

COVID-19 Daily Update

April 15, 2020

Summary

More than two million COVID-19 cases have been reported globally. The United States accounts for about 30% of cases worldwide, with 614,482 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 27,085 reported related deaths. The Department of Commerce reports that total retail sales – which includes retail purchases in stores and online, auto and gasoline sales, and money spent in bars and restaurants – dropped by 8.7% from the previous month, the largest drop in the nearly three decades. President Trump halted funding to the World Health Organization pending an investigation into how the organization handled the virus outbreak. The American Medical Association urged Trump to reconsider his decision, noting that halting funding to WHO is a “dangerous step in the wrong direction that will not make defeating COVID-19 easier.” WHO is reviewing the impact of any U.S. funding withdrawal and plans to work with partners to fill any financial gaps.

States have taken action to ensure the safety of citizens while voting. Six states have moved their presidential primaries to June 2, while other states have canceled in-person voting entirely in favor of vote-by-mail.

New York State reported 752 new virus-related deaths on Tuesday. The three-day average of the number of virus patients in hospitals fell for the first time since the outbreak began, down 0.7% since Tuesday. Governor Cuomo issued an executive order requiring people to wear face coverings in public settings where they cannot keep six feet away from others, effective Saturday April 18. New York City will allow grocery stores to require that all shoppers wear face coverings. New York City’s health department revised its death toll by adding 3,778 “probable” COVID-19 deaths among people who showed COVID-19 symptoms but were never tested. The new figures pushed the number of reported COVID-19 deaths in the City to more than 10,000. More people have died in New York City on a per-capita basis than in Italy, the European country with the most deaths.

General/Employer Guidance

Presidential updates

- [*Remarks by President Trump in Press Briefing*](#), April 15
 - President Trump plans to authorize state governors to lift social distancing guidelines and re-open the economy “at a time and in a manner as appropriate” for each state.

- The President previously claimed that “numerous provisions” in the Constitution gave him the authority to override the states if they wanted to remain closed. The President now asserts that he will not “put pressure on any governor” to reopen their state before they feel comfortable doing so.
- [*President Trump Announces Great American Economic Revival Industry Groups*](#), April 14
 - President Trump announced the creation of the “Great American Economic Revival Industry Groups,” a collection of more than 200 advisers, to counsel the President on how and when to reopen the economy. The list includes business executives, economists, and scholars, across industries such as agriculture, banking, defense, energy, real estate, health care, technology, and sports.
- [*President Trump Halts Funding to the World Health Organization*](#), April 15
 - President Trump announced that the United States would immediately halt funding WHO, and will undertake a 60 to 90 day investigation into WHO’s “severe mismanagement” of the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - President Trump criticized WHO for allegedly having a “dangerous bias towards the Chinese government” and putting “political correctness over lifesaving measures.” Last year, the United States contributed about \$553 million to WHO’s \$6 billion budget.
 - The Chamber of Commerce issued a [statement](#) agreeing that WHO could be “reformed” but noted that cutting WHO funding during the pandemic is not in the best interest of the United States “given the organization’s critical role in assisting other countries.”
 - The American Medical Association urged Trump to reconsider his decision, [noting](#) that halting funding to WHO is a “dangerous step in the wrong direction that will not make defeating COVID-19 easier.” CDC Director Redfield had recently [praised](#) WHO as a “longstanding partner” and stated that questions about the organization’s actions during the pandemic should be left until “after we get through this.”
- [*Trump’s Name to Appear on Stimulus Checks*](#), April 15
 - President Trump’s name will appear on the forthcoming economic stimulus checks. The decision, a break in Treasury Department protocol, was made after Trump suggested the idea to Treasury Secretary Mnuchin. The President’s name will appear in the “memo” section of the check because Trump is not legally authorized to sign such disbursements.
 - Senior IRS officials [stated](#) that adding the President’s name to the checks could delay the direct payments. A Treasury official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, denied that the decision would delay the disbursement of the checks and said that they would be mailed beginning next week.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [*WHO Director-General’s opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19*](#), April 15
 - WHO “regrets” President Trump’s decision to halt the United States’ funding, noting that the United States “has been a longstanding and generous friend to WHO.”

- WHO is reviewing the impact of any U.S. funding withdrawal and plans to work with partners to fill financial gaps. WHO urged that our current focus should be on stopping COVID-19 and saving lives. WHO’s pandemic performance will reportedly be reviewed by internal independent review bodies to ensure transparency and accountability.
- [*COVID-19 Situation Report – 86*](#), April 15
 - WHO issued [guidance](#) for countries preparing to transition from widespread COVID-19 transmission to a steady state of low-level or no transmission.
 - Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director Etienne [highlighted](#) that any transition from social distancing measures should be done with “extreme caution” to avoid a second wave of COVID-19 cases.

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

- [*CDC Director Interview on Sirius XM*](#), April 14
 - CDC Director Redfield recently asserted that “we’re definitely going to have a second wave” of COVID-19 infections in the fall, with outbreaks likely to become a seasonal phenomenon.
 - CDC Director Redfield described COVID-19 as “the most infectious respiratory virus I’ve seen in my lifetime” and said he was especially worried about containing it in nursing homes, even with widespread antibody and diagnostic testing.
- [*COVID-19 in Health Care Personnel During Exposures to a Hospitalized Patient*](#), April 14
 - A recent study, published by CDC as a preprint, examined the risk factors of COVID-19 transmission in health care settings.
 - The study examined the impact of one COVID-19 patient on health care personnel. Of the 121 health care personnel who were exposed to the patient, 36% developed symptoms during the 14 days after exposure and 3 had positive test results.
 - Health care personnel who developed COVID-19 had longer durations of exposure to the index patient. It was also more common for them to have had exposures during nebulizer treatment and bi-level positive airway pressure (BiPAP) ventilation.
 - These findings underscore the heightened COVID-19 transmission risk associated with prolonged, unprotected patient contact and the importance of ensuring that health care personnel exposed to patients with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 are protected.
- [*Characteristics of Health Care Personnel with COVID-19*](#), April 14
 - A recent study, published by CDC as a preprint, reviewed 8,945 COVID-19 cases reported among health care workers in the United States.
 - Among health care workers who reported having contact with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 patient in health care, household, or community settings, the majority reported contact that occurred in health care settings. However, there were also known exposures in households and in the community, highlighting the potential for exposure in multiple settings, especially as community transmission increases.
 - Among the health care workers with COVID-19, 8%–10% were hospitalized. This is lower than the 21%–31% of U.S. COVID-19 cases with known hospitalization status

- and might reflect the younger median age (42 years) of health care workers compared with that of reported COVID-19 patients overall, as well as prioritization of health care workers for testing, which might identify less severe illness.
- As with other studies, increased age was associated with a higher prevalence of severe outcomes, although severe outcomes, including death, were observed in all age groups.
 - [*Considerations for Pharmacies during the COVID-19 Pandemic*](#), April 14
 - CDC updated guidance for pharmacies during the COVID-19 pandemic. CDC recommends that everyone entering the pharmacy should wear a cloth face covering, regardless of symptoms. Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians should always wear a facemask while in the pharmacy.
 - CDC recommends postponing and rescheduling delivery of routine clinical preventative services, such as adult immunizations, which require face-to-face encounters. For clinics that are co-located in pharmacies, CDC recommends posting signs at the door instructing clinic patients with respiratory illness to return to their vehicles and call the clinic by phone so that proper triage can be performed before entering the store.
 - [*Cleaning and Disinfection for Non-Emergency Transport Vehicles*](#), April 14
 - CDC issued recommendations for non-emergency vehicle services, like passenger vans or cars, that may have transported passengers with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.
 - When transporting a known confirmed positive passenger, CDC recommends that drivers wear an N95 respirator or facemask (if a respirator is not available) and eye protection such as a face shield or goggles. The use of larger vehicles such as vans is recommended to allow for greater distance between vehicle occupants. CDC recommends disinfecting commonly touched surfaces in the vehicle at the beginning and end of each shift and between transporting passengers who are visibly sick.

New York State

- [*Governor Cuomo Holds Briefing on New York's COVID-19 Response*](#), April 15
 - New York State reported 752 new virus-related deaths on Tuesday – the eighth day of the last nine days with a death toll over 700. The three-day average of the number of virus patients in hospitals fell for the first time since the outbreak began, down 0.7% since Tuesday.
 - Governor Cuomo issued an executive order requiring people to wear face coverings in public setting where they cannot keep six feet away from others, effective Saturday April 18. The Governor suggests wearing scarves or bandanas which could be worn below the chin when no one is nearby. Penalties will not be implemented yet, but those who violate the rule could eventually face fines.

New York City

- [*New York City Death Toll Soars Past 10,000 in Revised Virus Count*](#), April 14
 - The reported COVID-19 death toll in New York City sharply increased by more than 3,700 victims on Tuesday, after officials said they were now including people who

- had never tested positive for the virus but were presumed to have died of it between March 11 and April 13. Most of the added deaths took place in hospitals, while others occurred in nursing homes, long-term care facilities, and in residences.
- The new figures pushed the number of reported COVID-19 deaths in the City to more than 10,000, and increased the overall United States death count by 17% to more than 26,000. New York City is among a handful of places in the country, including Connecticut, Ohio and Delaware, that are beginning to disclose cases where infection is presumed but not confirmed.
 - [*Mayor de Blasio Holds Media Availability on COVID-19*](#), April 14
 - New York City will now allow grocery stores in the City to require that all shoppers wear face coverings. The City will begin supplying personal protective equipment to grocery stores as part of Mayor de Blasio's executive order requiring employers to give free face coverings to essential workers.
 - The City plans to spend \$170 million over the next four months to feed residents affected by COVID-19. The effort will include purchasing 18 million ready-to-eat meals, signing up entire public housing buildings for home meal delivery and hiring more than 11,000 drivers licensed by the Taxi and Limousine Commission to deliver meals. The City also approved \$25 million to support emergency food providers such as food pantries and soup kitchens.

Other Related Updates

- [*State Department Briefing: Health Impact and Assistance for American Citizens Abroad*](#), April 14
 - Since January 29th, the State Department coordinated the repatriation of 62,000 Americans from 107 countries on over 560 flights. This includes 30,000 people from Central and South American, over 10,000 from Africa, and more than 5,000 from South and Central Asia. The Department estimates that there are 15,000 United States citizens remaining that have expressed interest in repatriation.
- [*HHS Interim Final Rule Updating Regulatory Requirements used by CDC to Test Respirators During Pandemic*](#), April 14
 - The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) published an interim rule to update regulatory requirements used by CDC to test and approve air-purifying particulate respirators for use in the pandemic.
 - The rule allows for the approval of respirators in a new class, PARP100, by utilizing a different type of filtration testing process. CDC expects that the addition of PAPR100 devices to the marketplace will help to relieve the current high demand for respirators. The rule does not affect the manufacture of high efficiency respirators, including N95 respirators.
- [*Stay 6 Feet Apart, We're Told. But How Far Can Air Carry Coronavirus?*](#), April 15
 - Many public health organizations agree that six feet is the minimum physical distance to maintain between others to avoid the spread of COVID-19. CDC based its

recommendation on the idea that most large droplets that people expel when they cough or sneeze will fall to the ground within six feet.

- According to a [recent study](#), sneezes may launch infected particles further than 6 feet. Given combinations of an individual patient's physiology and environmental conditions, such as humidity and temperature, pathogen-bearing droplets of all sizes can travel 23 to 27 feet. It is unclear how many virus particles it takes to start an infection, how long the viral particles remain viable, or if similar studies simply detect the genetic imprint the virus left behind.
- [IRS COVID-19 Updates](#), April 15
 - The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) unveiled a new [online application](#) which allows taxpayers to track economic impact payments and update direct deposit information.
 - IRS [warns](#) tax professionals against COVID-19 scams seeking to exploit economic impact payments and other COVID-19 provisions. IRS encourages accountants to use a Virtual Private Network (VPN) for extra security, use multi-factor authentication to protect data, and beware of COVID-19 phishing scams.
- [FDA COVID-19 Daily Update](#), April 14
 - FDA and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) issued [warnings letters](#) to three sellers of fraudulent COVID-19 products.
 - FDA has issued 34 [emergency use authorizations](#) (EUA) for COVID-19 diagnostic tests. FDA is supportive of at-home testing, but has not authorized any COVID-19 test for at-home use. Home collection raises several issues, including whether lay users can properly collect the specimen and specimen stability during shipping.
- [Spread of SARS-CoV-2 in the Icelandic Population](#), April 14
 - A recent study published in the New England Journal of Medicine examined the spread of COVID-19 in Iceland.
 - Researchers tested 9,199 high-risk individuals who were symptomatic, had recently traveled to high-risk countries, or had contact with infected persons. 13.3% of the 9,199 high risk participants tested positive for COVID-19.
 - The study also screened 13,080 symptom-free members of the general population. 100 of 13,080 participants (0.8%) tested positive. This proportion remained constant over the course of 20 days, consistent with a slow spread of COVID-19 through the Icelandic population. The lack of increase in the incidence of infection over time may be due to containment efforts and the implementation of social-distancing measures.
 - The study found that children under 10 years of age and females had a lower incidence of SARS-CoV-2 infection than adolescents or adults and males, respectively.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [Recent Developments in Credit Funds Secondaries: Has the COVID-19 Pandemic Introduced New Opportunities?](#), April 15
- [COVID-19: Implications for Personal Planning](#), April 14

- [Managing Volatility in a Pandemic? Document your Derivatives Transactions Appropriately](#), April 13
- [Annual Meetings, Compensation and COVID-19: Where Things Stand](#), April 13

Send questions to COVID-19-Implications@ropesgray.com