

COVID-19 Daily Update

April 24, 2020

Summary

The United States has 883,826 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 50,373 reported related deaths. WHO reported that up to half of the reported COVID-19 deaths in the European Region were residents in long-term care facilities. In Africa, COVID-19 cases surged 43% in the past week, underscoring a recent warning from WHO that the virus could kill more than 300,000 people in Africa and push 30 million into desperate poverty.

President Trump signed a \$484 billion coronavirus relief package that will provide funds for small business loans, hospitals, and increased testing capacity. FDA issued a warning that hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine can cause dangerous abnormalities in heart rhythm in COVID-19 patients, and should be used only in clinical trials or hospitals where patients can be closely monitored. President Trump has repeatedly cited hydroxychloroquine as a possible treatment for COVID-19, despite the lack of scientifically verified data that it works. A government vaccine expert was recently removed from his post, and he has correlated his termination with his refusal to direct public funds toward hydroxychloroquine research and as a result of his pressing for more rigorous vetting of the drug.

Salons, barbershops, gyms, tattoo parlors, and bowling alleys re-opened in Georgia on Friday morning despite warnings from some public health experts that moving too quickly could fuel a resurgence in infections. President Trump recently criticized the move and urged Georgia's Governor to "take a little slower path." The New Jersey Department of Health issued an executive directive related to funerals, prohibiting all open-casket viewings, regardless of whether the cause of death was related to COVID-19. The directive also bars funeral homes from denying funeral services for anyone based on their cause of death. New York State reported 422 deaths on Friday; the smallest recorded number since April 1. New York averages 6,000 new cases of COVID-19 per day, down from almost 11,000 per day during the first week of April, but still more than any other state in the country.

General/Employer Guidance

Presidential updates

- [*President Trump Signs Fourth Coronavirus Relief Bill Into Law*](#), April 24
 - President Trump signed a \$484 billion coronavirus relief bill into law. The bill passed in the House on Thursday on a 388-5 vote. Trump thanked Congress for "answering my call" to provide critical assistance and said it was "a tremendous victory." It is the fourth measure approved by Congress in less than two months to combat the pandemic.

- The package includes an additional \$250 billion for the Paycheck Protection Program, a lending program for small businesses, with \$60 billion reserved for smaller businesses without existing banking relationships. It also provides another \$75 billion for healthcare providers and \$25 billion for coronavirus testing, \$11 billion of which is reserved for states.
- [Remarks by President Trump, Vice President Pence, and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force in Press Briefing](#), April 23
 - Vice President Pence announced that 16 states have released formal phased plans to re-open based on federal guidelines. Pence encouraged states to re-start elective surgeries.
 - Dr. Fauci [stated](#) that the United States needs to “significantly ramp up not only the number of tests but the capacity to perform them.” Dr. Fauci stated that he is “not overly confident” that “we have what it takes to do that.”
 - A Homeland Security official presented “emerging” results that the spread of COVID-19 could slow with increased direct sunlight and humidity. The presentation highlighted that bleach can kill the virus on surfaces within five minutes and that isopropyl alcohol can kill the virus within 30 seconds.
 - President Trump commented on the study and asked “is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside or almost a cleaning?” Many interpreted the President as suggesting that the injection or ingestion of household disinfectants could destroy the virus within the body. The President further suggested “hitting the body” with “ultraviolet or just very powerful light” as a viable COVID-19 treatment option. On Friday afternoon, President Trump [told](#) reporters that his comments were intended to be “sarcastic” rather than literal.
 - The manufacturers of Lysol and Dettol, and authorities in Washington State issued separate [warnings](#) that people should not ingest or inject cleaning products. Other experts [stated](#) that the “notion of injecting or ingesting any type of cleansing product into the body is irresponsible and it’s dangerous.”

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [Global collaboration to accelerate new COVID-19 health technologies](#), April 24
 - WHO announced a new initiative to develop and ensure equal access to safe drugs, tests, and vaccines to treat and prevent COVID-19. Leaders from Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas joined the videoconference announcement, but a spokesman for the U.S. mission in Geneva stated that “there will be no U.S. official participation.”
- [WHO Regional Director for Europe Press Statement on Long-Term Care Priorities](#), April 23
 - WHO Regional Director Kluge called on countries to gradually ease social distancing measures and asserted that “there is no fast track to the new normal.” The European Region reported a 25% increase in COVID-19 cases and a 33% increase in related deaths over the last week. The Regional Director highlighted the high incidence of COVID-19 in long-term care facilities and urged providers to create safer and sustainable long-term care systems.

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

- [Elastomeric Respirators: Strategies During Conventional and Surge Demand Situations](#), April 23
 - CDC issued guidance on the use of elastomeric particulate respirators, tight-fitting respirators made of synthetic materials which can be repeatedly disinfected and re-used. While elastomeric respirators are not FDA approved for fluid resistance, the devices can provide the same level of protection as N-95 respirators against airborne pathogens.
- [CDC FAQ on Water and COVID-19](#), April 23

- CDC updated guidance on COVID-19 and drinking water, treated recreational water, and wastewater. The virus that causes COVID-19 has not been detected in drinking water. Conventional water treatment methods that use filtration and disinfection, such as those in most municipal drinking water systems, should remove or inactivate the virus that causes COVID-19.
- The virus that causes COVID-19 was recently found in untreated wastewater. Researchers do not know whether this virus can cause COVID-19 if a person is exposed to untreated wastewater or sewerage systems.
- The virus that causes COVID-19 has been found in the feces of some patients diagnosed with COVID-19. There are no confirmed reports of the virus spreading from feces to a person. Based on data from previous outbreaks caused by related coronaviruses, some researchers believe the risk of feces-related virus transmission is low.

New York State

- [*Virus Deaths in New York Hit Lowest Level Since April 1*](#), April 24
 - New York State reported 422 deaths on Friday; the smallest recorded number since April 1. The three-day average of hospitalized COVID-19 patients has fallen 11 days in a row and dropped by more than 3,000 people since last Friday.
 - New York is averaging 6,000 new cases of COVID-19 per day, down from almost 11,000 per day during the first week of April, but still more than any other state in the country.
 - Governor Cuomo described the number of newly admitted COVID-19 patients as “basically a flat line.” After dropping almost 35% from last Friday to Tuesday, the metric has fallen only another 5% since then.
 - Governor Cuomo directed the state Board of Election to send every voter a postage-paid application for an absentee ballot for the primary election on June 23. The Governor said that polling places would remain open.
 - Governor Cuomo will decide next week whether to keep schools across the State closed for the rest of the year. Mayor de Blasio announced that New York City’s schools would close for the rest of the year earlier this month. Governor Cuomo previously stated that the decision was his to make.
- [*New York State Bolsters Efforts to Protect Nursing Home Residents During the Pandemic*](#), April 23
 - A new New York State directive requires nursing homes to immediately report actions they have taken to comply with the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) and CDC regulations and guidance. This includes directives requiring personal protective equipment and temperature checks for staff, the isolation of residents with COVID-19, and the notification of residents and their families of positive COVID-19 cases.
 - NYSDOH plans to inspect nursing home facilities that do not comply, and will immediately require such facility to submit a compliance action plan. Facilities could be fined \$100,000 per violation and potentially lose their operating license.
 - New York Attorney General James [announced](#) the creation of a hotline where residents, families, or members of the public can share complaints about nursing homes.

New York City

- [*Mayor De Blasio Holds Media Availability on COVID-19*](#), April 24
 - New York City reported that the number of new hospital admissions, the number of ICU patients, and the percentage of positive tests decreased on Wednesday, April 22. There is a two-day lag time on the City’s data.
 - The number of new COVID-19 admissions to public and private hospitals decreased from 226 new admissions on Tuesday to 176 on Wednesday. That number has dropped 50.4% since April 12, when there were 355 new admissions.

Other Related Updates

- [NIAID strategic plan details COVID-19 research priorities](#), April 23
 - The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) released a [strategic plan](#) for COVID-19 research with four key priorities: (1) improving fundamental knowledge of SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19; (2) developing rapid, accurate diagnostics to identify and isolate COVID-19 cases; (3) testing potential treatments for COVID-19; and (4) developing safe and effective vaccines to prevent against future outbreaks.
- [FDA Issues Warning Against Use of Hydroxychloroquine or Chloroquine Outside of Hospital Settings](#), April 24
 - The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [cautioned](#) against the use of hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine outside of hospital settings or clinical trials, due to reports of serious heart rhythm problems in patients.
 - FDA's review found that hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine can cause abnormal heart rhythms such as QT interval prolongation and a dangerously rapid heart rate called ventricular tachycardia. These risks may increase when combined with other medications such as azithromycin and other QT prolonging medicines.
 - A recent [study](#), published in Nature Medicine, adds to concerns about combining hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin. In a cohort of 84 patients receiving both drugs, electrocardiograms found an increase in the average patient's rhythm disruption, called a prolonged QT interval, a few days after the treatment began. In nine cases the disorder was severe, reaching levels known to increase the risk of sudden death.
- [FDA COVID-19 Update: Daily Roundup](#), April 23
 - FDA issued [guidance](#) to increase the availability of non-invasive prescription fetal and maternal monitoring devices during the pandemic. Home-use of these devices may increase access to pre-natal data without the need for in-person visits.
 - FDA issued [guidance](#) to increase the availability of portable imaging systems needed for the diagnosis and monitoring of lung disease during the pandemic. These devices include x-ray, ultrasound, magnetic resonance imaging systems, and image analysis software.
 - FDA issued [guidance](#) on a temporary policy that provides regulatory flexibility to recognized accreditation bodies that conduct certifications and inspections of foreign food entities and their products.
 - FDA highlighted [best practices](#) for retail food stores, restaurants, and food delivery services during the pandemic.
 - FDA extended the [deadline](#) for the premarket review of e-cigarettes, cigars, and other new tobacco products because of COVID-19. FDA noted that COVID-19 is affecting all FDA-regulated industries.
- [Federal Funding Announcements for COVID-19 Support](#), April 23
 - FEMA plans to [award](#) \$100 million in funding to fire service organizations to purchase personal protective equipment and supplies.
 - The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) [extended](#) the deadline for hospitals to submit data for COVID-19 high impact payments.
 - The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) [awarded](#) \$6.3 billion to states and localities to support their child welfare system during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [Key Health Care Provisions of the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act](#), April 23
- [Ensuring Compliance as Usual Even Without Business as Usual in Latin America](#), April 23
- [HHS Provides Guidance on Additional Distributions from the Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund](#), April 23

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