

COVID-19 Daily Update

August 16, 2020

Summary

The United States has 5,375,216 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 169,640 reported related deaths. U.S. Postal Service sent letters to 40 states, warning of a “significant risk that, at least in certain circumstances, ballots may be requested in a manner that is consistent with your election rules and returned promptly, and yet not be returned in time to be counted.” A recent CDC survey found that 40.9% of over 5,000 respondents reported at least one adverse mental or behavioral health problem due to COVID-19; 31% reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder, 26% had symptoms of trauma- and stressor-related disorder linked to the pandemic. FDA granted emergency authorization for a new saliva-based test to detect the virus, developed by researchers at Yale University with funding from the NBA and the National Basketball Players Association. A lab affiliated with Rutgers University received emergency authorization in May for a similar test.

In Arizona, a school district outside Phoenix has canceled its plans to re-open schools next week after teachers staged a “sick out” in protest, indicating that they did not feel safe returning to the classroom with students. In Georgia, Governor Kemp signed an executive order that allows local governments to require masks if the community reaches more than 100 confirmed cases in a county per 100,000 people over the previous 14 days. Kemp’s rule contains an exception for private property, and may not be enforced in privately-owned spaces, including businesses, if the owner does not consent. In Spain, authorities closed nightclubs, banned the consumption of alcohol, and prohibited smoking outdoors in cases where social distancing cannot be maintained after experiencing a gradual uptick in cases since early July.

New York reported six deaths, 527 hospitalizations, and 128 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Saturday, August 15. Approximately 607, or 0.78%, of the 77,692 tests administered in New York on August 15 were positive for COVID-19. New York Attorney General James suspended the collection of medical and student debt owed to the State of New York that was specifically referred to the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) for collection through September 4. Governor Cuomo announced that 9/11 Museum’s Tribute in Light Show will continue this year, reversing an earlier announcement by the museum to cancel the tribute due to COVID-19. New York State Department of Health personnel will supervise the production of the show and its team of about 40 stagehands and electricians.

Presidential updates

- [Remarks by President Trump in Press Briefing](#), August 16
 - President Trump recently commented on COVID-19 in a press briefing.
 - Trump reported that COVID-19 cases nationwide declined by six percent over the last week. The country's overall test positivity rate decreased to 6.5%, a 71% reduction from April and a 15% reduction from mid-July.
 - The President stated that nearly 80% of commercial lab test results are now returned within three days, while the turnaround time for federal surge testing sites is two days.
 - President Trump renewed calls for "college football to come back" and noted that players are "strong [and] healthy" people.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [COVID-19 Situation Report – 208](#), August 15
 - A Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) [survey](#) expressed concern about the impact of COVID-19 on routine immunization services. Reports from 23 countries reveal a 12% to 14% decrease in the number of diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, and rubella vaccines administered to children when compared to the same time last year.

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

- [COVIDView Weekly Surveillance Summary of U.S. COVID-19 Activity](#), August 14
 - CDC summarized key COVID-19 disease indicators for the week ending August 8.
 - The national average of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 decreased from 7.7% to 7.0% during from August 1 to August 8. Regionally, the percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 also declined or remained the same in nine of ten regions, with a small increase of .2% reported in the New York/New Jersey region.
 - The overall cumulative hospitalization rate is 144.1 per 100,000, up from 137.6 per 100,000 during the previous week. The highest rates were in people 65 years and older, at 394.2 per 100,000, up from 378.8 per 100,000.
 - Based on death certificate data, the percentage of total deaths attributed to pneumonia, influenza, or COVID-19 increased from June 27 to July 25, after declining for 11 weeks since mid-April. Deaths fell slightly from July 25 to August 8, from 12.5% to 8.1% and remained above the epidemic threshold.
- [Press Release on Updated Isolation Guidance](#), August 14
 - CDC recently updated its isolation guidance to suggest that someone who had COVID-19 within the past three months does "not need to quarantine or get tested for up to three months [after close contact with a confirmed case] as long as they do not develop symptoms again."
 - CDC clarified that the change "does not imply a person is immune to reinfection with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in the three months following infection."
 - The latest data suggest that people can continue to test positive for up to three months after diagnosis and not be infectious to others. CDC noted that "re-testing someone in the three months following initial infection is not necessary unless that person is exhibiting the symptoms of COVID-19 and the symptoms cannot be associated with another illness."

- Researchers have found that the amount of live virus in the nose and throat drops significantly soon after COVID-19 symptoms develop. Additionally, the duration of infectiousness in most people with COVID-19 is no longer than 10 days after symptoms begin and no longer than 20 days in people with severe illness or those who are severely immunocompromised.
- [*Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic*](#), August 14
 - A recent study, published by CDC, examined the impact of the pandemic on mental health due to the morbidity caused by the disease and due to mitigation activities, such as physical distancing and stay-at-home orders.
 - Researchers administered a web-based survey of 5,412 adults from June 24 to June 30. Overall, 40.9% of respondents reported at least one adverse mental or behavioral health problem. 31% reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder, 26% had symptoms of trauma- and stressor-related disorder linked to the pandemic, and 13% started or increased substance use as a coping mechanism.
 - In general, young adults, Hispanic and Black people, essential workers, unpaid caregivers for adults, and people with pre-existing psychiatric conditions had the highest rates of mental and behavioral health symptoms. For example, while roughly 11% of respondents reported seriously considering suicide in the prior 30 days, the rate among people aged 18-24 was 26% and the rate among unpaid caregivers for adults was 31%.
 - Researchers concluded that “identification of populations at increased risk for psychological distress and unhealthy coping can inform policies to address health inequity, including increasing access to resources for clinical diagnoses and treatment options.”
 - The study recommended that the “expanded use of telehealth, an effective means of delivering treatment for mental health conditions ... might reduce COVID-19-related mental health consequences.”

New York State

- [*New York State COVID-19 Updates*](#), August 16
 - New York reported six deaths, 527 hospitalizations, and 128 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Saturday, August 15.
 - Approximately 607, or 0.78%, of the 77,692 tests administered in New York on August 15 were positive for COVID-19. New York’s positivity rate has remained below one percent for nine days in a row.
 - State Liquor Authority officials conducted 1,170 compliance checks at bars and restaurants in New York on August 15 and observed 33 social distancing violations.
 - New York Attorney General James [suspended](#) the collection of medical and student debt owed to the State of New York that was specifically referred to the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) for collection through September 4.

New York City

- [New York City COVID-19 Updates](#), August 16
 - New York City [expanded](#) its Open Streets outdoor dining program to serve 21 new locations, including include Westchester Square in the Bronx; Hillel Plaza in Brooklyn; and Corona Plaza, Diversity Plaza, and the 71st Avenue Plaza in Queens.
 - Governor Cuomo announced that New York State Department of Health personnel will [supervise](#) the production of the 9/11 Museum’s Tribute in Light Show, allowing the yearly tribute to continue as planned. This decision reversed an earlier announcement by the museum that it would cancel the tribute due to COVID-19.
 - A New York Times [article](#) highlighted that several New Yorkers have been hiring private doctors to administer rapid COVID-19 tests to anticipated guests for sleepovers, barbecues, and weddings. Event companies are also offering rapid testing as a service to clients alongside catering and music. Public health experts warned that rapid tests are not always reliable and noted that “there is a false confidence you get when you use a test for social decisions.”

Other Related Updates

- [Health Department COVID-19 Update](#), August 16
 - Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced \$1.4 billion in targeted distribution funding for 80 children’s hospitals nationwide through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.
 - HHS noted that children’s hospitals have faced decreasing patient visits and increased costs during the pandemic due to suspending non-emergency surgeries, purchasing additional personal protective equipment, and offering their capacity as a backup to other hospitals in support of local preparedness planning for COVID-19 patient surges.
 - A preliminary state-by-state breakdown of validated distributions is available [here](#).
- [FDA Authorizes New COVID-19 Saliva Test](#), August 15
 - FDA issued an emergency use authorization (EUA) to Yale School of Public Health for its SalivaDirect COVID-19 diagnostic test, which uses a new method of processing saliva samples when testing for COVID-19 infection.
 - The NBA and its players’ union partly funded the development of the test and have used it to test asymptomatic NBA players and staff taking part in the league’s restart “bubble” in Orlando.
 - Yale issued a [press release](#) noting that researchers “simplified the test so that it only costs a couple of dollars for reagents, and we expect that labs will only charge about \$10 per sample.” The release states that “if cheap alternatives like SalivaDirect can be implemented across the country, we may finally get a handle on this pandemic, even before a vaccine.”
 - SalivaDirect does not require any special type of swab or collection device; a saliva sample can be collected in sterile containers. The test is unique because it does not require a separate nucleic acid extraction step. FDA notes that “this is significant because the extraction kits used for this step in other tests have been prone to shortages.”
 - Testing saliva eliminates the need for nasopharyngeal swabs, which have also been prone to shortages, and alleviates the patient discomfort associated with these swabs.

- Yale intends to provide the SalivaDirect protocol to interested laboratories as an “open source” protocol, meaning that the labs can follow the protocol to obtain the required components and perform the test in their lab. Because this test can use a variety of commercially available testing components, it can be assembled and used in high-complexity labs throughout the country.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [CMS Seeks Permanent Changes for Certain Telehealth Services Modified During Public Health Emergency](#), August 14
- [Credit Funds: Valuation Risks and Other Compliance Considerations in a Pandemic Market Environment](#), August 10

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