

COVID-19 RESPONSE

New York City was one of the first American cities struck by COVID-19, and among the hardest hit, becoming an epicenter for the nation. But New York City, primarily due to the resolve and ingenuity of everyday New Yorkers, showed the way forward in responding to and addressing this enormous international health, economic, and humanitarian crisis. The city rapidly implemented a comprehensive mobilization of personnel and resources, including an unprecedented health response predicated on science and data; the overnight creation of new programs to combat hunger at scale; the procurement and distribution of 100 million pieces of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to frontline workers; the adaptive use of technology to maintain critical services; the redeployment of thousands of City workers to tackle emergent issues such as social distancing compliance; and the creative use of streets and sidewalks for recreation, travel, and commerce.

New York City monitored the evolving science around COVID-19 and continuously expanded the key, vital aspects of social distancing, testing, and contact tracing throughout the City. It deployed a wide array of public health measures, including education and critical outreach campaigns; distribution of vital supplies such as masks; placement of large numbers of testing sites throughout the city; mobilization of contact tracers and take care ambassadors; and constant response and recovery programs. As a result of programs like these and the diligent response of more than 8 million New Yorkers, the City has gone from its initial high infection rates to its current low levels of infection and transmission (among the lowest in the country).

In April 2020, the City also launched the Racial Inclusion and Equity Taskforce in response to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color. The taskforce has monitored response in affected neighborhoods and among vulnerable populations. It has also identified key disparities through analysis and dialogue with affected communities. The City also conducted outreach and engagement through 10 Sector Advisory Councils, convening experts in such fields as labor and small business to inform the City's response.

This chapter provides a summary of the City's COVID-19 response through the MMR reporting period of June 30, 2020. It cannot capture the rapid and complex nature of the efforts, but it lays out key aspects of the City's response.

FRONT LINE HEALTH RESPONSE

The City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and NYC Health + Hospitals (NYC H+H) have a long history of combatting infectious diseases and preparing for emergent health threats. COVID-19 exceeded all modern-day epidemics on a global scale and tested every facet of our health care system, from post-acute care to ambulatory care to the bed capacity of our 11 acute care hospitals. The City rapidly expanded the bed and staffing capacity of its public hospitals, including the creation of new field hospitals; surged critical supplies and resources to the city's other hospitals and nursing homes; and activated and expanded new technologies such as telemedicine services.

Starting in February, DOHMH conducted disease surveillance efforts and the epidemiologic investigation to inform response operations and decision-making, including how different age groups, racial demographics, neighborhoods and communities are all experiencing this public health emergency. DOHMH distributed over 1 million face masks to nursing homes

from its emergency response warehouse and began filling orders for face masks from hospitals and other healthcare facilities. In March, DOHMH began to receive PPE and other supplies from the federal Strategic National Stockpile, New York State, and other sources and made weekly “push” deliveries of PPE to every hospital and nursing home in New York City. Through June 30, 2020, more than 98 million pieces of PPE were provided to hospitals, nursing homes, and other healthcare providers across the City. In the last week of March, DOHMH delivered over 3,100 ventilators, which it received from State and federal stockpiles, to New York City hospitals.

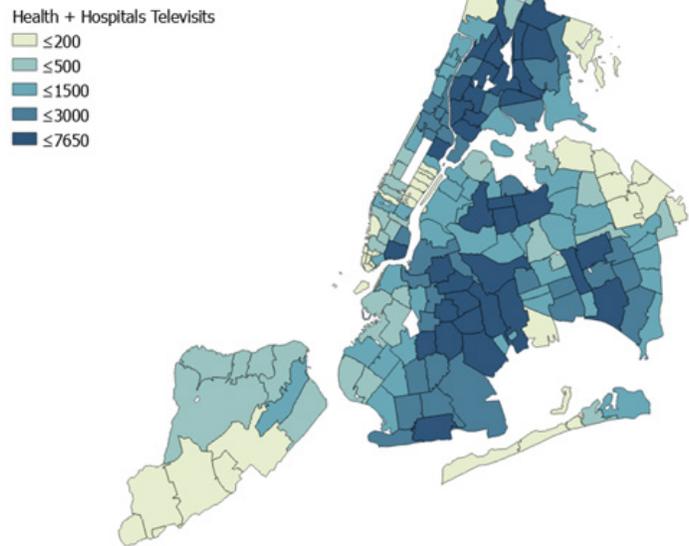
In early March, NYC H+H stood up a clinician-led COVID-19 hotline that allowed New Yorkers to call with their COVID-19 health concerns and receive expert guidance. At its peak, the hotline received over 5,000 calls a day. In addition, NYC H+H aggressively scaled up telemedicine services, going from just 500 virtual visits in the month prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, to nearly 57,000 in the first three weeks of the pandemic—and a total of over 289,000 televisits by the end of June.

COVID-19 created patient loads well beyond our health care system’s baseline capacities, especially in intensive care units (ICUs). NYC H+H’s facilities quickly re-organized and transformed spaces into COVID-19 critical care units, which included increasing the number of intensive care beds. NYC H+H was able to triple overall ICU capacity. It also stood up a 350-bed field hospital, Roosevelt Island Medical Center, equipped and staffed within three weeks, that accepted over 600 patients. Activating its waterfront properties, the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC) conducted dredging to prepare Pier 90 for the arrival of the USNS Comfort hospital ship while simultaneously converting its space at Brooklyn Cruise Terminal to a 1,000-bed temporary hospital. In a collaborative effort to help New York City health care facilities mitigate staffing shortages, DOHMH provided health care workers through the NYC Medical Reserve Corps, comprised of over 2,000 medical professionals mobilized in response to the public health emergency. DOHMH also implemented a liaison program with assigned points of contact, who reached out daily to the city’s nursing homes and independent hospitals. Requests were collected for general guidance on City and state policies, PPE needs, and staffing support. The City also constantly communicated and partnered to support its broader health care and hospital networks.

Although the City’s emergency life-saving measures were robust, as outlined above, COVID-19 tragically represents the largest mass fatality incident in modern NYC history. Drawing from expertise developed post-9/11, the NYC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) led the City’s response to the unprecedented number of deaths by conducting medico-legal investigations as well as serving as the City’s mortuary. OCME partnered with NYC Emergency Management (NYCEM) to help 135 NYC hospitals expand and manage their own morgue capacity, creating temporary morgue capacity in healthcare facilities throughout the City. OCME also rapidly established four portable mortuary units in Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn, to ensure dignified and respectful treatment of the deceased.

The City has taken unprecedented measures to protect New Yorkers, including our heroic frontline workers at private and public healthcare facilities, from the spread of COVID-19. Through June 30, 2020, more than 98 million pieces of PPE and more than 3,300 contracted and volunteer staff were provided to hospitals, nursing homes, and other care facilities throughout the city. As it became clear that such supplies were not readily available, the City through NYCEDC undertook an unprecedented effort to coordinate, partner with, and drive approximately 70 local manufacturers to stand up local supply chains from scratch to produce and distribute critical medical supplies. Through June, these partnerships resulted in the local production of over 3.6 million medical gowns, 4.7 million face shields, 190,000 test kits, and 1,330 bridge ventilators. Beyond providing much needed medical equipment, local production of this equipment supported nearly 3,000 jobs in the City while strengthening our emergency preparedness.

NYC H+H Televisits by ZIP



TEST AND TRACE

On June 1, the City announced universal testing for all New Yorkers and launched the NYC Test & Trace Corps to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Since the first days of the pandemic, the City has sought to expand testing capacity throughout the City, by partnering not only with national reference labs, but also local ones. The City has pursued strategic private, community, and non-profit partnerships, while constantly encouraging and pursuing new innovations in testing. As a result, the City now has capacity to perform more than 50,000 tests per day, a considerable increase from the initial days, when its capacity was just a few hundred tests per day. The City has continued to ramp up its citywide testing capacity at community testing sites operated by NYC H+H and through a wide, diverse network of other private and community partners. It has brought more than 200 new walk-in sites on line, spread across the five boroughs, to ensure that testing is available in the hardest hit neighborhoods, communities of color, and places that continue to experience periodic spikes of COVID-19. In addition, NYCEDC properties, NYC Parks recreation centers, and several libraries were converted into sites for COVID-19 testing.

NYC H+H leads the NYC Test & Trace Corps in close collaboration with DOHMH. Through Test & Trace Corps, New Yorkers receive free, safe, and confidential testing for COVID-19. The program emphasizes the core tenets of combating COVID-19: testing as many people as possible and tracing the contacts of those who are identified as positive. The NYC Test & Trace Corps manages COVID-19 by identifying early, and limiting future contacts of, anyone infected with the virus. It ensures that anyone with the virus receives care and can safely isolate to prevent the spread. Through the Take Care initiative, the NYC Test & Trace Corps connects COVID-19 positive patients to care and help them stay isolated at home, in a hotel, or at a healthcare facility if necessary. Contact tracers manage a process to determine if individuals who test positive need medical attention, offer services to patients at home or in hotels (including meals and medications), and create lists of everyone patients have had contact with since the onset of symptoms. By the end of June, the City's Test & Trace Corps reached 86 percent of total cases in the City. The program has continued to grow and is now reaching 96 percent of COVID-19 cases citywide.

EDUCATION

New York City made the difficult decision to close school buildings for in-person instruction beginning on March 16, 2020. At the same time, it provided innovative new resources at scale to students, parents, and teachers. These included remote learning, free meals, and other support services for 1.1 million public school students.

To ensure that all students were connected and able to learn from home through the end of June, the City distributed over 310,000 internet-enabled iPads to students. To support the families of first responders, health care providers, transit workers, and other frontline workers, the City created 178 Regional Enrichment Centers across all five boroughs that care for children while their parents served the City in its time of need. In addition, the City provided free meals to all New Yorkers at Meal Hubs across the city.

The 2020–2021 school year began on September 16 for remote student-teacher orientation. The City is also preparing to reopen physical schools, making it the largest school system in the nation to do so.

SAFEGUARDING OUR MOST VULNERABLE

During the pandemic, food insecurity rose dramatically as the economy was put on hold, schools closed, and hundreds of thousands of residents lost their jobs. To meet these challenges, the City launched large-scale, multi-language education and support programs to reach all New Yorkers, particularly our most vulnerable and hardest-hit populations. Public education and awareness efforts included targeted robocalls, live calls from outreach staff to vulnerable seniors, and targeted text messages via NotifyNYC. The City also expanded its wellness call program to all seniors and vulnerable residents in the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) with the goal to check on residents' health and well-being and connect them to basic necessities such as medicine and food.

ESTABLISHING FOOD SECURITY

New York City has also taken bold and effective steps to make sure every New Yorker has access to the food they need during the crisis, regardless of age, disability, income, race or ethnicity, neighborhood, immigration and citizenship status, medical risk and underlying health conditions, dietary restrictions, employment status, housing status, or eligibility for federal assistance. In March, Mayor de Blasio appointed a City Food Czar to create and operationalize a cross-agency effort to feed hungry New Yorkers and ensure a secure food supply chain. As a result, the City launched the Feeding New York Plan and the GetFood NYC Program, which served more than 130 million free meals through the home delivery programs and DOE Meal Hubs at over 500 sites across the City. The City also invested \$25 million in direct assistance to support emergency food providers—pantries and soup kitchens—that experienced increases in demand and costs, and established a Food Reserve to bolster our capacity to support this network in the future. In addition to support from the Department for the Aging, the Department of Education, the Department of Youth and Community Development, the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunication, and the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Taxi and Limousine Commission hired 9,000 TLC-licensed drivers who worked nearly 37,000 shifts to deliver more than 60 million meals directly to New Yorkers’ homes. In order to publicize these programs, the City conducted outreach in 11 languages, reassigned staff to manage increased virtual and remote interviews for enrollment in federal food assistance programs, and made robocalls to more than 400,000 senior citizens throughout the five boroughs.

ENSURING ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected the mental health of New Yorkers. To ensure that services continued to reach people who need care, nearly all of Thrive NYC’s 30 programs continued to deliver services during the pandemic. Many programs—specifically those that reach New Yorkers with the highest need and those that strengthen crisis prevention and response—continued to provide in-person services, including in over 100 shelters for families with children, over 40 runaway and homeless youth residences and drop-in centers, and at 46 high-need sites within the NYC Health + Hospitals system. Mobile treatment teams continued to provide intensive, ongoing, community-based treatment to people with serious mental illness, many of whom are experiencing homelessness. Students in high-need schools and students enrolled in school-based mental health clinics continued to receive counseling remotely, and School Response Clinicians offered wellness check-in calls and individual mental health sessions remotely to students in emotional distress or crisis. Furthermore NYC Well, the City’s comprehensive mental health helpline, responded to an increased need: the service answered 17 percent more calls in May 2020 than in May 2019.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ThriveNYC also launched new engagement strategies to eliminate barriers to care for particularly high-need populations. For example, to reach veterans during the pandemic, ThriveNYC and the Department of Veterans’ Services launched Mission: Vet Check, in which volunteers were trained to make supportive check-in calls to veterans. Over 12,800 calls to veterans were made resulting in over 300 referrals for additional help with issues like food assistance, unemployment, and COVID-19 testing information.

ENGAGING SENIORS

In addition to ensuring that certain traditional essential services to home-bound seniors, including meal delivery and case management, remained seamless, the Department for the Aging (DFTA) and its partners quickly worked to transition many of the services that older New Yorkers came to rely on, especially those provided in congregate settings, to services that could be accessible at home. Before and through the pandemic, DFTA served 170,994 senior center participants. Key areas of focus during the pandemic for senior center participants, and for all older New Yorkers and their caregivers, included social engagement, virtual programming, social isolation-related outreach and services, meals, support groups, assessment, and linkage and referral to essential resources.

DFTA Social Engagement Calls to Older Adults

Total Successful Calls to Older Adults

- 100
- 500
- 1,000
- 5,000
- 10,000



In May, the COVID-19 Heat Wave Plan was announced to keep vulnerable New Yorkers cool and safe at home, create safer summer cooling options, and prevent and respond to power outages. The City created a \$55 million program to provide over 74,000 air conditioners to New Yorkers who were 60 years old and older and had income below 60 percent of the state median income, and did not have air conditioning at home. The Get Cool NYC program addressed the higher risk for indoor heat exposure for New Yorkers due to staying inside for social distancing, especially among those most at risk of COVID-19 complications. By mid-June, the City had reached out to over 180,000 low-income seniors. In the first few weeks of the program, the City installed eight times as many air conditioners as it did in all of last year under the Home Energy Assistance Program.

In a multipronged approach to combat social isolation among older New Yorkers, DFTA network reached 145,596 older New Yorkers through 904,442 social engagement calls and 100,827 clients through additional wellness calls. This effort was conducted by DFTA and provider staff, supported by over 1,000 volunteers. DFTA transitioned its Friendly Visiting program, which matches homebound older adults with volunteers who do weekly in-person visits, to a remote program. In June, DFTA launched a social isolation media campaign to raise public awareness about the problem of social isolation among seniors, with audio and visual media in English, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese. More than 200 New Yorkers signed up as Friendly Visiting volunteers during the media campaign in June.

PROTECTING TENANTS

At the outset of the crisis, the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Mayor's Office to Protect Tenants (MOPT) worked together to initiate a wide-ranging tenant engagement strategy to inform tenants of the risks posed by the virus and to keep New Yorkers in their homes while much of the City's economy was put into lockdown. This campaign was accomplished through the wide distribution of up-to-date fact sheets to tenants and by consistently posting the latest public health guidance online. HRA designated eligibility specialists and case managers as essential workers, ensuring that social services "first responders" remained on-hand to assist New Yorkers in need. In late March, HRA initiated an emergency process for all eligible New Yorkers—including those not already receiving public assistance—to apply for public assistance and rent and utility grants and arrears online through the ACCESSHRA benefits portal. In April, MOTP, the Public Engagement Unit, HRA, and 311 launched the Tenant Helpline, a fully language-accessible legal services and case management referral hub available to all NYC tenants regardless of income or immigration status. This helped New Yorkers navigate housing insecurity created and exacerbated by the pandemic. Working with the Department of Buildings, MOPT initiated the Three Quarter-House (TQH) PPE program, which distributed PPE to single adults receiving public assistance and living in City-monitored TQH housing. In May, MOPT and HRA launched Project Parachute/Homebase, a housing assistance collaboration with Enterprise, a community non-profit organization, and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, to translate Notices of Eviction into a variety of languages. These initiatives helped to ensure that tenants knew their rights, had the resources necessary to avoid eviction, and were able to stay in their homes regardless of immigration status.

In public housing, NYCHA took proactive steps to ensure the safety and well-being of the 400,000 New Yorkers residing in NYCHA properties. From the beginning of the crisis through the end of Fiscal 2020, NYCHA staff delivered approximately 2.35 million communications to residents and other stakeholders in the form of phone calls, robocalls, and emails advising about the risks of the virus and measures to prevent its spread. NYCHA launched a COVID-19 resource website and posted safety posters translated into Spanish, Chinese, and Russian at all 316 NYCHA developments. Working with Tenant Associations, NYCHA staff helped mobilize federal Housing and Urban Development Tenant Participation funds to cover the distribution of free meals in coordination with New York City's GetFoodNYC program, related transportation, face coverings and PPE, and other supplies for tenants. NYCHA deployed targeted outreach programs for its most vulnerable residents, including those with active social service cases, those with life-sustaining equipment, and seniors. NYCHA also took special precautions and preventative actions to ensure that the physical state of its facilities was in compliance with public health guidance to keep residents safe, including deploying two vendors to provide regular disinfection services at developments citywide.

SERVING HOMELESS NEW YORKERS

The Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and its not-for-profit partners delivered essential, front-line social services, providing shelter and expanding outreach to New Yorkers experiencing street homelessness and offering temporary housing to all those in need. DHS worked closely with public health officials to develop a multi-pronged approach for implementing City guidance on isolation and disease mitigation. In keeping with DOHMH guidance, DHS ensured

that all shelters were regularly and comprehensively cleaned; implemented an active monitoring system for clients and staff who had experienced (or were experiencing) symptoms; and coordinated closely with DOHMH and NYC H+H staff to provide care for the sick. To protect its most vulnerable clients—including those over 70 years of age who were neither sick nor symptomatic—DHS made special accommodations in dedicated shelters in its system for residents to isolate. To inhibit the virus's spread, DHS strategically relocated clients out of larger shelters with congregate settings to commercial hotels, which were able to provide greater social distancing for the clients who were relocated and protected the residents of the targeted shelters from which they relocated.

All front-line DHS and HRA staff were provided with essential PPE such as masks and other face coverings, and DHS distributed the same resources to clients. As a further safety measure, DHS coordinated with NYC H+H to contract or hire new nursing staff at all intake centers to conduct 24/7 front-door screenings, on top of their intake centers' existing medical clinic capacity, and ensured 24/7 clinical staffing at all isolation locations as well. DHS is also proactively offering testing to all adult clients, systematically going shelter-by-shelter to provide easy-to-access, free testing on-site.

The DHS HOME-STAT program conveyed the City's latest guidance to social service provider partners and directly to clients experiencing unsheltered homelessness. DHS rolled out a screening process to hundreds of street outreach, Safe Haven, and Drop-In Center staff to identify unsheltered individuals who may be experiencing possible symptoms and connect them to testing and assessment at NYC H+H. As of August 18, outreach teams have conducted more than 53,000 engagements related to COVID-19.

DHS also brought new resources online to serve unsheltered New Yorkers, including hundreds of new Safe Haven and stabilization beds, several in commercial hotel locations. DHS intensified outreach efforts at high-priority, end-of-the-line subway stations and gave outreach teams the ability to conduct expedited intake processes with clients directly on the platform to bring more unsheltered New Yorkers out of the subways amid the COVID-19 crisis.

SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES

To support small businesses during the crisis, the Department of Small Business Services (SBS) quickly established financing programs including the Small Business Continuity Loan and Employee Retention Grant program. SBS helped small businesses obtain 4,750 financing awards totaling \$122.6 million—triple the number of awards and a 60 percent increase in funding compared to the prior fiscal year.

In June, SBS established its Business Restart Hotline, which allows business owners to reach out for assistance and information on how to reopen safely. The Hotline received over 19,616 calls in Fiscal 2020. The Workforce1 Career Center System pivoted to remote service delivery, focusing on connections to jobs for essential work and on training. Over 400 New Yorkers participated in trainings made available online. As of June 30, SBS had distributed more than 5.1 million face coverings to small businesses through its network of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Chambers of Commerce, and other community partners.

NYCEDC assisted small businesses across the City and worked to maximize their access to federal support programs. NYCEDC provided information about applying to Small Business Administration programs to over 5,700 companies and provided direct application assistance to more than 300 small businesses. NYCEDC also developed partnerships with small banks and community development financial institutions, through which over 60 local businesses successfully submitted loan applications.

In June, the Racial Inclusion and Equity Taskforce announced the creation of the Restaurant Revitalization Program. Implemented by NYC Opportunity and HRA, and supported by the Mayor's Fund, the program will support unemployed and underemployed restaurant workers affected by COVID-19 and their employers, with a focus on New York City's hardest-hit communities. This program aims to partner with restaurants committed to paying a full minimum wage to its workers, with tips on top; increasing race and gender equity; and making their meals accessible to vulnerable community members, including those who are food insecure, essential workers, or others who are facing challenges in a time of need. Collectively, the City and the advocacy group One Fair Wage will direct \$3 million into some of the City's hardest-hit communities to support approximately 100 restaurants and 1,000 displaced restaurant workers, as well as providing hard-hit communities with approximately 53,000 meals over 6 to 12 weeks.

ACCESS TO OPEN SPACE

Warmer weather brought new challenges to the fight against COVID-19. In April, the City announced its Open Streets initiative to allow New Yorkers to safely experience summer in New York City. Open Streets are streets that are closed to through traffic and only accessible for local access, allowing pedestrians and cyclists to use the roadbed for socially distant recreation. Open Streets locations were selected through community engagement and data analysis to include neighborhoods that lack open space and were hard hit by COVID-19. The program includes streets managed by local precincts or local partners such as BIDs, block associations, and civic groups. By June 2020, 64 miles of Open Streets had been announced across all five boroughs, among which were blocks in some of the City's most impacted areas, such as Stanley Avenue in East New York, Rockaway Freeway in Far Rockaway, and 101st Street in East Harlem. The Open Restaurants outdoor dining plan was announced in June 2020, allowing restaurants to temporarily use open space on sidewalks and curbsides. The program has supported the City's restaurants by eliminating a cumbersome application process while promoting social distancing. Open Streets and Open Restaurants will continue in New York City until October 31 and will begin again summer 2021.

In March, the Department of Parks and Recreation created the Social Distancing Ambassador program to encourage communities to follow social distancing guidelines and stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. In May 2020, the Social Distancing Ambassador program was expanded by the Mayor's Office. In coordination with 14 agencies, City employees were deployed throughout City parks to monitor adherence to social distancing guidelines and to educate residents about the importance of social distancing through the distribution of literature and face coverings. In addition, approximately 800 school safety agents were deployed to subway stations throughout the five boroughs to also educate New Yorkers about social distancing and distribute face coverings. From May 1 to the end of Fiscal Year 2020, over 2,200 Social Distancing Ambassadors from the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Department of Environmental Protection, the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings, the Law Department, the Department of Design and Construction, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the Department of Correction, the Department of Citywide Administrative Services, the Department of Citywide Planning, the Department of Buildings, the NYC Sheriff's Office, the Department of Sanitation, and the Fire Department interacted with over 100,000 members of the public and distributed more than 3.3 million face coverings in City parks.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For additional information on items referenced in the narrative, go to:

- Department of Health and Mental Hygiene COVID-19 Information page:
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-main.page>
- COVID-19 Assistance & Guidance for Businesses:
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/sbs/businesses/covid19-business-outreach.page>
- 311 COVID-19 Health & Safety:
<https://portal.311.nyc.gov/article/?kanumber=KA-03288>
- NYC COVID-19 Engagement Portal:
<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doitt/about/covid-19/engagement-portal.page>
- NYC Open Data Portal:
<https://opendata.cityofnewyork.us/>
- Test & Trace Corps:
<https://www.nychealthandhospitals.org/test-and-trace/?notification>
- COVID-19 Testing Sites:
<https://www.nychealthandhospitals.org/covid-19-testing-sites/?redirect¬ification>

