

COVID-19 Daily Update

August 17, 2020

Summary

The United States has 5,421,806 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 170,277 reported related deaths. Dr. Fauci expressed concern about the upcoming flu season and commented that “the worst-case scenario is we have a very active flu season that overlaps with the respiratory infection of COVID-19... [which] would really complicate matters from a diagnostic standpoint, from a therapeutic standpoint, and the standpoint of putting a lot of stress on the health care system.” CDC Director Redfield urged company leaders to set up flu vaccine programs for employees in September and October. Redfield noted that “the private sector... can take a concrete step, play a big role in setting the example and have an enormous impact.” A recent study, published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, evaluated the risk for COVID-19 transmission to close contacts in different settings. The study found that household contact was the main setting for COVID-19 transmission, and the risk for transmission among close contacts increased with the severity of index cases.

In California, the Los Angeles Unified School District announced plans to begin testing its nearly 700,000 students and 75,000 employees over the next few months as the district awaits permission from public health authorities to resume in-person instruction. District Superintendent Beutner commented that the program will augment—and probably far exceed—existing city and county testing efforts, noting that “extraordinary circumstances call for extraordinary measures.” Less than a week after the fall semester began, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill identified four clusters of COVID-19 cases on campus across two residence halls, an off-campus fraternity house, and a privately-managed apartment complex that houses UNC students. North Carolina health officials define “clusters” as five or more cases in a single dwelling. In New Zealand, Prime Minister Ardern postponed the country’s general election by one month due to a rise in COVID-19 cases that has prompted a lockdown in Auckland.

Approximately 408, or 0.71%, of the 56,891 tests administered in New York on August 16 were positive for COVID-19. This figures represent a stark contrast from the high positivity rates in Los Angeles (7%), Miami-Dade County (13%), and Houston (15%). Governor Cuomo announced that gyms and fitness centers could re-open as soon as August 24. Gyms will be limited to 33% capacity with cleaning and ventilation requirements; shared equipment must be sanitized after every use and masks will be required at all times. Local health departments must inspect all gyms before or within two weeks of re-opening to ensure compliance. Mayor de Blasio commented on the City’s school re-opening plans and expressed that “whatever our schools need, they’re going to have,” including “hand sanitizer or wipes, soap, face shields, [and] surgical masks.”

Presidential updates

- [*President Trump Privately Expresses Enthusiasm for Oleanderin as COVID-19 Treatment*](#), August 17
 - Government health officials expressed concern about President Trump’s enthusiasm for FDA to permit oleandrin, a plant-based extract, to be marketed as a dietary supplement or, alternatively, approved as a drug to cure COVID-19.
 - President Trump held a meeting on the drug in the Oval Office in July with Housing and Urban Development Secretary Carson and MyPillow founder and CEO Mike Lindell. Lindell recently acquired a financial stake in Phoenix Biotechnology, the company promoting oleandrin.
 - According to Lindell, President Trump “basically said [that] the FDA should be approving [oleandrin.]” Carson’s spokesperson commented on the meeting, noting that “the Task Force is looking at a plethora of therapeutics to fight COVID-19.”
 - There is no public data showing that oleandrin has ever been tested in animals or humans for its efficacy against COVID-19. The extract has shown some evidence of inhibiting the virus in a non-peer reviewed laboratory [study](#). Andrew Whitney of Phoenix Biotechnology stated that oleandrin has been tested on humans for its efficacy against COVID-19 but said the study has not been published yet.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [*WHO COVID-19 Updates*](#), August 17
 - WHO issued a joint [statement](#) with International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), calling on governments to ensure that the procurement and supply of controlled medicines meets the needs of all patients during the pandemic.

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

- [*CDC COVID-19 Updates*](#), August 17
 - CDC published a COVID-19 [toolkit](#) for people aged 15 to 21, synthesizing resources on testing, personal and social activities, prevention tools, and transportation guidance.
 - CDC updated [data](#) on reported COVID-19 cases and deaths by county.

New York State

- [*New York State COVID-19 Updates*](#), August 17
 - New York reported six deaths, 534 hospitalizations, and 133 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Sunday, August 16.
 - Approximately 408, or 0.71%, of the 56,891 tests administered in New York on August 16 were positive for COVID-19.
 - State Liquor Authority officials conducted 3,375 compliance checks at bars and restaurants in New York over the weekend, documenting 66 social distancing violations.
 - Governor Cuomo announced that gyms and fitness centers could re-open as soon as August 24. Gyms will be limited to 33% capacity with cleaning and ventilation requirements; shared equipment must be cleaned after every use and masks will be required at all times. Local health departments must inspect all gyms before or within two weeks of re-opening to ensure compliance.

- Local elected officials may choose to delay the re-opening of gyms and fitness centers until September 2 to provide time for required local health department inspections. Localities may also choose to delay the re-opening of indoor fitness classes until a date beyond September 2.
- Governor Cuomo warned that parents and teachers still have “many questions,” as schools prepare to re-open. Cuomo asserted that parents have a “right to be concerned” because opening schools has already proven to be “problematic for sophisticated governments,” such as in Israel and Hong Kong. Cuomo urged local school districts to hold an open dialogue with parents and teachers to address their concerns.

New York City

- [*New York City COVID-19 Updates*](#), August 17
 - Mayor de Blasio commented on the City’s school re-opening. De Blasio expressed that “whatever our schools need, they’re going to have,” including “hand sanitizer or wipes, soap, face shields, [and] surgical masks.”
 - De Blasio announced a new hotline for school principals to use as a resource as they prepare for students to return, noting that “if [principals] need additional personal protective equipment for their educators... it will be immediately delivered.”
 - Schools Chancellor Carranza will perform unannounced spot inspections of schools to ensure compliance with protocols before and during the school year.
 - Mayor de Blasio warned of a spike of positive COVID-19 tests in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Health officials believe the infections are limited to a few households, the “vast majority” of which are working with contact-tracers.
- [*Health Experts Worry a Second Wave Is Inevitable*](#), August 17
 - A recent New York Times article described New York’s success in controlling its COVID-19 outbreak.
 - Around one percent of the roughly 30,000 tests each day in New York are positive for the virus, a stark contrast from the high positivity rates in Los Angeles (7%), Miami-Dade County (13%), and Houston (15%).
 - Howard Markel, a historian of epidemics at the University of Michigan, praised New York for taking “matters much more seriously than in other places,” but warned that “all they’re doing is reducing the risk” and are “not extinguishing the virus.”
 - Epidemiologists expressed concern about cooler weather driving people inside, where COVID-19 can spread more readily. Others expressed concern about increased transmission due to in-person schooling, travelers from COVID-19 hotspots entering New York, and a lack of compliance with contact-tracing.
 - According to Oxiris Barbot, the City’s former Commissioner of Health, New Yorkers’ willingness to wear masks means that “if a new infection gets introduced into the community, it will be a terminal transmission, meaning that it won’t go any further.”

Other Related Updates

- [*Study on Contact Settings and Transmission Risk in Close Contacts of COVID-19 Cases*](#), August 17
 - A recent study, published in Annals of Internal Medicine, evaluated the risk for transmission of SARS-CoV-2 to close contacts in different settings.
 - Researchers studied 3,410 close contacts of nearly 400 COVID-19 patients in Guangzhou, China between January and March. In addition to traditional contact tracing, public health officials used mobility data from cell phones to identify exposure on public transportation.
 - Overall, almost 4% of all contacts became infected. Secondary infections acquired while using public transportation were rare, representing 0.1% of secondary infections. In contrast, 1 in 10 household contacts was found to be infected, consistent with secondary attack rates of 11.2% in other cities in China and 10.5% in the United States.
 - The risk for transmission increased as the severity of the index case increased, from 0.3% with an asymptomatic index case to 13.6% with an expectorating symptomatic case.
 - Researchers hypothesized that “COVID-19 cases with more severe symptoms might carry a higher viral load of SARS-CoV-2 and thus have greater transmission capacity.”

- [*Department of Labor Summarizes Recent Actions on COVID-19*](#), August 17
 - Department of Labor (DOL) summarized recent actions on COVID-19.
 - DOL published [guidance](#) for states on implementing the Lost Wages Assistance (LWA) program authorized by presidential memorandum to provide unemployment insurance claimants with up to \$400 per week of additional benefits between August 1 and December 27. LWA will be administered by states through a grant agreement with FEMA and with support from DOL.
 - Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) [signed](#) an alliance with the North American Meat Institute to provide guidance and access to training resources to protect workers in the meatpacking and processing industry from COVID-19 exposure.
 - DOL [enforced](#) provisions of the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act (EPSLA) under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), and found that a North Carolina trucking and warehousing service, wrongly denied an employee paid sick leave after the worker received instructions from a health care provider to self-quarantine due to coronavirus concerns.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [*Senate Republicans Introduce the Health, Economic Assistance, Liability Protection and Schools Act \(HEALS Act\)*](#), August 17
- [*CMS Seeks Permanent Changes for Certain Telehealth Services Modified During Public Health Emergency*](#), August 14
- [*Tax Controversy Developments Related to the Coronavirus*](#), August 13
- [*Credit Funds: Valuation Risks and Other Compliance Considerations in a Pandemic Market Environment*](#), August 10

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