

COVID-19 Daily Update

August 18, 2020

Summary

The United States has 5,462,976 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 171,120 reported related deaths. Quest Diagnostics announced that it has reduced its turnaround time for COVID-19 diagnostic test results to around two days for all patients, down from more than seven days a month ago. Mortgage Bankers Association (MBA) reported that nearly 16% of Federal Housing Administration-insured loans are delinquent, the highest level recorded since 1979. MBA President Walsh noted that “certain homeowners, particularly those with FHA loans, will continue to be impacted by this crisis, and delinquencies are likely to stay at elevated levels for the foreseeable future.” Department of Agriculture officials confirmed the first U.S. cases of mink infected with COVID-19 on two large farms in Utah, following similar outbreaks in Europe. Testing began after the farms reported unusually high mortality rates among the minks; officials are now investigating how the disease spread to the farms.

A New York Times database found that the number of COVID-19 deaths in prisons and immigration detention centers has increased by about 40% over the last six weeks. American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living reported a new high of 9,715 COVID-19 cases in nursing homes during the week of July 26, based on an analysis of the most recent federal data available. Nearly four in five infections were at facilities in Sunbelt states, where total nursing home cases nearly tripled since mid-June. Deaths are also on the rise, with 1,706 COVID-19 fatalities during the week ending July 26, a 22% increase from the previous week, but well below the 3,130 deaths reported in the last week of May.

New York reported eight deaths, 537 hospitalizations, and 126 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Monday, August 17. Approximately 655, or 0.98%, of the 66,891 tests administered in New York on August 17 were positive for COVID-19. New York updated its COVID-19 travel advisory list to include Alaska and Delaware; the list now includes 33 states and two territories. Travelers arriving from locations subject to the advisory are required to quarantine for 14 days upon arrival. Mayor de Blasio signed an executive order requiring hotels and short-term rentals in the City to deny rooms to travelers from areas on the State’s quarantine list unless they fill out a contact-tracing questionnaire. De Blasio urged residents to avoid non-essential travel to COVID-19 hotspot areas and stressed that “if you have a choice in travel, don’t go to where the problem is.”

Presidential updates

- [*President Trump Comments on COVID-19 in Press Briefing*](#), August 17
 - President Trump commented on COVID-19 in a press briefing at an airport in Mankato, Minnesota.
 - Trump claimed that New Zealand was an example of a country that had early success in fighting the COVID-19 outbreak, only to struggle now with a “big surge.”
 - New Zealand Prime Minister Adern described Trump’s comments as “patently wrong” and noted that “I don’t think there’s any comparison between New Zealand’s current cluster and the tens of thousands of cases that are being seen daily in the United States.”
 - The death toll from COVID-19 in New Zealand stands at 22 people, out of a population of around five million. In the United States, around 170,000 people have died from the disease, out of a population of around 330 million. These figures amount to a mortality rate of around 52 deaths per 100,000 people in the United States, compared to 0.45 deaths per 100,000 people in New Zealand.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [*WHO COVID-19 Updates*](#), August 18
 - WHO Director-General Tedros [explained](#) WHO’s planned approach for distributing an eventual COVID-19 vaccine.
 - Once drug developers present a viable vaccine, WHO’s strategic advisory group will provide recommendations for its appropriate and fair use. Doses will be allocated proportionally to all participating countries simultaneously to reduce overall risk by immunizing at-risk groups. Consideration will then be given to countries based on threat and vulnerability.

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

- [*CDC COVID-19 Updates*](#), August 18
 - CDC [reported](#) that the current test positivity rate in the United States is 9%. 70,155,956 tests have been conducted and reported to CDC, 6,281,615 of which were positive.
 - CDC updated [data](#) on COVID-19 cases and deaths by county.
- [*Study on Racial and Ethnic Disparities Among COVID-19 Cases in Workplace Outbreaks by Industry Sector*](#), August 17
 - A recent study, published by CDC as an early release, examined COVID-19 cases associated with workplace outbreaks in certain industries in Utah.
 - Between March 5 and June 6, workplace outbreaks occurred in 15 industry sectors in Utah, from agriculture to educational services to transportation. A majority of those outbreaks (58%) were in three sectors: manufacturing, wholesale trade, and construction.
 - The study found that Hispanic and non-white workers comprised 73% of COVID-19 cases, despite representing just 24% of the workforce in sectors where the outbreaks occurred.
 - Researchers concluded that racial and ethnic disparities in workplace outbreaks are likely driven by long-standing health and social inequities which have resulted in: (1) the over-representation of Hispanic and non-white workers in front-line occupations that carry a higher risk of COVID-19 exposure; (2) less flexible work schedules and fewer options to telework compared with white workers; and (3) “unpaid or punitive”

sick leave policies that prevent workers from staying home when ill, which in turn can lead to increased workplace exposures and worse health outcomes.

New York State

- [*New York State COVID-19 Updates*](#), August 18
 - New York reported eight deaths, 537 hospitalizations, and 126 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Monday, August 17.
 - Approximately 655, or 0.98%, of the 66,891 tests administered in New York on August 17 were positive for COVID-19.
 - State Liquor Authority officials conducted 976 compliance checks at bars and restaurants in New York on August 17. Officers did not observe any social distancing violations.
 - New York updated its COVID-19 travel advisory list to include Alaska and Delaware; the list now includes 33 states and two territories. Travelers arriving from locations subject to the advisory are required to quarantine for 14 days upon arrival.

New York City

- [*New York City COVID-19 Updates*](#), August 18
 - Mayor de Blasio signed an executive order requiring hotels and short-term rentals to deny rooms to travelers from areas on the State’s quarantine list unless they fill out a contact-tracing questionnaire.
 - De Blasio urged “people that if you have a choice, if you’re going to travel, go to a place that’s not on the New York State list of states that are experiencing profound coronavirus problems.”

Other Related Updates

- [*Impact of COVID-19 on Small Business Health Insurance Coverage*](#), August 17
 - A recent article published in the New England Journal of Medicine examined the impact of the pandemic on health insurance coverage at small businesses.
 - More than 40% of the private U.S. labor force is employed by small businesses, defined as those employing fewer than 500 workers
 - The article analyzed the results of a June survey of 3,450 small U.S. businesses and found that 60% offered health insurance coverage before the pandemic and virtually all of those (95%) continued to do so as of June 15.
 - Small businesses forecasted a 50% decline in demand during the pandemic, placing them under extreme pressure to cut costs. In the month of April, 30% reported they did not make rent or mortgage payments.
 - The article noted that nearly one-third of respondents indicated they were not sure they could continue to pay premiums beyond another two months, raising the specter of significant coverage disruption by early fall. While 1.6% of respondents offering coverage reported being late to pay premiums before the pandemic, this figure increased to 9.5% as of June 15. Only 5% reported receiving relief from insurers in the form of premium reductions.
 - The authors concluded that “absent additional relief — and soon — providers and policymakers should expect much greater disruption in insurance coverage going forward.”

- [FDA COVID-19 Update: Daily Roundup](#), August 18
 - FDA issued a [warning letter](#) to one company for selling colloidal silver products with misleading claims that it can mitigate, prevent, or cure COVID-19.
 - FDA issued an [alert](#) to doctors and laboratory technicians using Thermo Fisher's TaqPath COVID-19 genetic test. FDA advised technicians to follow updated instructions and software developed by the company to ensure accurate results. Failing to strictly adhere to the test's instructions can lead to false positives.

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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