

COVID-19 Daily Update

August 11, 2020

Summary

The United States has 5,116,791 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 164,137 reported related deaths. Vladimir Putin announced that Russia has become the first country to approve a vaccine to prevent coronavirus infection. The vaccine, dubbed Sputnik-V, has yet to complete phase three clinical trials in which large numbers of people are given doses to determine whether it is safe and effective in a general population. The vaccine will be available to the general public on January 1, 2021. Reactions from experts have ranged from cautious to skeptical, with some suggesting that the high-level haste in pushing an as-yet unproven vaccine may have more to do with politics than science. An Associated Press review found that at least 49 state and local public health leaders have resigned, retired, or been fired since April across 23 states. Former CDC Director Frieden described the numbers as “stunning” and reflective of burnout and attacks on public health experts and institutions from the highest levels of government during the pandemic.

In Illinois, legislators passed a law providing a stiffer penalty for assaulting a retail worker “conveying public health guidance,” such as requiring patrons to wear face-coverings or promoting social distancing. In Texas, an epidemiologist in Houston, estimates that about half of those contacted by the department’s contact tracers in Harris County do not cooperate because people “think that the [COVID-19] numbers are inflated.” In Los Angeles, a chief health strategist reports that a few businesses are “completely uncooperative” with contact tracing efforts and have threatened to terminate employees that provide information to the County’s health department. New Zealand confirmed its first locally transmitted cases of COVID-19 on Tuesday, shortly after marking its 100-day milestone without any new such infections. Four people from the same family were found to be infected from an unknown source, triggering a three-day stay-at-home order for all residents in Auckland.

Approximately 667, or 0.86%, of the 77,059 tests administered in New York on August 10 were positive for COVID-19. New York updated its COVID-19 travel advisory list to include Hawaii, South Dakota, and the Virgin Islands. Alaska, New Mexico, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington State were removed from the list. Travelers arriving from states subject to the advisory are required to quarantine for 14 days upon arrival. New York Attorney General James announced a suit against Hillandale Farms for allegedly earning \$4 million in illegal revenue for gouging customers with high prices for eggs during the pandemic. The suit claims that Hillandale at times quadrupled the price of eggs during a surge in demand in March and April. Mayor de Blasio remained optimistic about the ability to resume in-person schooling in New York City, describing the City’s ability to control the COVID-19 positivity rate as “unlike almost any city in the country” and noting that “that’s what’s allowing us to keep moving forward.”

Presidential updates

- [Readout from the Vice President's Governors Briefing on COVID-19](#), August 10
 - Vice President Pence led a discussion on COVID-19 with state governors and the White House coronavirus task force.
 - Treasury Secretary Mnuchin provided an update on relief legislation negotiations and recent executive actions, including temporary payroll tax relief, unemployment benefits, eviction and foreclosure protections, and student loan relief.
 - Assistant Health Secretary Giroir provided an update on state testing needs, pooling best practices, and supporting testing in nursing homes and schools. Pence encouraged governors to work with hospitals to effectively leverage extra testing capacity for nursing homes and schools.
 - Dr. Birx announced plans to travel to Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and West Virginia to discuss COVID-19 with local leaders.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [COVID-19 Situation Report – 203](#), August 10
 - WHO epidemiologists [warned](#) that the Americas remain the “hardest-hit” region in the world, “contributing over half of all newly confirmed cases reported (54%) and deaths reported (63%) during the past week.”

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

- [CDC COVID-19 Updates](#), August 10
 - CDC issued a [statement](#) on the importance of conducting census follow-up interviews during the pandemic. CDC noted that field interviews “present a low risk of [COVID-19] transmission” because “census takers are trained to rigorously and universally follow CDC recommendations to mitigate” transmission risk, including wearing face masks, maintaining social distance, and conducting interviews outside as much as possible.
 - CDC published [guidance](#) on how CDC assesses risk factors for severe COVID-19 illness. Potential risk factors that have been identified to date include age, gender, underlying medical conditions, the use of certain medications, poverty, and pregnancy. CDC posted graphics consolidating data on COVID-19 associated hospitalizations related to [underlying medical conditions](#), [race and ethnicity](#), and [age](#).

New York State

- [New York State COVID-19 Updates](#), August 11
 - New York reported six deaths, 540 hospitalizations, and 120 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Monday, August 10.
 - Approximately 667, or 0.86%, of the 77,059 tests administered in New York on August 10 were positive for COVID-19.
 - New York updated its COVID-19 travel advisory list to include Hawaii, South Dakota, and the Virgin Islands. Alaska, New Mexico, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington State were removed from the list. Travelers arriving from states subject to the advisory are required to quarantine for 14 days upon arrival.
 - New York [guidelines](#) restrict large gatherings to 50 people or fewer in regions that have entered phase four of re-opening. A federal district judge [ruled](#) that wedding receptions at restaurants are allowed to host parties of more than 50 people under the same rules

that apply to restaurants. Restaurants have been allowed to re-open for indoor service in some parts of the State at half-capacity. The court reasoned that venues that currently seat more than 50 people for indoor dining could safely do so for wedding receptions as well.

- Governor Cuomo’s press secretary described the ruling as “irresponsible at best as it would allow for large, non-essential gatherings that endanger public health” and noted that the administration would “pursue all available legal remedies immediately.”
- [*New York Sues Egg Producer, Alleging Price Gouging*](#), August 11
 - New York Attorney General James announced a lawsuit against Hillandale Farms for allegedly earning \$4 million in illegal revenue for gouging customers with high prices for eggs during the pandemic.
 - The suit alleges that Hillandale at times quadrupled the price of eggs during a surge in demand in March and April. Hillandale sold the eggs to major grocery store chains, U.S. military facilities, and wholesale food distributors throughout the State. At Stop & Shop, for example, the Hillandale charged as low as 85 cents per dozen in January and \$3.15 per dozen by early April.

New York City

- [*New York City COVID-19 Updates*](#), August 11
 - Mayor de Blasio remained [optimistic](#) about the ability to resume in-person schooling, describing New York City’s ability to control the COVID-19 positivity rate as “unlike almost any city in the country,” noting that “that’s what’s allowing us to keep moving forward.”
 - Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) CEO Patrick Foye sent a [letter](#) to Apple, asking the company to make its Face ID iPhone unlock feature more amenable to mask-wearing. Foye explained that bus and subway riders are “removing their masks in order to unlock their iPhones with Face ID in order to use their devices.” Foye urged Apple to develop a way for “users to unlock their phones while keeping their masks securely covering their nose and mouth.”

Other Related Updates

- [*Putin Announces Regulatory Approval of Russian COVID-19 Vaccine*](#), August 11
 - President Vladimir Putin announced that Russia has become the first country to approve a vaccine to prevent coronavirus infection.
 - The vaccine, dubbed Sputnik-V, was developed by Russia’s Gamaleya Research Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology and will be available to the general public on January 1, 2021.
 - The vaccine has yet to complete phase three clinical trials in which large numbers of people are given doses to determine whether it is safe and effective in a general population. Putin noted that one of his daughters received a dose of the vaccine and she “feels just fine.”
 - Reactions from experts, including those inside Russia, have ranged from cautious to skeptical, with some suggesting that the high-level haste in pushing an as-yet unproven vaccine may have more to do with politics than science.
 - Moscow-based Association of Clinical Trials Organizations (ACTO) asked the Russian Health Ministry to delay the vaccine’s registration until after the completion of phase

- three trials. Researchers noted that fewer than 100 people have been tested, and that the early registration of a vaccine could expose end consumers to unnecessary danger.
- WHO is “in close contact with the Russian health authorities” about possibly pre-qualifying the vaccine under a program designed to facilitate access to medicines deemed by WHO to have met “unified standards of quality, safety and efficacy.”
 - U.S. Health Secretary Azar commented that “the point is not to be first with a vaccine” but to “have a vaccine that is safe and effective for the American people and the people of the world.”
- [*Study Measures Mask Efficacy for Filtering Expelled Droplets During Speech*](#), August 9
 - A recent study, published in Science Advances, tested the efficacy of 14 different mask types for filtering expelled droplets during speech.
 - Researchers placed someone wearing a face mask inside a dark enclosure with an expanded laser beam. The person repeatedly spoke the words “stay healthy, people” towards the laser beam. Droplets that passed through the laser scattered light, which was recorded with a cell phone camera; a computer program then counted the droplets in the video.
 - N95 masks were most efficacious, followed by surgical masks, then polypropylene masks and handmade cotton face coverings. Other masks were less efficacious. In particular, gaiter-type fleece coverings seemed to spread larger respiratory droplets into numerous smaller droplets. Researchers warned that “considering that smaller particles are airborne longer than large droplets ... the use of [gaiter-type fleece coverings] might be counterproductive.”
 - [*NIH Announces Start of Two Phase Three Clinical Trials for COVID-19 Treatments*](#), August 10
 - National Institutes of Health (NIH) announced the start of two phase three clinical trials through the COVID-19 Prevention Network, testing whether experimental monoclonal antibodies (mAbs) can prevent infection by SARS-CoV-2.
 - One trial will evaluate Regeneron Pharmaceutical’s investigational drug, REGN-COV-2, which is designed to bind to two points on the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein and prevent it from entering healthy cells. The trial will enroll approximately 2,000 asymptomatic adults who are household contacts of persons with SARS-CoV-2 infection. Participants must have been in close contact (typically due to residing at the same address) with the infected person in a 96-hour window preceding administration of either REGN-CoV-2 or placebo.
 - A second trial will evaluate LY-CoV555, a mAb isolated from a recovered COVID-19 patient, to determine whether it can prevent SARS-CoV-2 infection among people at high risk of exposure due to residing or working in skilled nursing or assisted living facilities. Within one week of identification of a COVID-19 case at a facility, study investigators will enroll trial volunteers and evaluate the prevention efficacy and safety of LY-CoV555, compared to placebo, over an 8-week period. The trial will also evaluate efficacy in preventing symptoms of a given severity in those already infected.

- [Health Department COVID-19 Updates](#), August 10
 - Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) publicly [posted](#) all state COVID-19 testing plans for July through December. Each state plan includes the target numbers of tests per month and addresses partnerships with academic, commercial, and hospital laboratories. The plans were developed by states in consultation with HHS and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
 - HHS [announced](#) that the Provider Relief Fund is now accepting applications from eligible medical providers who previously missed the June 3 deadline. HHS will host an informational webinar on the application process on Thursday, August 13.

- [FDA COVID-19 Update: Daily Roundup](#), August 10
 - FDA [issued](#) an emergency use authorization (EUA) to George Washington University Public Health Laboratory for its COVID-19 test.
 - FDA issued a [warning letter](#) to one company for selling products with misleading claims that the products can mitigate, prevent, treat, diagnose, or cure COVID-19 in people.
 - FDA updated [guidance](#) for hand sanitizer manufacturers to require that companies test each active ingredient lot for methanol.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [Credit Funds: Valuation Risks and Other Compliance Considerations in a Pandemic Market Environment](#), August 10
- [Key Tax Considerations For Companies With Remote Employees](#), August 3
- [Public Disclosure: Data Analytics and DOJ Enforcement in Light of COVID-19](#), August 3
- [Senate Proposes the Health, Economic Assistance, Liability Protection and Schools Act](#), August 3

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