

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/nonprofits-launch-site-asian-americans-report-coronavirus-related-racism-n1164091>

Nonprofits launch site for Asian Americans to report coronavirus-related racism

“We hope members of the AAPI community will report incidents they have experienced, which may range from microaggressions to incidents of racial profiling to hate violence,” the site's co-founder said.

March 20, 2020, 1:13 PM PDT

By Natasha Roy

Asian American and Pacific Islander groups have launched a reporting tool for people to report coronavirus-related racist acts.

The Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (A3PCON) along with the Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA) on Thursday announced the creation of the [online reporting center](#) where people can fill out a form — currently available in English, traditional Chinese, simplified Chinese and Korean — to report the location and type of discrimination experienced and other details.

The groups say they plan to use the information to create targeted education and media campaigns, provide resources to those affected and advocate for policies to curb racial profiling. The collected data will also allow the organizations to figure out the scope of discrimination nationwide and determine the best solutions from there, CAA Co-Executive Director Cynthia Choi said.

The site stresses that information will be used collectively, not individually, and that privacy will be protected. People are also urged to call 911 for actual emergencies.

The groups also plan to offer resources, including pro bono legal work and direct assistance, including referrals to resources like human relations commissions, school districts and law enforcement, A3PCON Executive Director Manjusha Kulkarni told NBC Asian America in an email.

Asians across the globe have reported experiencing xenophobia as a result of coronavirus fears, with several incidents [involving physical harassment](#). Republican lawmakers and [President Donald Trump](#) have referred to the coronavirus as the “Wuhan virus” or “Chinese virus,” which [experts say](#) could be fueling real-life acts of discrimination.

A3PCON and CAA’s work focuses on California, but Kulkarni said the groups would do their best to help AAPIs outside of California and provide appropriate resources and referrals. Kulkarni also said that while they cannot guarantee they will be able to reach out to everyone who completes the form, the groups will provide resources and assistance where they can.

Kulkarni said A3PCON and CAA have been developing the reporting center for several weeks. The two groups want to offer support and resources for the Asian Americans and advocate for the community with local, state and federal officials.

“We hope members of the AAPI community will report incidents they have experienced, which may range from microaggressions to incidents of racial profiling to hate violence,” Kulkarni said.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/us/chinese-coronavirus-racist-attacks.html>

Spit On, Yelled At, Attacked: Chinese-Americans Fear for Their Safety

As bigots blame them for the coronavirus and President Trump labels it the “Chinese virus,” many Chinese-Americans say they are terrified of what could come next.

By Sabrina Tavernise and Richard A. Opiel Jr.

Published March 23, 2020

Updated April 10, 2020

WASHINGTON — Yuanyuan Zhu was walking to her gym in San Francisco on March 9, thinking the workout could be her last for a while, when she noticed that a man was shouting at her. He was yelling an expletive about China. Then a bus passed, she recalled, and he screamed after it, “Run them over.”

She tried to keep her distance, but when the light changed, she was stuck waiting with him at the crosswalk. She could feel him staring at her. And then, suddenly, she felt it: his saliva hitting her face and her favorite sweater.

In shock, Ms. Zhu, who is 26 and moved to the United States from China five years ago, hurried the rest of the way to the gym. She found a corner where no one could see her, and she cried quietly.

“That person didn’t look strange or angry or anything, you know?” she said of her tormentor. “He just looked like a normal person.”

As the [coronavirus](#) upends American life, Chinese-Americans face a double threat. Not only are they grappling like everyone else with how to avoid the virus itself, they are also contending with growing racism in the form of verbal and physical attacks. Other Asian-Americans — with families from Korea, Vietnam, the Philippines, Myanmar and other places — are facing threats, too, lumped together with Chinese-Americans by a bigotry that does not know the difference.

In interviews over the past week, nearly two dozen Asian-Americans across the country said they were afraid — to go grocery shopping, to travel alone on subways or buses, to let their children go outside. Many described being yelled at in public — a sudden spasm of hate that is reminiscent of the kind faced by American Muslims, Arabs and South Asians in the United States after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

But unlike in 2001, when President George W. Bush urged tolerance of American Muslims, this time President Trump is using language that Asian-Americans say is inciting racist attacks.

Mr. Trump and his Republican allies are intent on calling the coronavirus “the Chinese virus,” rejecting [the World Health Organization’s guidance](#) against using geographic locations when naming illnesses, since past names have provoked a backlash.

Mr. Trump told reporters on Tuesday that he was calling the virus “Chinese” to combat a disinformation campaign by Beijing officials saying the American military was the source of the outbreak. He dismissed concerns that his language would lead to any harm.

On Monday evening, Mr. Trump tweeted, “It is very important that we totally protect our Asian American community in the United States.” He added they should not be blamed for the pandemic, though he did not comment on his use of the phrase “Chinese virus.”

“If they keep using these terms, the kids are going to pick it up,” said Tony Du, an epidemiologist in Howard County, Md., who fears for his son, Larry. “They are going to call my 8-year-old son a Chinese virus. It’s serious.”

Mr. Du said he posted on Facebook that “this is the darkest day in my 20-plus years of life in the United States,” referring to Mr. Trump’s doubling down on use of the term.

While no firm numbers exist yet, Asian-American advocacy groups and researchers say there has been a surge of verbal and physical assaults reported in newspapers and to tip lines.

San Francisco State University [found a 50 percent rise](#) in the number of news articles related to the coronavirus and anti-Asian discrimination between Feb. 9 and March 7. The lead researcher, Russell Jeung, a professor of Asian-American studies, said the figures represented “just the tip of the iceberg” because only the most egregious cases would be likely to be reported by the media.

Professor Jeung has helped set up [a website in six Asian languages](#) to gather firsthand accounts; some 150 cases have been reported on the site since it was started last Thursday.

Benny Luo, founder and chief executive of NextShark, a website focused on Asian-American news, said the site used to get a few tips a day. [Now it is dozens.](#)

“We’ve never received this many news tips about racism against Asians,” he said. “It’s crazy. My staff is pulling double duty just to keep up.” He said he was hiring two more people to help.

No one is immune to being targeted. Dr. Edward Chew, the head of the emergency department at a large Manhattan hospital, is on the front lines of fighting the coronavirus. He said that over the past few weeks, he had noticed people trying to cover their nose and mouth with their shirts when they are near him.

Dr. Chew has been using his free time to buy protective gear, like goggles and face shields, for his staff in case his hospital runs out. On Wednesday night at a Home Depot, with his cart filled with face shields, masks and Tyvek suits, he said he was harassed by three men in their 20s, who then followed him into the parking lot.

“I heard of other Asians being assaulted over this, but when you are actually ridiculed yourself, you really feel it,” he said the following day.

A writer for The New Yorker, Jiayang Fan, said she was taking out her trash last week when a man walking by began cursing at her for being Chinese.

“I’ve never felt like this in my 27 yrs in this country,” she [wrote on Twitter](#) on Tuesday. “I’ve never felt afraid to leave my home to take out the trash bc of my face.”

Attacks have also gotten physical.

In the San Fernando Valley in California, [a 16-year old Asian-American boy was attacked](#) in school by bullies who accused him of having the coronavirus. He was sent to the emergency room to see whether he had a concussion.

In New York City [a woman wearing a mask](#) was kicked and punched in a Manhattan subway station, and [a man in Queens](#) was followed to a bus stop, shouted at and then hit over the head in front of his 10-year-old son.

People have rushed to protect themselves. One man started a buddy-system Facebook group for Asians in New York who are afraid to take the subway by themselves. Gun shop owners in the Washington, D.C., area said they were seeing a surge of first-time Chinese-American buyers.

At [Engage Armament](#) in Rockville, Md., most gun buyers in the first two weeks of March have been Chinese-American or Chinese, according to the owner, Andy Raymond.

More than a fifth of Rockville's residents are of Asian ethnicity, and Mr. Raymond said buyers from Korean and Vietnamese backgrounds were not unusual. But Mr. Raymond said he was stunned by the flow of Chinese customers — in particular green-card holders from mainland China — that began earlier this month, a group that rarely patronized his shop before.

"It was just nonstop, something I've never seen," he said.

Mr. Raymond said that few of the Asian customers wanted to talk about why they were there, but when one of his employees asked a woman about it, she teared up. "To protect my daughter," she replied.

For recent immigrants like Mr. Du who are in close touch with friends and family in China, the virus has been a screaming danger for weeks that most Americans seemed oblivious to.

Mr. Du is trying to remain hopeful. He spends his weekends training to become a volunteer with Maryland's emergency medical workers. He is part of a group of Chinese-American scientists who organized a [GoFundMe account](#) to raise money for protective gear for hospital workers in the area. In three days, they raised more than \$55,000, nearly all in small donations.

But he said he was afraid of the chaos that could be unleashed if the United States death toll rises significantly.

Already a gun owner, Mr. Du, 48, said he was in the process of buying an AR-15-style rifle.

"Katrina is not far away," he said, alluding to the unrest in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. "And when all these bad things come, I am a minority. People can see my face is Chinese, clearly. My son, when he goes out, they will know his parents are Chinese."

For American-born Asians, there is a sudden sense of being watched that is as unsettling as it is unfamiliar.

"It's a look of disdain," said Chil Kong, a Korean-American theater director in Maryland. "It's just: 'How dare you exist in my world? You are a reminder of this disease, and you don't belong in my world.'"

He added: "It's especially hard when you grow up here and expect this world to be yours equally. But we do not live in that world anymore. That world does not exist."

One debate among Asian-Americans has been over whether to wear a mask in public. Wearing one risks drawing unwanted attention; but not wearing one does, too. Ms. Zhu said her parents, who live in China, offered to ship her some.

"I'm like, 'Oh please, don't,'" she said. She said she was afraid of getting physically attacked if she wore one. "Lots of my friends, their social media posts are all about this: We don't wear masks. It's kind of more dangerous than the virus."

A 30-year-old videographer in Syracuse, N.Y., said he was still shaken from a trip to the grocery store last week, when the man ahead of him in the checkout line shouted at him, "It's you people who brought the disease," and other customers just stared at him, without offering to help. That same day, he said, two couples verbally abused him at Costco.

"I feel like I'm being invaded by this hatred," said the man, Edward, who asked that his last name not be used because he feared attracting more attention. "It's everywhere. It's silent. It's as deadly as this disease."

He said he had tried to hide the details of what happened from his mother, who moved to the United States from China in the 1970s. But there was one thing he did tell her.

“I told her, whatever you do, you can’t go shopping,” he said. “She needed to know there’s a problem and we can’t act like it’s normal anymore.”

Op-Ed: Trump's racist comments are fueling hate crimes against Asian Americans. Time for state leaders to step in

By RUSSELL JEUNG, MANJUSHA P. KULKARNI AND CYNTHIA CHOI

APRIL 1, 2020

3 AM

Coughing is now a doubly serious concern for Asian Americans. Like everyone else, we're afraid of contracting the coronavirus. As a racial group, we have an additional fear: being profiled as disease-carriers and being maliciously coughed *at*.

After news of the coronavirus broke in January, Asian Americans [almost immediately experienced racial taunts](#) on school campuses, shunning on public transit and cyber-bullying on social media. When President Trump insisted on labeling the coronavirus as the "Chinese virus" in early March, these attacks became more virulent and common.

The FBI now [warns of an increase](#) of hate crimes against Asian Americans, but we've already experienced a surge. Since the [Stop-AAPI-Hate website](#), a project of the Asian Pacific Planning and Policy Council and Chinese for Affirmative Action, launched on March 19 to track anti-Asian harassment, it has received more than 1,000 reports from people in 32 states detailing verbal abuse, denial of services, discrimination on the job or physical assaults.

Several people have reported others coughing at them, including this frightening incident: "A white man on open sidewalk approached and stepped directly in front of me and coughed in extremely exaggerated manner in my face — loudly, mouth wide open, about 2 feet from my face, said 'take my virus.'"

In Texas, [the FBI is investigating the stabbing](#) of a father and two children from Burma by an assailant who blamed them for the pandemic. This case harks back to the 1982 murder of Chinese American Vincent Chin, whose killers believed he was Japanese and responsible for the decline of the American auto industry.

Sadly, this kind of racist resentment is a recurring pattern in American history, particularly during health crises or in wartime.

When the bubonic plague arrived in 1900, the San Francisco Health Department quarantined that city's Chinatown with barbed wire and ropes. While white citizens were allowed to leave, 30,000 Chinese were segregated and confined. During World War II, fear and racist hysteria led to the unconstitutional relocation and imprisonment of 120,000 Japanese Americans.

The current vilification of Asian Americans is reminiscent of the scapegoating of Arabs, Muslims and South Asians after 9/11. Hate crimes against [Muslim Americans surged in 2001](#) and remained elevated above pre-9/11 levels years later. Ethno-religious groups, like Sikhs from India, also suffered attacks and discrimination after 9/11.

Immediately after 9/11, President Bush denounced those who intimidated Muslims and called on the nation to treat this American community with respect. In contrast, Trump repeatedly used the term [the "Chinese virus"](#) despite warnings that this would incite racist threats against Asian Americans. His tepid retreat on that rhetoric last week did little to stem the harm. The damage is done.

Republicans in Congress continue [to blame China](#) as the source of the virus, rather than focusing on how to control the spread of Covid-19. Trump's language, along with media coverage of his remarks, have framed how Americans view Chinese people, and correspondingly, Asian Americans. Even the face mask has become racialized, with some Asian Americans [fearing that wearing one](#) in public would draw attention and make them targets for physical attacks.

American history repeats itself in another way. Asians in the U.S. have always fought the discrimination they faced. Chinese Americans filed lawsuits against the Chinese Exclusion Act and engaged in mass resistance to unjust government policies. Japanese Americans won reparations for their wartime incarceration. Muslim Americans are gaining political power and have run for office in record numbers, with two recently elected to Congress.

Last week, Rep. Grace Meng (D-N.Y.) [introduced a resolution](#) calling on all public officials to condemn anti-Asian bias and on federal law enforcement officials to collect data to document and investigate hate crimes tied to COVID-19.

State leaders like Gov. Gavin Newsom should form a multi-agency task force to coordinate efforts to combat racial bias spurred by the pandemic. They should notify stores to provide safe access to their goods and warn employers about workplace discrimination. And schools and colleges need to provide culturally competent mental health services to Asian American students and other affected communities.

This pandemic requires us to stop the spread of both COVID-19 and racial hatred. Asian Americans need allies who will intervene when they see racial profiling happening. We need to learn from American history and have the courage and leadership to counteract fear and anxiety in this time of crisis.

Russell Jeung is chair of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University. Manjusha P. Kulkarni is executive director of Asian Pacific Planning and Policy Council. Cynthia Choi is executive director of Chinese for Affirmative Action.

https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/01/economy/unemployment-benefits-new-york-asian-americans/index.html?fbclid=IwAR1IpnG7rUUMe53qHPuzZ-SOBdPGJWXwQ2wJTie6nWm0oZ1A078S-tlk_0

Unemployment claims from Asian Americans have spiked 6,900% in New York. Here's why

By [Shannon Liao](#), CNN Business

Updated 6:54 PM ET, Fri May 1, 2020

Ten days before New York issued a stay-at-home order, Truman Lam, 35, was already contemplating whether to close his restaurant Jing Fong, an icon in Manhattan's Chinatown. It was Tuesday, March 10. During the peak lunch hour, he went upstairs to count how many customers he still had.

Jing Fong's dining room is massive; a destination for banquets and weddings, it can hold up to 794 people — and on weekends, there has historically been a long wait to get in for dim sum. But on that day, Lam counted just 36 guests.

Business had started to slow as early as January and was down 80%. All of the parties in March were canceled, too, he said.

"That day, I decided, you know what? Let's just close for the rest of the weekdays," Lam told CNN Business, adding that he was thinking about staying open on the typically busier weekends.

As long as the restaurant could cover workers' wages each day, Lam felt it was still worth it to stay open. But "it became more and more obvious that we couldn't even cover the payroll for that day," Lam said.

Soon after, Lam made the final decision to furlough 170 staff members across two locations and encourage them to apply for unemployment benefits. He declined to say whether he has filed for benefits, too.

Across New York, businesses like Lam's have shut down during the coronavirus pandemic and Asian American workers have filed for unemployment benefits at extraordinary rates. In the state, about 147,000 self-identified Asian workers have filed initial unemployment claims in the last four weeks alone, up from just 2,100 during the same period last year.

That's a 6,900% increase — by far the largest percentage increase experienced by any one racial or ethnic group.

In contrast, claims were up 1,840% for white workers, 1,260% for black workers, and 2,100% for Hispanic and Latino workers in New York.

New York stands out from other states in that in early April, it started releasing [detailed demographic breakdowns](#) of unemployment claimants every week. Not surprisingly, claims are skyrocketing for every group in the state, reflecting the sharp economic downturn that nationwide has left [30 million Americans](#) filing first-time unemployment claims since mid-March.

But even so, the increase for Asian Americans is an oddity: It's so large, it's disproportionate to the size of their labor force. Asian workers make up about 9% of New York state's [population](#) and work force, but now account for 12.5% of initial claims over the last four weeks. A year ago, they made up just 3.7% of claims during the same time period.

For the other groups, claims are either roughly in line — or well below — the size of their populations. White workers, for example, make up 65% of [New York's labor force](#), but only 51% of recent claims.

What's the cause? Academics and members of the community point to several potential factors ranging from xenophobia to Asian Americans working in industries hard hit by the pandemic, including food and services. Many Asian

workers also say they began social distancing earlier in the crisis than others — a factor that led some to close down businesses even before official lockdowns.

Lam, for instance, believes the main reason his restaurant began to lose business starting in January is because of "Chinese people practicing social distancing early." One regular customer told him that their parents hadn't left the house in a month since January except to get coffee and the newspaper.

"Jing Fong was first established around 1978," said Lam, who took over daily operations of the business after his father, uncle and grandfather. "And we've never seen anything like this before."

Low unemployment rates never told the full story

For much of the last ten years, Asian workers have had the lowest unemployment rate and highest median household income of any racial or ethnic group in the US. Part of the reason is due to their higher education levels. All of those figures contribute to the common perception that Asian Americans are more economically successful than average and to the pernicious model minority myth about Asian Americans being polite, working hard and pulling themselves up by their bootstraps.

But studies have shown low unemployment rates and high household earnings obscure persistent disadvantages for Asian Americans, including workplace discrimination and increasing income inequality within the group.

Averages also hide the fact that Asian Americans — one of the fastest growing populations in the US — are a diverse population. Those who self-identify as Chinese, Indian or Filipino ancestry make up the three largest Asian groups in the US, but no one ethnicity makes up a majority. The same is true of Asian Americans in New York State, where smaller populations of Burmese, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are also growing quickly.

Economically, Asian Americans are the most divided racial or ethnic group in the US, a Pew Research study found, with high-income Asian Americans in the 90th percentile earning 10.7 times as much as Asian Americans in the 10th percentile.

All of those underlying factors are at play now in New York's data, as unemployment claims spike disproportionately for the Asian community.

Low-wage workers hit first

One theory from experts to explain the high unemployment claims is that many Asian Americans work in industries that were hardest hit by lockdowns — places like restaurants, small shops and nail salons.

While overall, Asian Americans are more likely to work in education and health services than retail and restaurants, those who were hardest hit by layoffs and furloughs early in the pandemic probably were in low-wage service sectors.

Wellington Z. Chen, executive director of the Chinatown Partnership, a nonprofit that focuses on revitalizing the neighborhood, said that Asian communities' reliance on industries like food services and personal care meant they bore the brunt of shelter-in-place orders. "You can't cut nails from six feet away, right?" said Chen. "A lot of people are not going to hang on. [They're] not going to make it."

Nationwide, Asian workers make up about 6% of the US labor force, but 57% of 449,000 "miscellaneous personal appearance workers," a category that mainly includes nail salons.

On the opposite end of the income-spectrum, however, they also represent 35% of software developers, 20% of physicians and surgeons, and 23% of pharmacists. Those white collar jobs are generally more resilient to layoffs — but economists expect those sectors could be hit later in the pandemic as well.

But occupations alone likely don't explain the disproportionate rise in Asian unemployment claims as other groups work in hard-hit industries too. That's why experts also point to other potential explanations.

Racism and xenophobia as a factor

Business owners and workers told CNN Business that recently, racism and xenophobia against Chinese and Chinese-looking people have been a factor in driving business closures and unemployment claims.

In some of New York City's predominantly Asian neighborhoods, business owners told CNN Business that foot traffic took a downturn months before lockdowns were in place. Not only that, but Asian employees and business owners said they were also apprehensive about commuting to work, as people would give them strange looks and news about anti-Asian hate crimes was spreading across their social media networks.

Lin Weng, 25, who lives in Sunset Park, a neighborhood known as Brooklyn's Chinatown, applied for unemployment benefits after she was furloughed from her coffee shop on March 22. But while customers were still coming into the shop, she said, she experienced an incident in which she was associated with the coronavirus potentially due to her race.

"This lady walked in... and the first thing she asked me was 'do you guys have the coronavirus?'" said Weng, who added that the woman proceeded to order an iced coffee but then changed her mind and left. "And I'm just [thinking] like, 'are you asking me or telling me?'"

Reports of attacks against Asians and those appearing to be East Asian have intensified after the coronavirus outbreak began in China in January. The NYPD Hate Crimes Task Force told CNN Business that of the 14 coronavirus-related hate crimes it investigated since the start of the outbreak, all of the victims were of Asian descent.

Jennifer Lee, a sociology professor at Columbia University, said that President Donald Trump's reference to the coronavirus as a "Chinese virus" exacerbated fears among Asian Americans, by playing into xenophobia. "While he no longer refers to coronavirus as the 'Chinese virus,'" the damage has already been done," she wrote in an email.

In addition to racism and xenophobia, Asian businesses in neighborhoods like Chinatown and Flushing have faced caution from their own communities as well. Some Asian customers have drastically cut back their interactions with Asian-run businesses, as owners noticed huge drops in traffic.

Early social distancing hurt Chinese businesses

Some essential businesses, including Asian-run supermarkets in Flushing and laundromats in Brooklyn, have closed despite being allowed to operate under shelter-in-place rules.

The Korean American Dry Cleaners Association of New York estimates that 70% of its 1,500 members will soon or already have temporarily closed their operations, according to Ahyoung Kim, small business project manager at the nonprofit Asian American Federation. Reasons varied from workers being unwilling to come in, to some contracting the virus, or because business had dropped off.

Some Chinese American workers who have applied for unemployment told CNN Business they agreed with their bosses' decision to close, even if it meant that they lost income.

Zixian Tang, 25, who lives in Flushing, Queens, worked at a popular karaoke place that closed on March 15.

Even if his boss had not chosen to close the place, Tang said in comments translated by CNN Business from Mandarin Chinese, "I'm not willing to go to work because I'm afraid" despite having rent to pay. "The death toll is too high," he said.

Jennifer Feng, 38, a nail technician at an ordinarily bustling mall salon in Flushing told CNN Business in comments translated from Mandarin that the salon decided to cancel its many upcoming appointments and close on March 16, several days ahead of New York's stay-at-home order. While she can apply for unemployment, she said she is waiting for her stimulus check to hit first to see if she needs the extra benefits.

Feng said she believes Flushing stores closed early because the Chinese American community acted faster in taking precautions, from social distancing early to wearing face masks, compared to those in other groups.

Economists from Columbia University, New York University, and the University of Massachusetts Boston said they can't know for sure whether xenophobia or caution were reasons for the high amount of unemployment claims from Asian Americans. It's too early, and data on that is unavailable so far.

A different story for South Asian communities

While workers of East Asian backgrounds say they grappled with shop closures, social distancing and xenophobia early on in the pandemic, South Asian neighborhoods in Queens were still pretty crowded at the end of March.

"I went to Patel Brothers the first week of the shutdown," said Annetta Seecharran, executive director of the Chhaya Community Development Corporation, a nonprofit that serves the South Asian community, referring to a destination Indian grocery store in Jackson Heights, Queens. "It was life as usual, like nobody had actually heard of any pandemic."

Mohammed Uddin, 42, told CNN Business that although the virus' first case in New York was announced on March 2, only when the death toll began to rise in mid-March did he begin to realize it was a dangerous situation.

Compared to stores in Flushing, the ones in Jackson Heights — a diverse neighborhood known for Indian, Bangladeshi and Latino American residents as well as other groups — stayed open longer, Uddin observed.

But despite different reaction times — and, anecdotally, fewer coronavirus-related hate crimes against them, South Asians are also reporting a sudden uptick in unemployment claims, according to Seecharran.

Uddin said he left his job as an Access-a-Ride driver on March 17 because it involves chauffeuring elderly and ill patients from their homes to hospitals and he felt it was too risky. His friends, drivers who introduced him to the job, quit too, he said.

"I was very scared of getting anything," he said. He developed a cough and fever that worried him. He lives with his wife, a 2-year-old, a 7-year-old and his mom, 67, and dad, 75, both of whom have diabetes.

"If I got any other job, which is not close to people, of course I'll go to work," he said.

Small numbers in 2019 meant a large spike for 2020

Another factor behind the large jump: Asian Americans filed very few claims last year, so that's partly why their percentage gains were higher than any other group, said Christian Moser, assistant professor of economics at Columbia Business School. "The larger number... will come from the fact that we've started out with such a low level to begin with for Asian Americans," he said.

The small base numbers in 2019 can be potentially explained in part by pride, said Ahyoung Kim, the small business project manager. And now, it's possible Asian American people are rethinking that stance given the combination of racism and economic fallout they've experienced during the pandemic.

"I can't speak for all Asian cultures, but at least in the Korean community, there has been a bit of shaming, in a cultural sense that you can't really demand stuff from the government," she said. "There's a huge shift in the community. Those

that are asking are now realizing, 'I can take this money and we should take this money because there really is no choice.'"

Undocumented immigrants missing from the numbers

Even as unemployment claims have surged, the number almost surely undercounts the total of Asian Americans who are unemployed during the pandemic, as undocumented immigrants are ineligible to apply. About 238,000 undocumented Asian immigrants live in New York state, according to the Migration Policy Institute, a nonpartisan think tank. There's no data on how many of them have lost jobs recently. Sora Lee, 23, who lives in Bayside, Queens, told CNN Business that her whole family is ineligible.

Both her parents are undocumented, while she and her sister worked jobs that were paid in cash. All four of them lost jobs recently, although her dad is unemployed due to an injury unrelated to coronavirus.

Her mom, who requested to remain anonymous because of her immigration status, is a nail technician who lost her job after her salon closed. "I would like to be working because of the money, but at the same time, it's very dangerous because of the virus, so it was a good idea to close down," she said in comments translated from Korean by her daughter.

Thanks to a babysitting gig, Lee does have some income right now, but she's the only one in the family who does and her mother said she's worried she won't be able to pay her bills. Rent, electricity, cable, internet, car insurance and life insurance payments due soon total up to \$2,600 and the family is leaning on credit cards and about \$1,000 left in savings. She said she wished that undocumented immigrants could be eligible for some sort of relief.

The long road ahead

The financial impact on Asian Americans may change how these neighborhoods look once the pandemic ends. During the 2008 recession, Asian Americans had the highest long-term unemployment of any group, according to a 2012 study from Marlene Kim, a professor of economics at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

"I'm going to predict that this is going to happen again," Kim told CNN Business. "I think it was part discrimination but also part other people dropped out of the labor market, they didn't even look for jobs. But Asians kept looking for jobs and being counted [as unemployed.]"

Economists predict that nationwide, unemployment could surge to around 20% by June — a level not seen since the 1930s Great Depression.

New York's skyrocketing unemployment numbers could be just the beginning. And with many working in sectors hard hit by coronavirus and potentially facing discrimination, it could be difficult for Asian Americans to find jobs once New York opens back up again.

Wilson Tang, 41, owner of Nom Wah Tea Parlor — a dim sum restaurant that first opened in 1920 — said almost all of Manhattan's Chinatown has shut down. He has furloughed about 55 employees in Chinatown and is keeping a location north of Little Italy open only for takeout and delivery.

"I have told the people that we laid off to please go exercise that right and use the unemployment benefits that they've paid towards and the company has paid towards and whatever stimulus checks or whatever resources they can to survive and weather this storm," he said.

Correction: An earlier version of this story misstated the number of Jing Fong employees who were furloughed.