

COVID-19 Daily Update

August 28, 2020

Summary

The United States has 5,906,615 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 181,579 reported related deaths. Department of Labor reported that another 1,006,000 workers filed initial claims for unemployment benefits last week. CDC recently modified its testing guidelines to recommend that an asymptomatic person who has been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case for at least 15 minutes “does not necessarily need a test.” Experts questioned the revision, pointing to the importance of identifying infections in the small window immediately before the onset of symptoms, when many individuals appear to be most contagious. World Health Organization recommended against children under the age of 5 wearing masks as a preventive measure against COVID-19, based on childhood developmental milestones and challenges with mask compliance. FDA authorized the use of investigational convalescent plasma to treat hospitalized COVID-19 patients. Early data suggests that convalescent plasma may lessen the severity or shorten the duration of severe COVID-19.

A public health laboratory in Nevada reported the first confirmed COVID-19 re-infection in the United States. In California, Governor Newsom outlined a new four-tiered approach to re-opening, in which counties can move between phases of operation based on the area’s positivity rate and case rate. In Texas and Louisiana, COVID-19 has complicated rescue and recovery in areas affected by Hurricane Laura. Governor Abbott encouraged evacuees to consider forgoing shelters and instead booking rooms in hotels or motels as a safer way to isolate due to COVID-19. In Louisiana, officials shut down all state-run community testing sites on Monday, August 24, and are not expected to re-open the sites until next week. Delta Air Lines confirmed that it has a total of 240 customers on its no-fly list for refusing to wear masks aboard its planes and in its lounges and gate areas.

Approximately 630, or 0.65 %, of the 97,826 tests administered in New York on August 27 were positive for COVID-19. New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) released new mandatory guidelines for universities on physical distancing, capacity restrictions, and COVID-19 testing plans. Universities will be required to transition to remote learning for two weeks if a campus has more than 100 COVID-19 cases or if the number of COVID-19 cases equals 5% of the campus population. If after two weeks, the local health department finds that the school is unable to contain the number of cases, local authorities may continue to require remote learning, or impose other mitigation measures in consultation with the NYSDOH. New York City launched two initiatives to facilitate safe indoor and outdoor learning for the upcoming school year. Mayor de Blasio’s “Outdoor Schools” initiative will allow schools to conduct classes outside in nearby streets or parks. The City’s Health Department announced plans to send a team of independent professional engineers to inspect school buildings for proper ventilation.

Presidential updates

- [White House Press Release on Recent COVID-19 Protections in Nursing Homes](#), August 25
 - The White House issued a press release summarizing recent administrative actions to protect nursing home residents during the pandemic.
 - Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has [distributed](#) almost \$2.5 billion to help nursing homes cover expenses related to testing, personal protective equipment (PPE), staffing, and training.
 - Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) [posted](#) guidance for nursing homes to test all residents and staff for COVID-19.
 - HHS will [release](#) 1.5 million N95 respirators from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) for distribution to approximately 3,336 nursing home facilities that reported PPE shortages, beginning on August 28.
 - CMS [launched](#) a national nursing home training program for frontline nursing home staff to learn more about infection control and prevention, appropriate visitor screening, safe admission and transfer of residents, and the proper use of PPE.
 - CMS [issued](#) an informational bulletin on how states can better utilize Medicaid reimbursement strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in nursing homes.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [WHO COVID-19 Updates](#), August 28
 - WHO [reported](#) that 172 countries are in discussions to participate in COVAX, WHO's global initiative to accelerate the development and distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine. COVAX currently has nine vaccine candidates in its portfolio, with others under evaluation.
 - WHO [updated](#) its guidance on mask use for children. WHO recommends against most mask mandates for children under 5 years old, based on expert opinions on childhood developmental milestones, challenges with mask compliance, and the autonomy required to wear a mask properly. For children aged 6 to 11, WHO recommends a risk-based approach to mask mandates, considering the intensity of local transmission, a child's ability to comply, and whether they live with at-risk adults.

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

- [CDC Announces Changes to COVID-19 Testing Guidelines](#), August 25
 - CDC recently modified its COVID-19 testing [guidelines](#), stating that an asymptomatic person who has been in close contact (within 6 feet) of a confirmed COVID-19 case for at least 15 minutes “does not necessarily need a test.”
 - CDC noted certain exceptions for “vulnerable” individuals or instances where health care providers recommend testing.
 - Prior iterations of CDC's testing guidelines explicitly stated that “testing is recommended for all close contacts” of people infected with the COVID-19, regardless of symptoms. CDC specifically emphasized “the potential for asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic transmission” as an important factor in the spread of the virus.
 - Experts questioned the revision, pointing to the importance of identifying infections in the small window immediately before the onset of symptoms, when many individuals appear to be most contagious.
 - Research [models](#) published in Nature Medicine found that about half of COVID-19 transmission events can be traced back to individuals in the pre-symptomatic period.

Under National Institutes of Health's Rapid Acceleration of Diagnostics (RADx) program to scale up COVID-19 testing, officials have repeatedly underscored the importance of prioritizing tests that can "detect people who are asymptomatic."

- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Director Fauci [expressed](#) concern "about the interpretation of these recommendations," worrying that "it will give people the incorrect assumption that asymptomatic spread is not of great concern, [when], in fact, it is." Fauci noted that he was "in the operating room" having surgery when the White House coronavirus task force approved CDC's new recommendation.
 - CDC Director Redfield issued a [statement](#) that "testing may be considered for all close contacts of confirmed or probable COVID-19 patients."
 - The National Association of County & City Health Officials (NACCHO) issued a public [statement](#) urging CDC to "pull the revised guidance." NACCHO represents 3,000 local health departments across the country. The letter asserts that "as public health professionals, we are troubled about the lack of evidence cited to inform this change."
 - New York Governor Cuomo issued a [joint statement](#) with New Jersey Governor Murphy and Connecticut Governor Lamont criticizing CDC's updated testing guidance. The statement criticized the decision as "reckless" and "not based on science," asserting that it "has the potential to do long-term damage to [CDC's] reputation." The three states noted that they will not adopt CDC's new guidance and will continue to test asymptomatic individuals.
- [COVIDView Weekly Surveillance Summary of U.S. COVID-19 Activity](#), August 28
 - CDC summarized key COVID-19 disease indicators for the week ending August 22.
 - The national average of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 decreased from 6.2% to 5.7% from August 16 to August 22.
 - Regionally, the percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 declined or remained the same in eight of ten regions, but increased in the central and mountain regions. The highest percentages of positive specimens were seen in the southeast (9.3%) and south central (10.2%).
 - The overall cumulative hospitalization rate is 156.8 per 100,000, up from 151.7.6 per 100,000 during the previous week. The highest rates were in people 65 years and older, at 425.7 per 100,000, up from 412.9 per 100,000.
 - Based on death certificate data, the percentage of total deaths attributed to pneumonia, influenza, or COVID-19 decreased 4.4% from August 16 (12.3%) to August 22 (7.9%). The percentage remains above the epidemic threshold and will likely increase as more death certificates are processed.

New York State

- [New York State COVID-19 Updates](#), August 28
 - New York reported three deaths, 478 hospitalizations, and 122 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Thursday, August 27.
 - Approximately 630, or 0.65 %, of the 97,826 tests administered in New York on August 27 were positive for COVID-19, marking 20 straight days with a testing rate below 1%.
 - State Liquor Authority officials conducted 1,322 compliance checks at bars and restaurants in New York on August 27 and observed 9 social distancing violations.

- [*New York Releases Guidance for Infection Rates on College Campuses*](#), August 28
 - New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) released new mandatory [guidelines](#) for college campuses on physical distancing, capacity restrictions, COVID-19 testing plans, contact tracing, and contingency plans when the infection rate rises above a certain level on college campuses.
 - According to Governor Cuomo, the guidelines were introduced in response to “troubling reports of students congregating on college campuses.”
 - Cuomo noted that “if colleges have 100 cases or if the number of cases equal five percent of their population or more, [the school] must [transition] to remote learning for two weeks.”
 - During the two-week remote period, the school must suspend all athletic activities, extracurricular activities, and non-take-out options in dining halls.
 - If after two weeks, the local health department finds the institution is unable to contain the number of cases, local authorities may continue to require remote learning, or impose other mitigation measures in consultation with the NYSDOH.
 - If an institution’s infection rate remains below the stated threshold but the school remains unable to isolate and contact trace its COVID-19 cases, NYSDOH or the local health department may still order the school to transition to remote learning for two weeks.

New York City

- [*New York City COVID-19 Updates*](#), August 28
 - Mayor de Blasio and Schools Chancellor Carranza [announced](#) a new “Outdoor Learning” initiative to allow public, private, and charter schools in the City to hold classes outdoors during the upcoming year. Under the program, schools may use their own outdoor spaces or submit a request to the City to use nearby streets or parks.
 - The City [announced](#) a plan to ensure proper ventilation in indoor spaces in schools to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Every school building will be inspected by a citywide team of independent professional engineers to determine adequate ventilation.
 - Inspection criteria and standards were developed based on a thorough review of guidance from CDC, WHO, and New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH). Building inspection results will be publicly shared on a rolling basis.
 - Metropolitan Transport Authority (MTA) [launched](#) a digital advertisement campaign highlighting the agency’s urgent need for \$12 billion in federal aid due to the pandemic. MTA Chairman Foye recently convened a virtual special meeting to discuss fare increases and potential service cuts; the cuts may increase wait times by 8 minutes on the subways and 15 minutes on buses.

Other Related Updates

- [*Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance Weekly Claims Report*](#), August 28
 - Department of Labor (DOL) reported that another 1,006,000 workers filed initial claims for unemployment benefits last week.
 - The number of new claims briefly dropped below the one million mark earlier this month, but the filings have steadily increased over the last two weeks.
 - DOL reported 607,806 new claims for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, the federal program intended to help freelancers, gig workers, the self-employed, and others not normally eligible for state jobless benefits.

- *Study Questions Current Guidance on Physical Distancing*, August 25
 - A recent study published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) analyzed current physical distancing guidance to reduce COVID-19 spread.
 - Researchers concluded that recommending a “single specific physical distance” such as three feet or six feet is “based on an outdated, dichotomous notion of respiratory droplet size... [which] overlooks the physics of respiratory emissions.”
 - The study calls for a more “nuanced model” for social distancing based on “graded levels of risk.” This model would “provide greater protection in the highest risk settings but also greater freedom in lower risk settings, potentially enabling a return towards normality in some aspects of social and economic life.”
 - Researchers published the below chart as “a guide to how transmission risk may vary with setting, occupancy level, contact time, and whether face coverings are worn.” In the highest risk situations, physical distancing beyond six feet and minimizing occupancy should be considered. Less stringent distancing is likely to be adequate in low risk scenarios.

Type and level of group activity	Low occupancy			High occupancy		
	Outdoors and well ventilated	Indoors and well ventilated	Poorly ventilated	Outdoors and well ventilated	Indoors and well ventilated	Poorly ventilated
Wearing face coverings, contact for short time						
Silent	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium
Speaking	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium
Shouting, singing	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
Wearing face coverings, contact for prolonged time						
Silent	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	High
Speaking	Low	* Low	Medium	* Medium	High	High
Shouting, singing	Low	Medium	High	High	High	High
No face coverings, contact for short time						
Silent	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	High	High
Speaking	Low	Medium	High	High	High	High
Shouting, singing	Medium	High	High	High	High	High
No face coverings, contact for prolonged time						
Silent	Low	Medium	High	High	High	High
Speaking	Medium	High	High	High	High	High
Shouting, singing	High	High	High	High	High	High

Risk of transmission
 Low ■ Medium ■ High ■

* Borderline case that is highly dependent on quantitative definitions of distancing, number of individuals, and time of exposure

- [*FDA Authorizes Convalescent Plasma to Treat Hospitalized COVID-19 Patients*](#), August 28
 - FDA [issued](#) an emergency use authorization (EUA) for the use of investigational convalescent plasma to treat hospitalized COVID-19 patients.
 - Early FDA data suggests that convalescent plasma may lessen the severity or shorten the duration of COVID-19. In its decision [memorandum](#), FDA concluded that it is reasonable to believe that the potential benefits of convalescent plasma outweigh its risks.
 - FDA warned that the EUA is “not intended to replace randomized clinical trials” and stated that “convalescent plasma does not yet represent a new standard of care based on the current available evidence.”

- During a recent press conference, President Trump and FDA Commissioner Hahn both [cited](#) an erroneous statistic that convalescent plasma reduced virus deaths by 35%. President Trump called it a “tremendous” number and while Han stated that said 35 out of 100 COVID-19 patients “would have been saved because of the administration of plasma.”
- The 35% figure was based on a non-representative sub-sample of patients enrolled in a Mayo Clinic study on the use of convalescent plasma. The number was not mentioned in FDA’s official authorization letter nor was it included in FDA’s decision memorandum.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [Turning Over a New Lease? Are Turnover-Based Leases the Answer for Tenants Facing COVID-19 Related Business Disruption?](#), August 27
- [HHS Prohibits FDA from Requiring Premarket Review of LDTs, Including During the COVID-19 Emergency](#), August 25

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