

BRIEF19

A daily review of covid-19 research and policy.

POLICY BRIEFING

New York City's Safety-Net Hospitals Face Financial Collapse. New York City's safety-net hospitals are facing possible [closure](#) due to losses related to the coronavirus pandemic and [Medicaid cuts](#) by New York State. The city has 29 non-profit safety-net hospitals. They are not part of the city's public hospital system, so they won't be bailed out by City Hall, and they can't tap into generous lines of credit as wealthy Manhattan hospitals can. The Brooklyn Hospital Center, for example—where 79 percent of patients are on Medicaid or combined Medicaid and Medicare or are uninsured—needs \$100 million to stay in the black over the next four months. Federal funding formulas have historically dispersed funds inequitably: Of the \$12 billion allocated to hospitals in the last federal stimulus bill, the Brooklyn Hospital Center received only \$35.2 million. It remains to be seen whether the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will follow through on a promised “significant infusion of money for high-impact areas.”

Politico, The New York Times. [18 May 2020](#).

—Aida Haddad, MDiv

Loan Relief for Providers. Representative Carolyn B. Maloney last week [announced](#) the "Student Loan Forgiveness for Frontline Health Workers Act." The intent is to relieve frontline providers “of the debt they incurred to train for this critical work—in graduate degree programs or other professional certification.” The Department of Health and Human Services would be tasked with the creation of a nine-member task force in conjunction with the Departments of Education and Treasury to determine what qualifies as “significant contribution” to coronavirus mitigation, as well as the definitions of healthcare workers, students, laboratory workers, researchers, and a catchall for those involved in the pandemic response. Qualifying federal loans would be forgiven by the Department of Education, and private loans would be assumed by the Department of the Treasury. No refunds would be available for previous loan payments, nor could forgiven loans be claimed in federal tax filings. Applicants would have two years from the creation of the program to apply; loans incurred by workers who died of covid-19 would be eligible for consideration. *The House of Representatives. [18 May 2020](#).*

—Joshua Lesko, MD

Federal judge weighs in on voting by mail. Last month, after the Supreme Court weighed in, Wisconsin proceeded with in-person voting for its primary elections. The in-person voting has since been [linked](#) to an increase in covid-19 infections, the outcome that was feared by advocates for voting by mail. The issue has now appeared in Texas. The Texas Democratic party has filed a lawsuit demanding that mail voting be extended to all Texans to prevent the transmission of the coronavirus. The State has raised concerns about fraud associated with mail voting and wants to limit the extension of absentee ballots only to citizens over age 65. Yesterday, a federal court [sided](#) with the Democratic party and held that the risk of illness and death was too great compared to concerns of voter fraud, and that voting by mail should be made available to all voters. *Various. [20 May 2020](#).*

Pandemic exacerbates partisan divide. Instead of pulling the country together, the coronavirus pandemic is [pulling it apart](#) along familiar partisan lines. One reason: Six of the seven hardest-hit states are led by Democratic governors. Those six states, home to densely packed metropolises

and accounting for a third of our country's population, are only represented by 12% of senators. For most senators, therefore, the pandemic is not causing a significant human toll back home, even while it is causing economic devastation. For that majority of senators, the pressure to relieve the economic pain is more intense than the pressure to minimize deaths from the virus. It is not surprising, then, that the Senate is reluctant to pass legislation that would prolong the shutdown and is instead looking to re-open communities as soon as possible. *Wall Street Journal*. [19 May 2020](#).

CDC guidance finally issued. This past weekend the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention finally [issued](#) recommendations on reopening. Previously, a leaked draft of the recommendations caused public [disagreement](#) between the agency and the White House because Trump administration officials felt that some recommendations were overly cautious. The recently published document is far-reaching, and includes a review of the Center's surveillance efforts, recommendations for schools, businesses, and places of worship, among other institutions, on how to safely reopen. Suggestions include that school desks not all face the same direction and that shared objects like reusable menus and shared condiments be removed from restaurants. [20 May 2020](#). CDC. – Kimi Chernoby, MD, JD, Policy Section Editor

Alabama opened on April 30th. Now intense care units are full. After being one of the last states to close in an effort to flatten the covid-19 curve, doing so on April 1st, Alabama's stay-at-home order expired on April 30th. Since then, 5,000 new cases have been recorded, and the number of deaths statewide have nearly doubled. Yesterday, Steven Reed, the mayor of Montgomery (the capital and 2nd largest city in the state) said that intensive care units in the city were running out of beds. The three worst days in terms of new cases and deaths have all occurred [since May 5th](#). *Washington Post*. [21 May 2020](#). –Jeremy Samuel Faust MD, MS

Illinois legislators eject colleague for refusing to wear a mask.

Many legislative bodies, including Congress, have deferred reconvening in person until the threat of transmitting coronavirus can be abated. But the Illinois General Assembly gathered on Wednesday for the first day of a special pandemic session, meeting in a huge arena to allow for more social distancing. One of the body's first steps was to introduce a new rule requiring all legislators to wear masks. The measure [passed](#) with bipartisan support, but one Republican not only voted against the measure, but also refused to comply once the rule was adopted. The representative, Rep. Darren Bailey, who has sued Illinois's Democratic governor, J.B. Pritzker, over his stay-at-home executive order and called unemployment the "second pandemic," said the mask order was "just another Democrat bullying tactic" and that he did not believe it was about protecting people's health. Ultimately his colleagues on both sides of the aisle voted to remove him from the floor. This episode is just one more illustration of an emerging partisan fight over the utility of mask-wearing in public. *Washington Post*. [22 May 2020](#). –Kimi Chernoby, MD, JD

Kane Elfman PhD, Publishing and design.

Anna Fang, Week in Review.

Jeremy Samuel Faust MD MS, Editor-in-Chief.

<http://www.brief19.com/>

Twitter: [@brief_19](#)

submissions@brief19.com

Brief19 is a daily executive summary of covid-19-related medical research, news, and public policy. It was founded and created by frontline emergency medicine physicians with expertise in medical research critique, health policy, and public policy.