



JUAN INFANTE, a certified medical assistant, takes a woman's temperature before testing for the coronavirus in Madera, Calif. Los Angeles County uses Curative-Korva's oral-based approach for much of its testing.

COLUMN ONE

Pandemic has been a rough road for truckers

Many report lower pay and more dangerous working conditions, including the threat of thieves.

BY MOLLY HENNESSY-FISKE  
REPORTING FROM STILLWATER, OKLA.

By the time Connie Reynolds pulled her 18-wheeler into Cowboy Travel Plaza, she'd made the long haul up Interstate 35 from the Texas border town of Laredo to central Oklahoma and was looking forward to kicking back at a table and sampling the rest stop's Smokey Pokey barbecue before heading to Wichita, Kan.

But the Smokey Pokey was closed — except for takeout — because of the coronavirus. So was the rest stop's bar, Western wear store and a special indoor attraction: a pirate ship. Reynolds had to eat her sausage in her truck.

"We would like to just go in and sit down and take a break, have a meal. For a lot of drivers, it's a way to unwind," Reynolds said as she sat in the truck's cab recently, next to her new mask and hand sanitizer. "It's got a lot of drivers wound up."

About 70% of America's freight travels by truck, and many of the country's 3.5 million truck drivers are busier than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic, transformed into essential workers keeping shelves stocked with medical supplies and groceries.

"In the war against the virus, America's truckers are really the foot soldiers that are carrying us to victory," President Trump said during an event honoring truckers on the White House lawn this month. "Truckers are playing a critical role in vanquishing

[See Truckers, A1]

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Oral swab test in county brings risks and rewards

A Silicon Valley start-up's less invasive method to verify the coronavirus isn't favored by FDA

BY MAYA LAU  
AND MELODY PETERSEN

When the coronavirus hit, Los Angeles County faced a testing crisis.

Officials had only one test processing machine at its laboratory in Downey and had little hope of getting help from the federal government. Swabs were scarce. Laboratories were backlogged. And there weren't enough healthcare workers to take samples from pa-

tients.

So they turned to a brand-new Silicon Valley start-up with a novel approach that said it could provide a large number of drive-through tests very quickly.

That company, Curative-Korva, now performs most of the public testing across Los Angeles County for COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

The firm, started in January by a 24-year-old scientist and entrepreneur, processes

nearly 6,000 samples per day at dozens of pop-up sites and claims to provide nearly 20% of all testing for the virus in California.

The company's rapid growth owes in part to a unique approach that allows patients to self-administer the tests by swabbing their mouths after coughing.

The advantages? It's painless. Less protective gear is needed. And patients and workers face less infection risk.

[See Testing, A1]



A RESIDENT reads in peace at Palm Springs' Tahquitz Creek Golf Resort, closed during the pandemic.

A dramatic change in senior life

Virus' impact in retiree-dense Coachella Valley is widely felt

BY MARIA L. LA GANGA

RANCHO MIRAGE, Calif. — It was a choice Lisa Weaver wished she didn't have to make.

Keep her restaurant open. Risk contact with someone who has the coronavirus. Bring the disease home. To her doubly vulnerable partner, who is 68 and suffers from an autoimmune disorder.

Or close Dickey's Barbecue Pit and risk losing her investment in the place — half the money she'd set aside for retirement. Weaver would have to lay off her remaining employees. For at



LISA WEAVER bought Dickey's Barbecue Pit in Rancho Mirage, a city with a high percentage of residents 65 and older. Now she has doubts.

Many regions seeing a letup, but not L.A.

Fewer cases elsewhere in the state have some chafing under stay-at-home order. Others want it extended.

BY RONG-GONG LIN II,  
JOE MOZINGO  
AND MELANIE MASON

The coronavirus is on the decline in many parts of California but continues to spread in Los Angeles County, sparking new debate about whether officials will need to begin easing stay-at-home restrictions in certain sections of the state while giving harder-hit regions time to flatten the curve.

The state's epidemiological map is starting to reflect the adage that California is many states in one. Nineteen counties from Humboldt to Tuolumne have recorded no fatalities from the virus. And even moderately populated counties such as Fresno and Monterey are holding single-digit death tolls.

But Los Angeles County has had 944 people die from COVID-19, with 315 passing away last week alone.

Even adjusted for its larger population, its rate of 9.3 deaths per 100,000 people is 58% higher than the next hardest-hit urban county, Riverside, and 72% higher than the epicenter of the Bay Area, Santa Clara County, according to a Times analysis of coronavirus data.

Half of all hospitalized coronavirus patients in California are being treated in Los Angeles County, which is home to a quarter of the state's population, the analysis found.

Though a peak in deaths will usually lag behind the peak in infections by one to three weeks, it's hard to tell whether Los Angeles County has bent the curve on the virus' spread. There were 7,218 confirmed new cases for the seven-day period that ended Sunday, compared with 3,152 the previous week.

But inconsistent testing and backlogs at laboratories often make those numbers unreliable. Another key measure of infection, the number of hospitalizations, remained relatively stable last week, neither rising nor falling.

The differing situations [See Cases, A1]

HOURS CUT? YOU MAY GET FULL AID RELIEF

A quirk in the CARES Act means some California employees are eligible to earn more for working less.

BY SARAH D. WIRE

WASHINGTON — California workers who see their hours cut as little as 10% due to the coronavirus outbreak are eligible to receive the entire \$600-a-week federal subsidy offered in the \$2-trillion federal rescue package, state officials and employment experts say.

That means in some cases, workers in California — and across the country — could end up temporarily receiving far more from the government for those lost hours than they would have earned by working them.

In practice, however, few companies and workers so far are taking advantage of the benefits, partly because of the unprecedented backlog of unemployment claims in California and other states' unemployment offices, and partly because many business owners don't yet fully understand the incentives created by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act to encourage businesses to reduce employees' hours rather than lay them off.

"If employers knew about this option for their workers, there's a lot of free money floating around, and it's shocking that so few people take it up," said Till von Wachter, a UCLA economics professor. "There are substantial financial gains and opportunities for workers in the current environment, and it's just crazy that nobody's taking it up."

While it was widely known that the flat \$600-a-week [See CARES Act, A1]

A haunting worry about the virus

Doctors have fears that COVID-19 could cause long-term damage to the organs of some patients. **PERSPECTIVES, A2**

Lakers pay back federal relief loan

They received \$4.6 million as part of a program to help small businesses weather the COVID-19 pandemic. **SPORTS, B6**



# Daily life changes in a dramatic fashion

[Seniors, from A1]  
ments and championship golf, but it's also home to some of the densest concentrations of senior citizens in California — the very same people with the greatest risk of contracting the coronavirus simply because of the year they were born.  
That fact has changed daily life here in dramatic fashion. Ten days before Gov. Gavin Newsom issued a stay-at-home order for the entire state, the Riverside County public health officer recommended that “those in the Coachella Valley who are elderly and have underlying conditions, including individuals who are HIV-positive, limit nonessential travel and avoid large public gatherings.”  
Dr. Cameron Kaiser's targeted guidelines came just days after the county announced its first case of locally acquired COVID-19. Government and hospital officials did not identify the county's “patient zero,” but she is believed to be an 83-year-old Rancho Mirage woman who was hospitalized on March 1, according to the Desert Sun.

Many retired snowbirds, who winter here to escape harsh weather, fled home while they were still able to travel. Seniors who volunteer throughout the region are sheltering in place, so the National Guard was called in to lend a hand at the valley's regional food bank.  
The Rancho Mirage City Council has written \$8,000 checks to help hard-hit restaurants survive. The main requirement? That they stay open for food delivery or curbside pickup through May 31.  
This rugged valley at the foot of the San Jacinto Mountains is home to three California cities with the highest percentages of residents 65 and older: Indian Wells comes in at No. 2, with 59% of the population eligible for Medicare. Rancho Mirage is No. 3 with 53%. Palm Desert comes in at No. 8, with 34%. (Topping the list is Orange County's Laguna Woods, almost all retirement housing, where 83% of the population is 65 and older.)  
At the pandemic's start, “our demographics were working against us to a certain extent,” said Dr. Alan Williamson, chief medical officer at Eisenhower Health in Rancho Mirage. Among the hospital's first patients “were the country-club set that traveled, got together and showed up COVID-positive. Then very quickly thereafter, it became a communitywide disease.”  
Although many area seniors are fit, active and healthy, Williamson said, many “have diabetes, lung disease issues, heart disease issues.... They're the tail end of the World War II generation into the Korean War generation. A lot of smokers.”  
Which means a lot of underlying conditions that make people vulnerable to



Photographs by GINA FERAZZI Los Angeles Times

AN OLIVE Garden waitress delivers takeout in Rancho Mirage. The city offers aid to restaurants that stay open for delivery or pickup.



**BUSINESS HAS** improved some, said Lisa Weaver, welcoming Clyde Munsell. Many retired snowbirds in Rancho Mirage fled home; others are staying indoors.

‘They’re the tail end of the World War II generation into the Korean War generation. A lot of smokers.’

— DR. ALAN WILLIAMSON, on the virus' threat to senior citizens in Rancho Mirage

the coronavirus. But Williamson credits the senior population with adhering to stay-at-home guidelines, helping to keep the region's COVID-19 cases and deaths fairly stable in recent weeks.  
On April 12, the Riverside County Public Health De-

partment reported 373 COVID-19 cases and 17 deaths in the Coachella Valley's nine cities; by Friday, nearly two weeks later, the number of cases had risen to 562, but only five new deaths had been reported.  
“We’ve flattened the curve. These words have suddenly become what Americans long to hear.... And we can say it for our valley,” Eisenhower Health's leadership wrote in an April 20 letter. “Thankfully, we’ve all been doing the right things, to the point where Eisenhower is now treating only five (5) inpatients for COVID-19!”  
The virus' impact, however, has been widespread here.  
Eisenhower Memory Care Center's day-care program for people with Alzheimer's disease and dementia

was closed the week of March 16 “out of an abundance of caution.”  
The Rancho Mirage Chamber of Commerce canceled ribbon cuttings and business mixers and began offering Zoom seminars — “Stimulus Package Explained,” “Retail & Restaurant Rescue,” “Crisis Leadership.”  
Golf courses were locked down for nearly three weeks, their vast green expanses inviting but untouchable. They were allowed to reopen on April 20 with strict limitations. Gated communities and country clubs have been shut tight. Even cars in grocery store parking lots appear widely spaced, as if to keep a kind of automotive social distance.  
FIND Food Bank, which serves communities in a 5,000-square-mile swath of

Southern California desert, has been particularly hard hit. Because so many people have been thrown out of work, the organization had to add 19 new mobile distribution sites.  
“Seventy percent of our volunteer base, about 5,000 annually, are people over the age of 65,” said Debbie S. Espinosa, president of the Indio-based organization. “They’re seniors and retired. When shelter in place happened, we lost virtually all of our regular volunteers. To top it off, the amount of people we’re serving is 30% to 45% higher.”  
About two dozen members of the National Guard have stepped into the breach, packing food in the warehouse, staffing the free community markets. And Cardiff Limousine is now delivering meals to about 75 elderly clients. It is a volunteer effort, Espinosa said. Sadly, it's not as if the drivers have much else to do, mid-pandemic.  
“People are coming to our lines that have never been to a food bank line before,” Espinosa said. “You’ll get a gentleman who says, ‘I’ll skip two days of eating so my kids won’t have to.’ People taking care of seniors who say, ‘I need to make sure my mom eats. I can no longer take care of both of us because my hours got cut by 75%.’ It’s hard. It really is.”  
Act for MS, which helps Coachella Valley residents diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, has been hard hit by the virus. The organization offers strength training, exercise programs and help with electric bills, along with other services.  
The annual March fundraiser has been rescheduled to December. Its exercise programs, which help as-

suage the disease's impacts, have been suspended. Gyms have closed.  
Julie Drouyor misses them desperately. The 54-year-old was diagnosed with MS in 1992. She took disability retirement from her job as a financial analyst with the University of California in 2016, as her pain increased and her ability to move and think plummeted.  
In the winter, she and her husband live in a 330-square-foot recreational vehicle on the border of Rancho Mirage and Palm Desert. In the summer, they drive their home to Idyllwild. They can’t do that now, because of the stay-in-place orders. And Drouyor doesn’t have access to the adaptive yoga and aquatic exercise programs that help keep her mobile.  
“I have to actually think about walking every step,” said Drouyor, who is immunocompromised. “I’ve been distracted before and fallen.... That’s where the exercise with Act for MS helps me. When you’re on disability, you don’t have the same opportunities. It costs quite a bit.”  
Lisa Weaver stood behind a makeshift sneeze guard at midday in her barbecue joint. On a table to her right was a display of paper towels, bleach, toilet paper, Pampers and disposable gloves — restaurant staples she is selling to help make ends meet.  
On the plus side, the \$8,000 grant from the city of Rancho Mirage will help her pay her employees for the next month or two. On the minus side, it was lunchtime on a Sunday in the Coachella Valley's high season, and there were no customers.  
As she pondered how she’d live and still keep Dickey's open, she talked about her plans to pitch in and help her community survive the difficult months of the COVID-19 pandemic.  
“This week, we’re going to feed the National Guard and the volunteers at the food bank,” she said, with a bright smile. “They have to eat MREs like they’re in Afghanistan.”  
Weaver has donated meals to the California Highway Patrol and the staff at Eisenhower Medical Center's COVID-19 unit. She's helped feed the region's homeless population and is scheduled to bring meals to grocery store workers.  
For a week or so, she lived with friends to keep her partner safe. Now, she has moved home — sort of. She goes back-and-forth between the guest room and office via sliding glass doors to the backyard. She does not venture into any other part of the house.  
“She makes me meals or brings me water,” Weaver said of her partner. “She leaves it at the door. One day, she was gone, and I was hungry.”  
The solution? A Chipotle Mexican Grill order. Delivered. Because the kitchen was out of bounds.  
Business, she said, has improved some. April has been looking up. A generous donor gave her \$5,000, which will pay for 1,000 meals for people in need. “I cried,” she said. She’s been advertising a special deal that’s brought in supportive customers: “Buy a meal and we’ll feed the homeless a meal.”  
She paused. Clarified. “We’ll feed them regardless.”

## Court passes on chance to expand gun rights

Justices say N.Y. law is moot, sidestepping a major decision.

By DAVID G. SAVAGE

WASHINGTON — A 2nd Amendment challenge to a New York City gun ordinance fizzled in the Supreme Court on Monday, but conservative justices looked poised to expand gun rights in future cases.  
In a brief unsigned opinion, the high court said the New York case was moot because the city had repealed an ordinance that barred licensed gun owners from carrying their weapons across town or outside the city. Their permits allowed them to have a gun at home, but not to travel with it.  
It's only the latest disappointment for 2nd Amendment advocates. For a decade, they have tried and failed to get the Supreme Court to rule squarely on whether gun owners have a constitutional right to carry a firearm with them in public.  
Monday's decision revealed that at least four justices are ready to rule for expanded gun rights. Justices Clarence Thomas and Neil M. Gorsuch joined a 31-page dissent written by Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr.

“This is not moot. The city violated petitioners’ 2nd Amendment right, and we should so hold,” Alito wrote in New York State Rifle & Pistol Assn. Inc. vs. City of New York.  
Brett M. Kavanaugh wrote a short concurring opinion to say that while he agreed with the majority that the case was moot, he also agreed with the conservatives on the need to clarify

and expand gun rights.  
“I share Justice Alito’s concern that some federal and state courts may not be properly applying Heller and McDonald,” he said, referring to the rulings in 2008 and 2010 that struck down city bans on private handguns in Washington, D. C., and Chicago.  
“The court should address that issue soon, perhaps in one of the several

2nd Amendment cases with petitions for certiorari now pending before the court,” he said. As an appeals court judge, Kavanaugh wrote a dissent arguing that Washington's ban on semiautomatic rifles violated the 2nd Amendment.  
That leaves Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. holding the deciding vote in future gun cases.  
He joined the 5-4 rulings

that held residents had a right to have a gun at home for self-defense.  
But since then, the court has repeatedly refused to go further and rule on whether the 2nd Amendment protects a right to carry a gun in public or to own a semiautomatic weapon.  
The chief justice is inclined to avoid rulings on major issues if the court is not required to intervene.

## Insurers win healthcare reimbursement case

By DAVID G. SAVAGE

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court ruled Monday that when Congress makes a promise to pay, the government must indeed pay up, even if a later Congress changes its mind.  
That's the essence of what could be a \$12-billion win for health insurers who joined the Obamacare program in its first years and lost money by doing so.  
When Congress passed the Affordable Care Act in 2010, it banned insurers from rejecting customers based on preexisting health conditions. The program was set up to partially reimburse the insurance companies that ended up with the sickest and most expensive pa-

tients. It said the federal government “shall pay” insurers for their losses if the costs of the expanded coverage outpaced the premiums.  
But after Republicans took control of Congress in 2014, lawmakers refused to appropriate the money to cover the losses suffered by insurers.  
Writing for an 8-1 majority, Justice Sonia Sotomayor said Congress was not free to renege on a past promise to pay.  
The 2010 law “created a government obligation to pay insurers the full amount set out” in a formula, she wrote in Maine Community Health Options vs. United States. “An obligation is definite commitment that creates a legal liability” on the

part of the government, she said.  
She said Congress could have said the payments were contingent on future appropriations, but it had not done so. As a result, the government had a “legal duty” to pay up. This holding “reflects a principle as old as the nation itself: The government should honor its obligations,” Sotomayor said.  
Four insurance companies — from Illinois, North Carolina and Maine — had appealed to the high court after an appeals court had rejected their claims. The lower court said only Congress had the power to disperse tax money, and its later decision to refuse to pay the insurers’ claims prevailed over the wording in the earlier law.

Industry experts said the claims for past losses could reach \$12 billion.  
Dissenting alone, Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr. faulted the court for “providing a massive bailout for insurance companies that took a calculated risk and lost. These companies chose to participate in an Affordable Care Act program that they thought would be profitable.” In 2012, Alito joined the dissent that would have struck down the Obamacare law in its entirety.  
Monday's ruling has nothing directly to do with the current Obamacare program. However, the justices in the fall will hear a new challenge to the law that arose when Texan Republicans sought again to have it struck down.