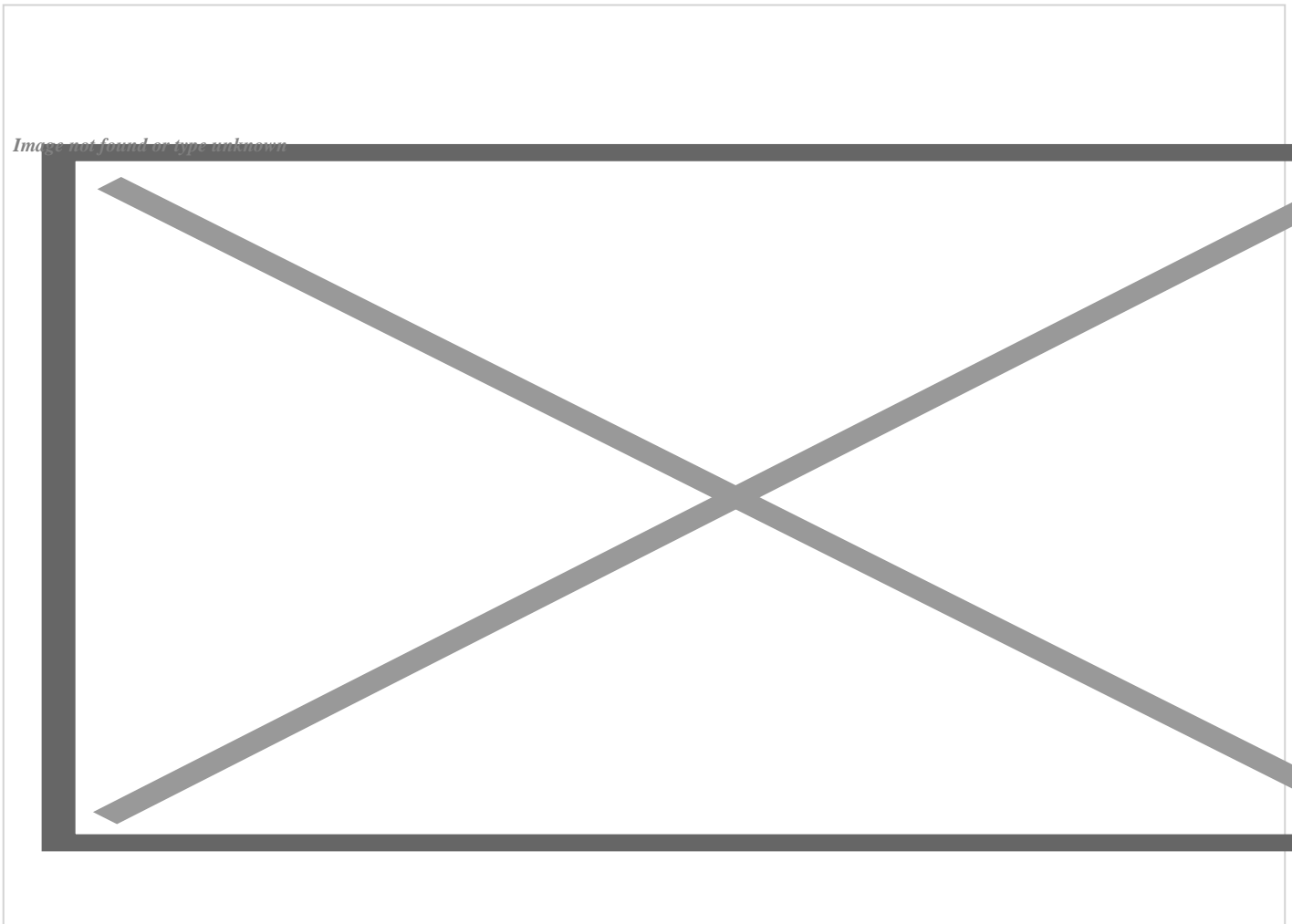# U.S. COVID cases soar after holiday celebrations

New York, January 5 (RHC)-- The United States has topped 351,000 COVID-19 deaths and 20.6 million confirmed cases as hospitals brace themselves for an even greater surge due to holiday travel and social gatherings.

California remains an epicenter in the U.S., with over 45,000 news cases reported Sunday. Ambulances are reporting wait times of up to eight hours to transfer patients to hospitals, which are already near their breaking point, in turn leading to a shortage of paramedics and longer 911 response times. Los Angeles morgues say they cannot keep up with the mounting daily death toll, which has averaged 178 over the past week — or one death every eight minutes. Funeral homes have had to turn away grieving families. Shelters and services for unhoused people in Los Angeles are reporting being overwhelmed by new spikes in cases.

In Tacoma, Washington, police evicted housing activists who had occupied a Travelodge motel since Christmas to shelter over 40 unhoused people. The group Tacoma Housing Now has been requesting

city officials take advantage of a federal funding program to cover the costs of housing people in unused hotel rooms during the pandemic. Baltimore recently announced it is extending contracts with hotels to accommodate unhoused people using FEMA funds through March.

Meanwhile, the coronavirus variant first identified in Britain, which is believed to be significantly more contagious but not more deadly, has now been reported in over 30 countries and three U.S. states: Colorado, California and Florida.

As frustrations mount over the slow rollout of vaccines, the U.S. will consider cutting Moderna doses in half for adults up to the age of 55. The U.S. has vaccinated just over 4.2 million people, falling far short of its original goal of vaccinating 20 million by the end of 2020.

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