

## The Impact of COVID-19 on New York City's Multilingual Immigrant Communities

Since late March, New York City has been the global epicenter of the COVID-19/coronavirus pandemic, with 134,874 confirmed cases and almost 10,000 confirmed deaths as of April 21. Nearly every New Yorker has been affected, but the effects have not been evenly distributed. While there is emerging evidence in city data of serious disparities [by race](#), it is also becoming clear, as this map indicates, that multilingual immigrant communities have been among the hardest hit.

This map combines [the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases by ZIP Code](#) (as of April 21) from the New York City Department of Health with the Endangered Language Alliance's recently released [NYC Language Map](#), which emphasizes linguistic diversity by representing over 600 languages at approximately 1,000 significant sites across the city, based on years of collaboration and data-gathering with the city's language communities.

Despite significant nuances and challenges — such as how to represent languages (especially the more widely-spoken) at individual locations, major variation in population per ZIP Code, different levels of testing for COVID-19 — some overall patterns are clear:

- The Central Queens neighborhoods of Corona, Elmhurst, and Jackson Heights, where hundreds of minority and Indigenous languages are spoken from across Latin America and Asia, has become the [“epicenter of the epicenter”](#), with approximately 9,000 cases and hundreds of fatalities.
- The most linguistically diverse stretch of neighborhoods in Brooklyn, from Borough Park to Canarsie and including major Jewish, Caribbean, and post-Soviet diaspora communities, has the highest number of cases in the borough.
- Major immigrant neighborhoods that are home to speakers of smaller languages from across Latin America, the Caribbean, and West Africa are bearing the brunt of the outbreak in Harlem and the Bronx, with high mortality rates.

These patterns are confirmed in stories from the communities themselves. Immigrant workers on the frontlines, such as essential care workers, food workers, and transit workers are at greater risk. Disparities around housing, income, health, and immigration status also play a role. A lack of timely, widely disseminated information in community languages, despite efforts, is another critical factor. Language is just one important indicator — note, for example, the affluent multilingual cluster around Manhattan's United Nations with relatively *fewer* cases.

New York City's multilingual immigrant communities are organizing, from mutual aid among [Brooklyn's Mayan community](#) to a [Queens-based Nepali network](#). The [COVID-19 Immigrant Emergency Relief Program](#) announced on April 16 is another important step, but more is needed.

*This map was produced by the [Mapping Linguistic Diversity](#) partnership, bringing together the [Endangered Language Alliance](#) and researchers at the University of British Columbia, with support from the [Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies](#). Media contact: [info@elalliance.org](mailto:info@elalliance.org)*

# Number of Positive COVID-19 Tests by ZIP Code and Distribution of Languages Spoken in New York City

Each dot represents a significant site (residential, commercial, religious, community, etc.) for a language with at least a few speakers in New York City, but in many cases thousands.

Larger languages are underrepresented to emphasize distinct communities and highlight linguistic diversity.

## Number of Positive COVID-19 Tests by ZIP Code

- 15 - 475
- 476 - 968
- 969 - 1,620
- 1,621 - 2,919

Number of total cases: 134,874  
ZIP Code unknown: 1,845

