

# STARS AND STRIPES®

Wednesday, May 20, 2020

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## Iran encounters prompt new Navy guidelines

*Associated Press*

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The U.S. Navy warned Tuesday it will take “lawful defensive measures” against vessels in the Mideast that come within 100 yards of its warships, offering specific guidelines after a recent close encounter with Iranian vessels in the Persian Gulf.

Defensive measures have typically included turning a ship away from the approaching vessel, sounding its horn, shooting off flares and ultimately firing warning shots to force the vessel away. But offering a specific distance is new for the Navy.

“Our ships are conducting routine operations in international waters wherever international law allows and do not seek conflict,” said Cmdr. Rebecca Rebarich, a Bahrain-based 5th Fleet spokeswoman. “However, our commanding officers retain the right to self-defense if deemed necessary.”

While 100 meters may seem far, it’s incredibly close for large warships that have difficulty in turning quickly, like aircraft carriers.

The U.S. Navy has years of experience with Iranian forces getting that close, namely the hard-line, paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. Their armed speedboats routinely cut across

their paths when going through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20% of all oil passes.

Tensions have been high between Iran and the U.S. ever since President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from Tehran’s nuclear deal with world powers in 2018. Last summer saw a series of escalating attacks targeting oil tankers and other sites around the Persian Gulf. It reached a crescendo in January with the U.S. drone strike in Baghdad that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani and an Iranian ballistic missile strike of American forces in Iraq in retaliation.

Those tensions had been expected to rise after Iran’s government overcame the initial chaos that engulfed its response to the coronavirus pandemic. In April, the U.S. accused Iran of conducting “dangerous and harassing” maneuvers near American warships in the northern Persian Gulf. Iran also had been suspected of briefly seizing a Hong Kong-flagged oil tanker just before that.

In April, Trump warned on Twitter: “I have instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea.”

## Navy swaps Kidd caretaker crew with virus-free sailors

BY WYATT OLSON

*Stars and Stripes*

The Navy on Monday swapped out the caretaker crew aboard the USS Kidd with about 90 sailors confirmed to be free of the coronavirus.

The guided-missile destroyer has been at Naval Base San Diego since April 28 dealing with an outbreak of COVID-19 that occurred while the ship was at sea, the Navy said in a news release Monday.

The ship underwent disinfection after

arriving at port, and a group of a sailors remained on board to operate essential services, the Navy said.

Other crew members and anyone testing positive for the virus were removed from the ship and placed in either isolation or quarantine, the Navy said.

The news release did not indicate the number of Kidd sailors testing positive.

The Associated Press reported earlier this month that 78 sailors of the crew of 330 had been infected.

Cmdr. Nathan Wemett, the ship’s com-

manding officer, told the AP that lessons learned from the coronavirus crisis aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt had helped the Kidd avoid wider contagion.

The Roosevelt has been sidelined in Guam since late March dealing with an outbreak that has infected more than 1,000 sailors and left one dead.

The carrier is expected to set sail later this week with a crew of roughly 3,000, leaving behind about 1,800 crew members still in quarantine.

## Navy announces plans to restart promotion boards

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON— The Navy will restart selection, promotion, and continuation boards July 1 after they were halted in March due to the coronavirus pandemic, the service announced.

“Our overriding commitment is that no sailor will be disadvantaged by the delay in boards,” Rear Adm. Jeff Hughes, the com-

mander of Navy Personnel Command, said in a statement. “Although the boards were postponed, those who are selected for promotion can expect to be assigned the original date of rank and receive any back pay and allowances they’re warranted.”

The decision to postpone them was meant to prevent sailors from having to travel to Millington, Tenn., to sit on these boards, and to limit the number of sailors who would be working closely to one an-

other, according to the Navy.

As part of the plan to restart the boards, the Navy has implemented mitigation precautions in order to minimize the health risks related to the coronavirus to personnel, according to the statement. These measures include adjusting the layout of board rooms to adhere to social distancing, additional cleaning of rooms and daily temperature readings, according to the Navy.

# In Afghanistan, coalition employs remote advising

By J.P. LAWRENCE  
*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — The U.S.-led NATO coalition in Afghanistan has suspended face-to-face advising three times since February and has generally stuck to remote methods since mid-March, an inspector general report said Tuesday.

Advisers with the NATO Resolute Support mission were restricted from meeting Afghan troops and trained via phone calls, emails and text messaging apps like Whatsapp, even as Taliban violence flared in the country, said the report to Congress by the Lead Inspector General for Operation Freedom's Sentinel.

Coalition advisers have been prevented from almost all face-to-face meetings since March 14 due to concerns over the spread of the coronavirus, the report said.

Remote advising can help protect U.S. and coalition troops from COVID-19, combat casualties and insider attacks, but there are clear drawbacks, said Jonathan Schroden, director of

the Special Operations Program at CNA, a nonpartisan research organization based in Virginia.

"It is much harder to advise troops and to build the relationships and trust that's required to do this in a foreign country, if you're not standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the partner force," Schroden said.

Coalition troops have resumed some high-level advising in person, as shown by visits by U.S. forces commander Gen. Scott Miller to a few Afghan corps headquarters.

But most advisers are allowed only minimal face-to-face interactions with Afghan troops and government officials, except when mission essential, the report said.

"Our first priority is protection of the force. We continue to advise Afghan partners through the use of technology," NATO's Resolute Support mission said in a statement.

Three Afghan troops deployed throughout the country told Stars and Stripes that remote advising has led to some difficulties, while two said it didn't affect their missions.

# F-35A stealth fighter crashes upon landing at Eglin Air Force Base

From staff and wire reports

Eglin Air Force Base in Florida's Panhandle suffered its second jet fighter crash in just five days.

Tuesday night, an F-35A Lightning II assigned to the 58th Fighter Squadron crashed upon landing, according to an Air Force press release.

The pilot, who is not being identified, ejected before the crash and is reportedly in stable condition at the base medical facility.

"At the time of the accident, the pilot was participating in a routine night training sortie," the Air Force said.

The crash site was secured and there was no loss of life or damage to civilian property. The accident is under investigation.

The crash, which happened around 9:30 p.m. local time, comes on the heels of an F-22 Raptor crash last Friday on the base's practice range. In that incident, a lone pilot also ejected before the crash 12 miles north of the main base. That pilot was also in stable condition after the crash.

The F-22 was assigned to the 43rd Fighter Squadron, part of the 325th Fighter Wing based at Eglin.

The F-35A Lightning II is part of the 33rd Fighter Wing,

also based at Eglin. The "Nomads" are a graduate flying and maintenance training wing for fighter jets. A single F-35A costs about \$90 million.

Eglin is under the command of the 96th Test Wing, which tests and evaluates Air Force equipment and systems.

Tuesday's accident marks the second time the A variant of the advanced stealth fighter has crashed. On April 9, 2019, one of the Japan Air Self-Defense Force's F-35As plunged into the Pacific Ocean about 85 miles east of Misawa Air Base, its home field in northeastern Japan. The pilot, whose remains were recovered about two months later, likely experienced "spatial disorientation," the JASDF said at the time.

The first F-35 crash happened on Sept. 28, 2018, when a B variant of the joint strike fighter, which is capable of short takeoffs and vertical landings, went down near Beaufort, S.C. The pilot safely ejected.

That accident was caused by a manufacturing defect in a fuel tube that made the part rupture during flight, resulting in a loss of engine power, according to congressional investigators.

# DOD civilians get emergency leave for family virus illnesses

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Defense Department civilians can take up to two weeks of paid emergency leave if they or a family member are affected by the coronavirus, the Army said this week.

Civilians are eligible if they are under government orders to quarantine or if they have been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine, the Army said in a statement Monday.

The new emergency leave category is

separate from sick leave and is authorized through Dec. 31.

Employees who have symptoms of coronavirus and are diagnosed with it also can receive emergency leave at their normal pay rate.

"They must, however, provide documentation of the government agency that issued the quarantine order or the name of the health care provider who advised the self-quarantine," the Army said.

Employees caring for a person under a government order to stay at home or di-

rected by a doctor to quarantine will be paid at two-thirds of their normal pay rate, the Army said.

But because the civilian pay system has not yet been adjusted to account for those who take emergency leave to care for others, that category of employee will be paid at the full amount but will have to repay one-third of the sum received, the Army said. The Defense Finance and Accounting Service will take back the owed sum in future pay periods.

# MCAS Iwakuni releases initial reopen plan

BY JAMES BOLINGER

*Stars and Stripes*

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — Marine Col. Lance Lewis has released a tentative plan to “reopen” the air station as long as coronavirus conditions in Japan continue to improve and the base remains free from infection.

The air station, about an hour south of Hiroshima in southern Japan, has reported zero infections.

Some base services were authorized to open Wednesday, depending on manning, such as dine-in options at restaurants and several other support services, Lewis wrote Tuesday on MCAS Iwakuni’s Facebook page.

Relaxing further restrictions must wait until the Navy’s

Carrier Air Wing 5 deploys in the coming weeks, he said. At the moment, the air station’s primary mission is to ensure that the sailors who will be embarked aboard the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan are infection-free.

“In the coming days, we will start seeing other bases around Japan loosen their posture, but those bases do not have the same strategic importance as MCAS Iwakuni and can afford a different risk calculus,” Lewis wrote. “Let me be brutally honest: Until [Carrier Air Wing 5] departs we will maintain our current level of vigilance.”

Lewis released a tentative timeline for lifting some restrictions on base personnel, although he said all dates are subject to change.

On June 8, off-base employment will be authorized, ex-

cept for jobs in health care, the commander said. Additionally, MCAS Iwakuni residents will be able to go off base for takeout food, and students who attend off-base schools and Japanese kindergartens may return to class.

Right now, 55 students, mostly children of Japanese residents employed on the air station, are staying home from local schools to prevent the virus from spreading to the base.

On June 21, Japanese employees and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force personnel may return to use base gyms and other facilities, Lewis said.

Also, base personnel who fall under the status of forces agreement will again be allowed to dine at the JMSDF kitchen.

During the pandemic, the air station and JMSDF Fleet Air

Wing 31 agreed to limit interaction between their personnel to reduce the possibility of infection, air station spokesman 1st Lt. Phillip Parker said in an email to Stars and Stripes on Tuesday.

If coronavirus reappears in the area, or if adherence to measures like social distancing or wearing of face coverings becomes lax, however, the loosening of restrictions will cease, Lewis said.

“Right now, everyone aboard this base needs to continue to focus on adhering to the safe hygiene and distancing measures that have made us successful thus far,” he said. “We cannot have carried the ball this far down the field, only to fumble it as we approach the endzone, like my beloved Redskins every. single. time.”

## Military begins easing restrictions at Okinawa bases

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE

*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The two military branches making up the bulk of U.S. personnel on Okinawa relaxed both on- and off-base restrictions Wednesday after three weeks with no new positive coronavirus cases on the island.

Air Force Brig. Gen. Joel Carey, 18th Wing commander, ordered the “phased” lifting of force health protection measures in a message posted Wednesday afternoon on Kadena Air Base’s Facebook page. Marine Forces Japan followed suit with a statement that evening.

Starting Thursday, airmen are allowed to purchase takeout food from off-base restaurants, send their children to off-base schools and child care facilities, and visit beaches and public parks, the 18th Wing statement said.

Airmen will also be able to dine inside restaurants on base, attend chapel services and patronize gyms, pools, outdoor

equipment rentals, libraries, movie theaters, beaches, camping and resort areas, among other base opportunities.

“For the past three weeks, the Okinawa Prefectural Government has reported no new cases of COVID-19 as well as a steady decline in the number of patients still infected,” said the 18th Wing statement, referring to the respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus. “Our cases here on Kadena Air Base have also fully recovered and are doing well.”

Some 18th Force Support Squadron facilities may not open right away, the statement said. Updates will be posted to Facebook. The use of reopening facilities is contingent on following posted virus mitigation measures.

Other restrictions remain in place: The use of mass transit, visiting off-base bars, barbers, hotels, nail salons and leisure shopping are still prohibited.

Base access is limited to mission-essential personnel, according to a wing Facebook post.

“We are not in the clear yet and we must remain vigilant,” the statement said. “Social distancing is still required for all personnel to the greatest extent possible.”

Cloth face coverings are required when social distancing is not possible, the statement said. The directives apply to all who have base access. Failure to obey could result in “administrative action.”

Marine officials implemented similar changes, according to the statement from III Marine Expeditionary Force.

Marines participating in recreational activities are being told to do so individually, with family or in pairs, the statement said.

In addition to being able to purchase off-base take-out food again, Marines are also authorized to patronize eateries with drive-thru windows. However, inside dining remains restricted.

Marines are also allowed to visit off-base residences.

“These changes are based on a thorough review of the

current COVID-19 pandemic situation in the region and the effectiveness of continued [health protection condition] preventive measures,” the statement said.

Marine officials said the measures would constantly be reviewed.

The latest actions by military officials mirror the easing of restrictions by Okinawa government officials. Okinawa prefecture allowed most shuttered businesses to open May 14, as long as they follow social distancing and hygiene protocols. Cabarets and nightclubs, where close contact is part of the service, were scheduled to reopen Wednesday.

As of Tuesday, Okinawa had 146 positive cases, the prefectural website said. The prefecture has reported six deaths, and four people remain in critical condition. The last new positive case on Okinawa was reported April 30.

Stars and Stripes reporter Aya Ichihashi contributed to this report.

# States join FEMA to counter misinformation

Associated Press

TRENTON — New Jersey's top homeland security official received nearly nonstop calls in early March from grocery chains, trucking companies and other logistics firms wanting to know if rumors of an impending national lockdown were true.

They weren't, and Jared Maples soon learned that the companies were reacting to misinformation stemming from text messages shared widely across the country.

Federal officials debunked the messages, but Maples said that the whole episode was a "whoa" moment for him and other state officials. Weeks later, New Jersey launched a website aimed at debunking misinformation and rumors about COVID-19.

New Jersey's effort mirrors a rumor-control site set up by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and is part of efforts underway in other states to combat conspiracy theories, hoaxes and bogus treatment claims that have erupted during the pandemic.

## Alabama

HOOVER — High schools nationwide have canceled or postponed traditional graduation ceremonies to avoid worsening the spread of the coronavirus, but some are going ahead with full-fledged springtime commencement exercises as usual, with tweaks to account for health concerns.

Thousands of graduates, parents, siblings, grandparents and more will gather at a nearly 11,000-seat stadium on Wednesday and Thursday nights in the Birmingham suburb of Hoover, as its two high schools — among the largest in Alabama — hold traditional commencement exercises despite COVID-19.

Dr. Michael Saag, who treats infectious diseases at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, said that the threat of spreading the virus poses too great a risk to hold such ceremonies. Virus carriers without

symptoms could unknowingly infect others, he said. Saag has a special perspective, as he survived COVID-19 after being infected in March.

## Arkansas

LITTLE ROCK — A federal judge on Tuesday rejected an effort to require Arkansas to release inmates at high risk of contracting the coronavirus and to take other steps to curb the virus's spread in its prisons.

U.S. District Judge Kristine Baker denied the motion for a preliminary injunction filed by a group of inmates who said that the state hasn't done enough to prevent the spread of the virus. The lawsuit was filed in response to an outbreak at one prison, the Cummins Unit, where 951 inmates have tested positive for the virus and eight have died from the illness caused by it.

The lawsuit sought the release of elderly or disabled inmates at high risk of contracting the coronavirus, or for them to be transferred to home confinement. Baker said that federal law prevents her from ordering such releases before the inmates have exhausted administrative remedies.

## Florida

TALLAHASSEE — The chief architect of Florida's coronavirus website was fired this week after a dispute over what information should be made public, underscoring how entwined public health data and politics have become as elected officials move to reopen their communities amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Questions about the integrity of the state's public health data were raised anew when Rebekah Jones, an information systems manager with the Florida Department of Health, announced in an email to researchers Friday that she was reassigned from her duties overseeing an online dashboard that provides daily snapshots of Florida's COVID-19 infections,

testing and deaths.

The firing has provided new fodder against the Republican governor as he continues defending his handling of the coronavirus outbreak. DeSantis has also come under fire for his handling of the state's unemployment system, which broke down after being inundated by hundreds of thousands of Floridians who suddenly lost their jobs because of the economic downturn caused by the outbreak.

## South Dakota

SIoux FALLS — A South Dakota city that was among the earliest to be hit by a major coronavirus outbreak in a meatpacking plant is planning a parade to thank workers, who organizers said have been unfairly stigmatized.

Several friends who planned Wednesday's event said that they hope hundreds of people will show up to hold signs of thanks outside a Smithfield Foods pork plant that closed after hundreds of employees were infected with COVID-19. Mayor Paul TenHaken is among those planning to attend.

Employees have faced stigmatization and anxiety even after the plant temporarily shuttered. A sign on the door of a local bar asked the plant's employees not to come inside, and one employee has had panic attacks as she prepares to go back to work, said Nancy Reynoza, who runs a Latino advocacy organization called ¿Que Pasa? Sioux Falls.

Natalie Eisenberg, one of the organizers of the parade, said that it's an attempt to bring a positive message to the employees and reach out as neighbors. They will also be paying for a billboard to thank the employees.

## Tennessee

MEMPHIS — Demand for opioids such as fentanyl has surged during the coronavirus outbreak in Tennessee's largest county, where more than 100 people have died of drug

overdoses since mid-March, officials said Tuesday.

Officials in Shelby County, which includes Memphis, said that more than 750 drug overdoses and 112 deaths have been reported since March 15, when the county began issuing stay-at-home orders related to the virus response.

Overdose deaths have eclipsed the number of fatalities from COVID-19, Shelby County Health Department Director Alisa Haushalter noted during an online news conference. As of Tuesday, 88 people had died from the virus in the county, Tennessee's largest by population.

## Vermont

RUTLAND — The owner of a Vermont fitness center who was ordered by a judge to close amid the coronavirus outbreak reopened Tuesday after moving exercise equipment outside into the parking lot as an outdoor facility.

The Vermont attorney general Friday had sued him and the club for staying open in violation of state rules, and hours later, a judge granted a temporary order barring the gym from operating.

Sean Manovill, owner of Club Fitness of Vermont, had temporarily stopped operating the gym after the attorney general sent a cease-and-desist letter May 5, but he reopened Friday, the attorney general's office said.

A police officer said that he saw people exercising without masks and not staying 6 feet apart, the office said. He also did not see any hand-sanitizing stations or signs advising people to wear masks, to maintain social distance or to clean equipment, it said.

Manovill disputed the police accusations and said that he closed after getting the judge's order Saturday. On Tuesday, he reopened as an outdoor fitness center in the parking lot and said that anyone can come and exercise for free. About eight club members showed up by the afternoon, he said.

# Thousands flee as dams break in Michigan

Associated Press

MIDLAND, Mich. — Rapidly rising water overtook dams and forced the evacuation of about 10,000 people in central Michigan, where flooding struck communities along rain-swollen waterways and the governor said that one downtown could be “under approximately 9 feet of water” by Wednesday.

For the second time in less than 24 hours, families living along the Tittabawassee River and connected lakes in Midland County were ordered Tuesday evening to leave home. By Wednesday morning, water that was several feet high covered

some streets near the river in downtown Midland, including riverside parkland, and reaching a hotel and parking lots.

The river rose Wednesday morning to 34.4 feet in Midland, topping a previous record reading of 33.9 feet set during flooding in 1986, the National Weather Service said.

Its flood stage is 24 feet, and it was expected to crest by day’s end at about 38 feet.

The Weather Service urged anyone near the river to seek higher ground following “catastrophic dam failures” at the Edenville Dam, about 140 miles north of Detroit,

and the Sanford Dam, about seven miles downriver. The evacuations come as Michigan remains under a stay-at-home order to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said that downtown Midland, a city of 42,000 about 8 miles downstream from the Sanford Dam, faced an especially serious flooding threat. Dow Chemical Co.’s main plant sits on the city’s riverbank.

“In the next 12 to 15 hours, downtown Midland could be under approximately 9 feet of water,” the governor said during a late Tuesday briefing. “We are anticipating a historic high water level.”

## US births decline, coronavirus may lower them more

Associated Press

NEW YORK — U.S. births continued to fall last year, leading to the fewest number of newborns in 35 years. The decline is the latest sign of a prolonged national “baby bust” that’s been going on for over a decade. And some experts feel that the coronavirus pandemic and its impact on the economy will suppress the numbers further.

“This unpredictable environment, and anxiety about the future, is going to make women think twice about having children,” said Dr. Denise Jamieson, chair of obstetrics and gynecology at Emory University.

The latest numbers were released Wednesday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The report, con-

sidered preliminary, is based on a review of over 99% of birth certificates from 2019.

The CDC found that the number of births fell about 1% from 2018, to about 3.7 million. Birth rates continued to fall for teen moms and for women in their 20s.

Aside from a one-year uptick in 2014, U.S. births have been falling every year since 2007, when a recession hit. The drop continued after the economy rebounded.

Experts have said that there are a number of causes, but chief among them are shifting attitudes about motherhood: Many women and couples delay childbearing and have fewer kids once they start.

The economy is a factor, but not because of short-term cycles in hiring. Many jobs

are low-paying and unstable, and coupled with high rents and other factors have caused women and couples to be much more cautious about having kids, said Dr. John Santelli, a Columbia University professor of population and family health.

It’s unclear what will happen to births this year, said Brady Hamilton, the CDC report’s lead author. The impact of the last few months’ events won’t become clear until late this year or early next, he said.

Santelli said that it’s possible births will go up, at least among some groups. Access to birth control and abortion has become more difficult, and some homebound couples may find themselves with greater opportunity to conceive, he said.

## Boy Scout councils pressured to share sex abuse costs

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Nine sex abuse lawsuits were filed Tuesday in New York against three Boy Scout local councils, signaling an escalation of efforts to pressure councils nationwide to pay a big share of an eventual settlement in the Scouts’ bankruptcy proceedings.

The lawsuits were filed shortly after an easing of coronavirus lockdown rules enabled courts in some parts of New York to resume the handling of civil cases.

One of the lawyers coordinating the filing, Mike Pfau, said that his Seattle-based firm expects to file scores more lawsuits in other parts of New York, as well as in New Jersey and California, after full reopening of courts there.

Two other firms, Oregon-based Crew Janci LLP and Chicago-based Hurley

McKenna & Mertz, said that they had similar plans, indicating that there could be hundreds of such lawsuits altogether.

An injunction issued by the bankruptcy judge, Laurie Selber Silverstein, blocks the lawyers from proceeding with lawsuits against the local councils through at least June 8. But several lawyers said that they will press for it to be lifted unless the councils’ financial information is fully disclosed and they agree to contribute significantly to a proposed victim compensation fund.

“The local councils are required to make a substantial contribution,” said Stephen Crew of Crew Janci. “If they don’t, the plan won’t be approved.”

Proceedings are underway at federal bankruptcy court in Delaware aimed at creating a compensation fund for thousands of men molested as youngsters decades ago by scoutmasters or other leaders.

In its bankruptcy filing, the BSA said that the 261 local councils, which have extensive property holdings and other assets, are separate legal entities and should not be included as debtors in the case.

The councils are represented by an ad hoc committee in the proceedings, and negotiations are in progress over disclosure of their assets and records as a step toward determining their contributions to the compensation fund.

Pfau said that he was skeptical the councils would agree to contributions large enough to forestall lawsuits against them.

The lawsuits filed Tuesday involve allegations of abuse from men who were Scouts decades ago in local councils in upstate New York that have subsequently merged into the Leatherstocking Council, the Baden-Powell Council and the Seneca Waterways Council.

# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Porn actor fighting to save childhood tree

**NY** NEW YORK — Porn actor Ron Jeremy is fighting to save a tree his father planted outside their New York home the day he was born.

Jeremy took to Twitter, saying that utility Con Edison was going to cut down the tree that was planted in Queens in 1953.

Jeremy, who has been staying at a Hollywood hotel during the coronavirus pandemic, told the New York Daily News that a neighbor let him know the trunk was wrapped in yellow tape last week.

The tree is on city property, and the Parks Department can choose to remove it, according to Con Edison.

Jeremy said he considered traveling to New York to protest the tree's removal but didn't feel comfortable flying.

## Scientists: Lava from eruption still cooling

**HI** HILO — Lava from the Kilauea volcano eruption in May 2018 is still cooling down and estimated to be only halfway cooled, scientists said.

The U.S. Geological Survey's Hawaiian Volcano Observatory said cooled exterior lava has insulated deeper areas of the lava flow, The Hawaii Tribune-Herald reported.

The exterior cooled because of exposure to air and rain, but the insulation is expected to keep some rock further below at extremely high temperatures for years, observatory geologist Carolyn Parcheta said.

Based on the average thickness of the lava of about 82 feet, Parcheta said there is a likelihood that liquid lava, or lava higher than about 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit, still exists in lava delta spots beneath the surface.

## Police drag street racers to jail in crackdown

**GA** ATLANTA — Atlanta Police said that they arrested 44 people and issued 114 tickets over the weekend for offenses related to illegal street racing.

Racers have been particularly noticeable in Atlanta since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with less traffic giving them more room to speed along Georgia's roads and freeways.

Charges included speeding, reckless driving, and laying drag, which Georgia law defines as creating a danger by driving a car in circles or zig-zags. Other criminal charges included driving under the influence, drinking in public and marijuana possession, with 29 vehicles impounded.

Four guns were recovered, including a semi-automatic rifle.

## Church begins removal of damaged statue

**UT** SALT LAKE CITY — The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints started work to temporarily remove a damaged statue from the church's Salt Lake Temple.

Removal of the Angel Moroni statue with a crane began as part of a four-year project to renovate and restore the temple, The Deseret News reported.

Work crews on multiple levels of scaffolding secured the statue, which is 210 feet above Temple Square in Salt Lake City.

Workers placed straps around the 12-foot-6-inch figure, which is made of hammered copper and covered in 22-karat gold leaf.

The statue was damaged during a 5.7 magnitude earthquake that struck west of Salt Lake City on March 18.

## Eagle camera returns, watching new eggs

**AK** ANCHORAGE — Two bald eagles watching over a pair of eggs in their Alaska nest could be joined by an audience of online viewers who are also eager to see the chicks hatch.

The live camera feed called Kenai Eagle Cam is part of the City of Kenai's YouTube channel, which is available on the city's website, The Anchorage Daily News reported.

The eagle cam, a partnership between the city and the Kenai Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center, went live in 2017 and was also running in 2018. The video feed's first summer online attracted millions of views.

The eggs produced by eagles named Aurora and Redoubt are expected to hatch between May 28 and June 2, city spokeswoman Christine Cunningham said.

## Boater injured by grizzly bear in attack near cub

**MT** GREAT FALLS — A mother grizzly bear attacked a boater who inadvertently came between the parent and her cub, a Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks official said.

A helicopter took the man to a hospital for treatment of non-life threatening injuries, The Great Falls Tribune reported.

Greg Lemon, a Fish, Wildlife and Parks department spokesman, said a man who was a member of a group taking boats down the Sun River was attacked after he stepped into some bushes without being aware of the animals.

"He put himself between the sow and the cub," Lemon said. "The sow saw him and immediately attacked him, bit him in

a couple of places."

"Right now the scene has been cleared and the sow swam the river and the cub stayed on the other side, but we're not going to take any further action with the bears," Lemon said.

## Fire ruins nearly all of school's football gear

**FL** TAMPA — A fire on the campus of a Tampa high school destroyed nearly all of its football program's equipment, from game day necessities to practice dummies and more.

Fire officials said the blaze at Blake High School was completely contained in under 45 minutes, but destroyed the 10-by-20 foot shed that housed the school's equipment.

The school's game-day equipment, field markers, pylons, chains, practice equipment, pop-up dummies, pads and all daily workout gear are presumed lost.

## Police: Man shoots himself in groin at party

**CA** LOS ANGELES — A large house party in the Hollywood Hills ended when a man accidentally shot himself in the groin, Los Angeles police said.

Officers responding to noise complaints found more than 100 people gathered at a short-term-rental property that appeared to have been reserved for the occasion, said police Lt. Mark Chong.

The officers heard a single gunshot and called for backup, Chong said. An investigation revealed that a man had been shot in his groin area. The wound is believed to have been accidentally self-inflicted and not life-threatening, Chong said.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

On a mission to provide credible reporting and daily news to America's military, wherever they serve.

Mobile apps available: [www.stripes.com/apps](http://www.stripes.com/apps).

# No standard for testing in pro leagues

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — There is no universal playbook for coronavirus testing in professional sports.

Protocols and procedures, guidelines and handbooks — they could be as different as rulebooks. There's plenty of common ground, though, which explains why executives and doctors from various leagues have consulted with each other while moving closer to at least a partial return to competition amid a pandemic.

League officials essentially are choosing the best option from a list of bad choices, and it comes down to how much risk they are willing to take.

"When you look at the people that run these other sports, these are all really smart guys," UFC President Dana White said. "And nobody knows their business better than they do."

"They have to literally sit down and break through item by item on what they need to do and how they need to make it as safe as they possibly can. And they'll figure it out."

There already have been several approaches in the United States:

■ UFC took blood (antibody test) or swabbed nostrils (viral test) for roughly 1,200 people

during its weeklong stay in Jacksonville, Fla., this month — part of the mixed martial arts behemoth's health and safety protocols. It took minutes for antibody results and as little as a few hours for viral test results.

■ NASCAR logged temperatures of about 900 people Sunday at its return race in Darlington, S.C.

■ Major League Baseball delivered a 67-page proposal of a 2020 operations manual last week, still subject to negotiation with the players' association. Proposed details include temperature checks twice a day and multiple fluid swabs weekly. Blood samples to detect COVID-19 antibodies will be collected less frequently.

■ The NBA hasn't implemented a full-scale testing program for its 30 teams; a little more than half have reopened practice facilities for voluntary workouts. The NFL, NHL, tennis, golf and other sports are working on their procedures.

Options differ internationally, too:

■ South Korea's top soccer league, the K-League, tested 1,100 players and staff at the end of April, and all came back negative, clearing the way to begin its season. South Korean

baseball, the KBO, screens players and coaches for fevers.

■ Australia's National Rugby League will mandate vaccines — not for the coronavirus, but for the seasonal flu. It's part of Queensland's contentious "no-jab, no-play" policy that means players who skip an annual flu shot won't be permitted to play north of the Queensland-New South Wales border.

■ The English Premier League conducted its first wave of COVID-19 testing this week and found six of 748 people infected. Those six have to self-isolate for a week.

UFC tested each of its employees before reopening its headquarters Monday. White said UFC will again test everyone before its next fights, May 30 in either Las Vegas or Arizona.

The UFC spent, on average, \$125 per test; that added up to around \$150,000 in Jacksonville. White was tested three times partly because he walked around without a mask and was in close contact with fighters.

That price tag is peanuts for a multibillion-dollar business that reportedly notched more than 700,000 pay-per-view buys for UFC 249 — generating as much as \$45 million in revenue for the first major sport-

ing event in the United States during the pandemic.

UFC has far fewer competitors than other leagues, which means more manageable testing and contact tracing and easier social-distancing.

NASCAR would have to spend more than \$2 million to test everyone it deems essential before each of its 20 races over the next month, but decided it didn't need to because drivers are isolated and pit crews already wear protective equipment.

Other sports have difficult decisions to make.

Tennis and golf tournaments often involve more than 100 entrants from around the globe. NFL teams head to training camp with 90 players, plus about 20 coaches and dozens more support personnel. MLB suggested 50-man rosters for its season.

"The overall picture is that there's a lot to be desired from testing to use it as a definitive indicator that everybody's safe," said Stuart Miller, the senior executive director of the International Tennis Federation, who is overseeing its COVID-19 advisory group and return-to-tennis efforts.

"There's a number of risks from just the testing side," Miller added.

## Border restrictions pose possible hurdle for NHL

Associated Press

The NHL is still more than a week away from determining a return-to-play format, a person familiar with discussions told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

And what that plan resembles could be complicated further should the U.S. and Canada extend border restrictions to non-essential travel into July, the person said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because the discussions are private.

The person spoke after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced border restrictions will stay in effect

through June 21. This marks the second time the restrictions have been extended since first being put into place March 18 because of the new coronavirus pandemic.

"I am hopeful that today's announcement will not have a material impact on our return to play discussions and timeline," NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly wrote in an email.

Though the NHL has left open the possibility of having training camps open as late as early August, it was unclear what effect further border restrictions will have on a league with seven of its 31 teams

based in Canada. There's also a question of how travel restrictions will affect players, many of whom have returned to their offseason homes — including about 17% of players currently self-isolating overseas.

In a separate development, the NHLPA's executive board voted to defer the final payment of players' regular-season salaries through the end of May. Players were owed their final checks on April 15, before voting to defer those payments for a month.

The decision provides temporary relief to the NHL's bottom line, opening the possi-

bility of players forgoing some or the entire remainder of their final checks. The players stand to lose all or a portion of what they are owed under the collective bargaining agreement.

Players and owners split hockey-related revenue on a 50-50 basis, with a percentage of players' salaries placed in an escrow fund. Owners can draw from the fund should their share fall below 50%, which is projected to happen this season.

Owners considered the players' previous decision to defer payment as a sign of good faith.

# NFLPA's Tretter cites hurdles to return

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Browns center JC Tretter is cautiously optimistic the NFL season — at least some version of it — will take place in 2020. He's just not certain when it will start.

The newly elected president of the NFL Players Association, Tretter said Tuesday that the COVID-19 virus outbreak has hatched so many unknowns and created such a fluid situation it's impossible to predict when football will be back — or what it will look like.

"This is a contact disease, and we play a contact sport," Tretter said during a Zoom video conference.

Voted in by his peers just days before the global pandemic brought the sports world to a standstill in March, Tretter said he's solely focused on the health of the league's players, who have remained in virtual contact during an off-season none of them could have imagined.

Tretter is encouraged that some teams have reopened their facilities, but he acknowledged there's a "long list of hurdles" to be cleared before

players can get back together to prepare for a season that remains uncertain and strangely distant.

The 29-year-old Tretter, who graduated from Cornell with a degree in industrial labor relations, has been deeply involved in discussions ranging from scheduling to players with pre-existing medical conditions and other safety considerations.

Everything is in play. Nothing is higher on Tretter's checklist than the well-being of players who are facing a ruthless, invisible opponent with an ever-changing game plan.

Although he's a relative rookie when it comes to football diplomacy, Tretter gave several noncommittal answers Tuesday.

"There's no bad idea at this point, and you kind of have to think outside the box," Tretter said when asked about the potential of players wearing modified face masks with surgical materials. "And just because it's an idea doesn't mean things are definitely going to happen, but you need to explore it, and you need to understand it."

"You have to focus on fitting

football inside of this world of coronavirus and don't get caught up in trying to fit coronavirus inside this world. The way coronavirus has kind of changed how every industry is working, you can't expect just to throw football back in and think that the virus is going to kneel down to almighty football."

Tretter said the union has been holding biweekly conference calls for players and their spouses.

For players to feel confident outside their homes, Tretter said they'll need guarantees that every precaution has been taken.

"The way this thing passes along is through contact, and that's what we do for a living," he said. "We interact with each other at the facility, at practice, weight lifting, at the meal room, it is shoulder to shoulder standing by each other, passing things around. So there is a long list of ideas we need to come up with on how to make this environment safe for us. And that's why it's going to be a lot of thinking involved in that."

Tretter said testing will be a

key to any return, and that for now, the league has the luxury of some time, with the scheduled regular-season opener four months away.

"In the end, we just have to make good decisions and safe decisions," he said. "As more people leave quarantine, we'll be able to see what's going on and get more data points with that. We still have time before our season is projected to start. A lot of the other leagues are trying to figure this out right now and piece it together. We still have time."

Tretter understands there can be no guarantees, but it's his responsibility to present every potential scenario. Even then, when players are cleared to go back, they do so knowing they could still become exposed to the virus.

"There's a level of risk to everything," Tretter said. "You're facing a level of risk right now going to the grocery store. There's always going to be a level of exposure that people are going to face in this. So I don't think we'll ever get to a point where there's no risk of exposure."

## Rain pushes Darlington Xfinity Series back to Thursday

Associated Press

DARLINGTON, S.C. — Noah Gragson couldn't wait to get back to Xfinity Series racing at Darlington.

Instead, he and the rest of the competitors will have to wait until Thursday after heavy rain postponed the series' first race since March, when the coronavirus pandemic shut down sports.

"After two months of waiting, what's another couple of days?" Gragson said.

NASCAR officials called the race about two hours after the scheduled 6 p.m. start. The event is now set for Thursday at noon.

The track was dry and fast until the rains hit about 4 p.m. The storms increased and lessened several times during that

stretch and NASCAR had Air Titans out at least three times when it looked like things might clear.

In the end, it was too wet to continue during one of the busiest weeks in Darlington history. It started Sunday with the NASCAR Cup Series' return to racing and was to continue Wednesday night when those racers were supposed to be back on the track for a rare midweek event.

Gregson, the series points leader who'll start on the pole Thursday, acknowledged he was anxious about racing at Darlington without practice laps or fans in the stands. He walked around the track earlier Tuesday to get a reminder of what it was like.

"It's going to be really difficult," Gragson said. "We saw

some guys in the Cup race who were pretty tame at the start and other guys who were pretty aggressive. That's what I'm nervous of."

Kevin Harvick won the Cup event on Sunday for his 50th victory in the sport's top series. Cup drivers were scheduled to run again at Darlington on Wednesday night, although forecasts called for additional rain. NASCAR hasn't raced on a Wednesday since Richard Petty won his series-leading 200th race at Daytona on July 4, 1984.

If that race is postponed, it would move to Thursday night, setting up a same-day double-header in a season like no other. NASCAR would likely inspect the Cup cars on Wednesday, then stagger the arrival times for Xfinity and Cup teams on

Thursday.

Thursday's Xfinity race will be the first in the series since March 7 at Phoenix.

All drivers, teams and essential personnel were screened at the track before being let in. All cars passed pre-race inspection. Now, they'll have to wait and hope for better weather.

The 21-year-old Gragson said he spent much of the rain delay playing Xbox and keeping to himself.

Once he fires up the engine, it will be racing as usual, no matter how long he's been away.

"Still a lot of butterflies," he said. "But once I get that helmet on and make a lap around this place, get back to that rhythm and feel comfortable again, it will feel natural."