



Matt Wellington, public health campaigns director with our national network (left), urged federal decision-makers in July to slow the spread of the coronavirus by temporarily closing non-essential businesses and to contain the virus by ramping up testing infrastructure. Credit: MSNBC.

Ramping up COVID-19 testing is the key to making us safer

Matt Wellington, director of our national network's public health campaigns

As we braced for the winter—and for a new set of challenges in keeping ourselves and our loved ones safe from COVID-19—the coronavirus spread uncontrolled across much of the country, killing hundreds of Americans every day.

Our national network called on leaders to reduce caseloads by making the painful choice to shut down where and when the virus was spreading out of control. But to keep the virus contained, and to ensure safe reopening, we also needed dramatically more testing.

California and most other states were not hitting the COVID-19 testing targets needed to “suppress” the virus—to catch isolated cases before they turn into outbreaks.

But, instead of centrally coordinating a ramp-up of testing for all states, the federal government mostly continued to leave states in the lurch.

In response, CALPIRG and our national network launched our Test More, Save Lives campaign, calling on governors across the country to commit to hitting the testing benchmarks required to protect public health.

What level of testing do we need in order to suppress COVID-19?

The Brown University School of Public Health and Harvard Global Health Institute have built a model that projects how much testing each state needs to effectively suppress the virus. Our national network is calling on governors to commit to meeting and maintaining testing targets for their states based on this model.

MEMBER RESOURCES

Read the latest news and sign up for email alerts on our public health and consumer campaigns at: <https://calpirg.org>

CALPIRG's Mission

When consumers are cheated or the voices of ordinary citizens are drowned out by special interest lobbyists, CALPIRG speaks up and takes action. We uncover threats to public health and well-being and fight to end them, using the time-tested tools of investigative research, media exposés, grassroots organizing, advocacy and litigation. CALPIRG's mission is to deliver persistent, results-oriented public interest activism that protects consumers, encourages a fair, sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government.

Ensuring that each of us can access necessary testing infrastructure requires states to:

- Expand testing locations to include a variety of options such as drive-thru and walk-up sites, as well as mobile testing units that visit at-risk settings such as churches and urban neighborhoods.
- Make sure anyone who needs a test gets one, regardless of whether they have symptoms.
- Ensure all test results come back within 48 hours.
- Launch educational campaigns to inform people of where they can get tested and how.
- Target testing efforts at high-risk settings such as nursing homes, meat-packing factories, schools and prisons.
- Increase purchasing power by forming consortiums, similar to the one started by Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan and the National Governors Association.

More testing will help us save lives

As we acknowledge the tragedy of hundreds of thousands of American deaths, we reflect on our response to the pandemic and on how many of these deaths could have been avoided had we responded as quickly and as effectively as other similarly wealthy countries.

But we can't let the mistakes of the past dictate how we respond to this crisis today. It's as important as ever that we all keep social distancing, wearing masks, and limiting gatherings and non-essential travel. But adding more testing to the equation is a key to getting this virus under control and preventing widespread community outbreaks—and that's why it's imperative that Gov. Gavin Newsom increase testing. ■

NEWS BRIEFS

TRANSFORM TRANSPORTATION

California commits to go all-electric on vehicles by 2035

California is now home to the country's most ambitious plan for electrifying our transportation.

On Sept. 23, Gov. Gavin Newsom issued an executive order requiring that all new cars and passenger trucks in California be zero-emission vehicles by 2035, and banning the sale of new gas-powered cars after that year. The order came as wildfires continued to rage across Western states, bringing the urgency of climate change and the necessity of policies that will mitigate its worst effects into stark relief.

"Gas-powered cars are a major source of air pollution that creates toxic smog and threatens public health," said CALPIRG Executive Director Emily Rusch. "We cannot address climate change without phasing out oil-powered transportation, and we applaud Gov. Newsom for embracing the promise of clean transportation."

As part of our Transform Transportation campaign, CALPIRG is continuing to advocate not only for cleaner vehicles but also for more



Sydney Riess, public health campaign associate with our national network (top left), virtually joined Florida residents who have lost loved ones to COVID-19 in October to call on Gov. Ron DeSantis to adopt a statewide mask mandate and to increase testing and contact tracing.

How can we expand testing in my state?

To contain the spread of the coronavirus, states must hit their testing benchmarks. The few states that met their targets, such as New York, used tried-and-tested strategies that other states can replicate.

New York residents can get a test with or without symptoms. You don't need a test order from a healthcare provider, and there are several testing sites across the state. Rather than just using testing as a tool to contain big outbreaks after they happen, New York's infrastructure—combined with clear communication of public health protocols from local and state leaders—allows it to prevent isolated infections from spreading.

transit, bike and pedestrian infrastructure in the Golden State. ■

RIGHT TO REPAIR

CALPIRG backs bill in Congress to loosen medical repair restrictions

Not being able to fix a critical medical device creates a risk for patients, especially during a pandemic. Too often, though, manufacturer restrictions impede repairs.

CALPIRG is calling on Congress to pass a bill introduced by U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (Ore.) and Rep. Yvette Clark (N.Y.), which seeks to lower restrictions on components and service information that biomedical repair technicians (biomed) need to fix essential medical devices during the COVID-19 crisis.

“I’ve talked to more than a hundred biomed since the start of the crisis,” said Kevin O’Reilly, Right to Repair associate with our national network. “All they want is to be able to fix broken equipment and protect the patients in their hospitals.”

In a survey of 222 repair professionals released by our national research partners at U.S. PIRG Education Fund in July, 30 percent reported having critical equipment—such as defibrillators, ventilators and anesthesia machines—that they could not put to use because they lacked access to parts and service information. ■

CONSUMER DEFENSE

Auto lending complaints spiked with pandemic, finds analysis of CFPB data

Americans already struggling in a pandemic shouldn’t also be the targets of abusive auto lending tactics.

But from March to July 2020, Americans filed more than 2,800 complaints with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) regarding vehicle loans and leases, according to an October report from our national research partners at U.S. PIRG Education Fund and Frontier Group.

The spike represents the largest influx of auto lending complaints in a five-month period in



Scripps National News

the history of the CFPB’s complaint database. Nearly half cite harassment from debt collectors.

“While so many Americans have endured life-changing events in the past months and have a lot less money, auto loan market abuses that have been growing since the 2008 financial collapse have dramatically worsened,” said Ed Mierzwinski, senior director of U.S. PIRG Education Fund’s federal consumer programs.

The report makes recommendations to the CFPB, the Federal Trade Commission and state decision-makers for protecting consumers in the auto lending market. ■

Lucy Baker, consumer program associate with our national network, discusses the sharp increase in auto loan complaints in an interview with Scripps National News.

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TOP STORY: Ramping up COVID-19 testing is the key to making us safer

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BEYOND PLASTIC

CALPIRG Students secure UC commitment to move beyond plastic

What would happen if one of the largest university systems in America eliminated single-use plastics from its campuses?

We'll soon find out, thanks to a new policy at the University of California (UC). On Aug. 24, the UC Office of the President and CALPIRG Students jointly announced that, following a student-run campaign, UC campuses will start phasing out single-use plastics—paving the way for campuses free of non-essential plastics by 2030. The move will help curb the plastic pollution contaminating our waterways, overrunning our landfills and polluting our communities.

“Students are more conscious than ever of the consumption of plastic and its



FLASHBACK—CALPIRG Students at UC Berkeley launch the Plastic-Free Seas campaign in November 2019.

negative impact on our environment and public health,” said UC Berkeley graduate Nicole Haynes, statewide Plastic-Free Seas coordinator with CALPIRG Students. “We’re thrilled that our institution, which has so much purchasing power in California, is taking major steps to eliminate single-use plastic.” ■

THANKS TO YOU



Dear CALPIRG member,

If the past year has taught us anything, it's that our problems don't come one at a time. Thanks to your support, we're working to ramp up COVID-19 testing, cut down plastic waste, and get toxic chemicals out of our everyday lives. Thank you for making it all possible.

Thank you,

Emily Rusch
Executive Director
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