to the Iowa Department of Public Health, according to Col. Michael Wunn, Iowa National Guard director of public affairs.

The Florida National Guard activated additional personnel over the weekend, bringing a total of just under two dozen Guardsmen assisting state officials in logistics and communications roles.

On Friday, the California Air National Guard activated a 10-person “medical augmentation team" from the 144th Fighter Wing of the California Air National Guard “to provide emergency pre-hospital stabilization response for up to 24 patients per 24-hour operations,” according to a press release.

In Louisiana, three Guardsmen are assisting New Orleans’ city officials, while the state’s “full time force is quite engaged and leaning forward in a preparedness mode...anticipating any possible future mission requests,” an official said.

Puerto Rico is utilizing their Guardsmen to screen passengers arriving via airports and cruise ship ports.

At the federal level, the National Guard Bureau is working with interagency partners as part of the nationwide response to the COVID-19 outbreak, and the bureau serves “as a federal coordinating agency should a state require assistance from the National Guard of another state."

“Bottom line, our force must remain flexible, innovative and ready to help America mitigate the impacts of this virus,” said Gen. Joseph Lengyel, National Guard Bureau chief, in the release. “I trust the Adjutants General in the 50 states, three territories and District of Columbia will continue to make decisions at their level to ensure our force of 450,000 people will be ready when their governors’ call.”