



COVID-19 Daily Update

March 11, 2020

Summary

Today, the WHO declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic, and state and federal organizations continue to implore individuals, employers, and schools to take steps to slow down the spread of the virus. Many of the steps discussed below – collectively described as “social distancing” – are intended to prevent community spread and thereby prevent over burdening the US health system. In addition, the CDC specifically noted the increased risk of infection in older adults and people of all ages with severe chronic medical conditions, urging this population to take extra precautionary measures. More locally, Governor Cuomo addressed the potential economic hardships facing New Yorkers and announced new cost-saving programs for COVID-related medical care.

Employer Guidance

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [*Coronavirus: COVID-19 Is Now Officially A Pandemic, WHO Says*](#), March 11, 2020
 - In a media briefing with WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO announced that COVID-19 is now officially a pandemic, as it sweeps into at least 114 countries and killed more than 4,000 people. Tedros announced the ratcheting up of a health emergency to its highest level and urged countries to act now to stop the disease.
 - Noting the rising death toll from the respiratory virus, the WHO head said, "In the days and weeks ahead, we expect to see the number of cases, the number of deaths, and the number of affected countries climb even higher." He did, however, note that the disease can still be controlled. "We cannot say this loudly enough, or clearly enough, or often enough: all countries can still change the course of this pandemic," Tedros said.
- [*Coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Situation Report – 50*](#), March 10, 2020
 - According to the WHO, five new areas have reported cases of COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, including Brunei Darussalam, Mongolia, Cyprus, Guernsey and Panama. Globally, the report notes 113,702 confirmed cases with 4,012 deaths.

- The recently issued WHO report focuses on travel measures states have enacted against other countries – including denying access to travelers from certain countries, flight restrictions or suspensions, and visa restrictions. WHO reiterated that measures that restrict the movement of people during this outbreak should be proportionate to the public health risk, short in duration and reviewed regularly as more information about the virus, the disease epidemiology and clinical characteristics becomes available.

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

- [*Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) in Healthcare Settings*](#), March 10, 2020
 - The CDC previously recommended that health-care workers interacting with coronavirus patients or suspected cases wear specialized masks known as N95 respirators, along with gowns, gloves, and eye protectors. N95 respirators filter out about 95 percent of airborne particles and must be custom-fitted.
 - Major distributors in the United States, however, have reported shortages of protective gear. As such, new CDC guidance states that “the supply chain of respirators cannot meet demand” and that looser fitting surgical face masks “are an acceptable alternative.” It stresses that available N95 respirators should be prioritized for use by those with the highest exposure risk to COVID-19.
- [*Keeping Workplaces, Homes, Schools, or Commercial Establishments Safe*](#), March 10, 2020
 - CDC-issued employee guidance highlights the need for good hygiene practices among employees – including cleaning hands at the door and avoiding handshaking. It also urges business to use videoconferencing, when possible, and to consider postponing large meetings or gatherings.
 - Household-specific guidance highlights the need for increased ventilation in the home and the regular disinfection of surfaces. It also notes that households with vulnerable seniors or those with significant underlying conditions should encourage healthy people in the household conduct themselves as if they were a significant risk to the person with underlying conditions.
- [*Frequently Asked Questions on COVID-19 Testing at Laboratories*](#), March 10, 2020
 - The CDC responded to frequently asked questions about COVID-19 testing at laboratories. It explained that the CDC provides test kits for public health laboratories to perform real-time detection of the SARS-CoV-2 virus (the virus that causes COVID-19) in respiratory specimens.

- As availability of diagnostic testing for COVID-19 increases, the CDC noted that clinicians will be able to access laboratory tests for diagnosing COVID-19 through clinical laboratories performing tests authorized by FDA under an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). It advised clinicians to consult with the laboratories that routinely perform their diagnostic services to see how best to access testing for COVID-19.
- [*People at Risk for Serious Illness from COVID-19*](#), March 9, 2020
 - In a recent [tweet](#), the CDC warned that “older adults and people of all ages with severe chronic medical conditions are more likely to develop serious outcomes, including death, if infected with COVID.” The medical conditions highlighted include heart disease, diabetes, lung disease, and any others with a suppressed immune system.
 - Updated CDC guidance suggests that those with a higher risk of getting “very sick” from COVID-19 should stock up on supplies, avoid crowds as much as possible, and keep away from others who are sick. It warns this population to track potential emergency warning signs, including difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, persistent chest pain, and bluish lips or face.

New York State

- [*Governor Andrew Cuomo: Press Conference Update on Coronavirus*](#), March 11, 2020 [Note: hyperlinks in this item are to Twitter, we will update with official pages when available]
 - In several tweets, Governor Andrew Cuomo recently updated the public on New York State’s efforts regarding the coronavirus. He expressed concerns over the potential economic hardship facing New Yorkers in light of the spreading virus.
 - In particular, the Governor announced a [new directive](#) requiring NY health insurers to waive cost sharing associated with testing for coronavirus, including emergency room, urgent care and office visits.
 - Cuomo also noted that New York State will be guaranteeing two full weeks of [paid leave](#) for all state workers who are quarantined or in isolation due to coronavirus.
 - Finally, Cuomo announced that New York State will start contracting with [private labs](#) in New York to increase coronavirus testing capacity. As part of this effort, he stated that he has already spoken with 28 labs and that the State is working to get these private labs online as soon as possible.
- [*Governor Cuomo Accepts Recommendation of State Health Commissioner for New Emergency Measures to Contain Novel Coronavirus Cluster in New Rochelle*](#), March 10, 2020

- Governor Andrew Cuomo accepted the recommendation of State Health Commissioner Dr. Howard Zucker for new emergency measures to contain the novel coronavirus cluster in New Rochelle. The area currently has 108 confirmed cases and is considered a "cluster." The protocols include closing schools, houses of worship and other large gathering facilities within a one-mile radius in New Rochelle for a two-week period, from Thursday, March 12th to Wednesday, March 25th.
- The Governor has deployed National Guard troops to a Health Department command post in New Rochelle to assist with the outbreak. The troops are mobilizing to deliver food to homes and help with cleaning public spaces in the containment area.
- [*At Novel Coronavirus Briefing, Governor Cuomo Announces State Will Provide Alcohol-Based Hand Sanitizer to New Yorkers Free of Charge*](#), March 9, 2020
 - Governor Andrew Cuomo announced the state will provide alcohol-based hand sanitizer to New Yorkers free of charge. To help combat price-gouging and ensure New Yorkers have access to this vital prevention method, the state will produce up to 100,000 gallons of hand sanitizer each week in 1.7 oz., 7 oz. and gallon bottles.
 - The hand sanitizer will be made available to residents free of charge, and distribution will be prioritized by the most impacted and high risk communities, including the New Rochelle community, and state agencies, including the MTA.

New York City

- [*Mayor de Blasio Provides Updates on New York City's COVID-19 Response*](#), March 8, 2020
 - Mayor Bill de Blasio issued additional guidance regarding COVID-19. The City advised that private-sector employers and employees to consider telecommuting where possible and to consider staggered start times for workers. It also urged those who take the subways at rush hour to consider commuting to work via alternative modes of transportation, like biking or walking, if possible. The City encouraged those with chronic lung disease, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, or a weakened immune system to avoid unnecessary events and gatherings.
 - As for the school system, the City plans to hire an additional 85 school nurses to ensure that every school district building has a full-time nurse. The Health Department is sending guidance to healthcare providers to test patients with respiratory illnesses who have been admitted to the hospital but are not in the ICU – now that private lab testing is available. Finally, the City announced that it will provide relief for small businesses in the City facing reduced revenues because of COVID-19 – including zero interest loans and grants.
- [*Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\), General Disinfection Guidance for Non-Healthcare Settings*](#), March 6, 2020

- The NYC DOH provided non-healthcare settings, such as businesses, schools, and other private and public organizations, with guidance for staff who perform general cleaning and disinfection. Leaders in these settings should ensure that staff take extra effort with daily cleaning practices. It recommends encouraging the following measures: staying home if sick, covering coughs and sneezes, avoiding touching your face with unwashed hands, avoiding close contact with people who are sick, and getting the flu shot.
- Non-healthcare settings should also consider having alcohol-based hand sanitizers in common areas to encourage hand hygiene, use regular cleaning and disinfection products, and pay special attention when cleaning to frequently touched surfaces in common areas and bathrooms. The NYC DOH does not recommend the routine use of face masks if you are not sick. As such, face masks are not needed for general or routine tasks by staff – even those who have frequent interaction with the public.

Education-Related Guidance

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [*COVID-19: IFRC, UNICEF and WHO issue guidance to protect children and support safe school operations*](#), March 10, 2020
 - The Red Cross, UNICEF, and WHO issued new guidance to help protect children and schools from the transmission of the COVID-19 virus; it includes practical checklists, as well as advice to national and local authorities on the implementation of emergency plans for educational facilities. Overall, it urges schools to provide students with holistic support.

New York State

- [*Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Guidance for P-12 Schools*](#), March 9, 2020
 - The NYS DOH issued guidance to update schools on next steps needed to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. The DOH encouraged schools to proactively review, update, and implement emergency operations plans. It also recommended non-pharmaceutical interventions to curb the spread of disease, like separating ill students and staff, practicing hand hygiene, and engaging in routine cleaning.
 - If a school has an identified case of COVID-19 in the community, the local health department will notify schools if and when a school must close due to COVID-19 and when a school can reopen. When a student or staff member attended school prior to being confirmed as a COVID-19 case, New York State Department of Health requires an initial 24-hour closure, in order to begin an investigation.
 - The report also encourages schools to continue supplying meals to students, noting that they should work with community feeding organizations (food banks, food pantries, Red Cross, etc.) to plan for distribution of food to students by instituting

meal pick-up and delivery options. Despite these guidelines, the report notes that New Yorkers still have a low risk of contracting COVID-19.

New York City

- [Guidance for Institutes of Higher Education with Students and Staff Returning from Areas at High Risk of COVID-19](#), March 10, 2020
 - The NYC Department of Health issued guidance to institutes of higher education operating in NYC. Specifically, it applies to all students and staff arriving in New York City within 14 days of spending time in an area with ongoing spread of coronavirus.
 - The Department recommended suspending study abroad programs in currently affected areas, and developing plans to suspend programs in all other countries, regardless of whether they are currently designated as travel alert areas by the CDC. It also recommended requiring students and faculty returning from currently affected countries to self-monitor their health at home for 14 days after leaving an affected area.

Other Related Updates

- [Scientists figure out how new coronavirus breaks into human cells – potential to aid in drug development](#), March 11, 2020
 - To infect a human host, viruses must be able to gain entry into individual human cells. They use these cells' machinery to produce copies of themselves, which then spill out and spread to new cells. Researchers led by Qiang Zhou, a research fellow at Westlake University in Hangzhou, China, have revealed how the new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 binds with human respiratory cells in order to hijack them to produce more viruses.
 - This development is important because understanding how the virus enters cells can contribute to research on drugs or even a vaccine for the virus. Even so, developing either drugs or a vaccine will be a challenging task. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention officials have said that the earliest a coronavirus vaccine could be available is in a year to a year and a half.