



# COVID-19 Daily Update

Sunday, March 15, 2020

## Summary

President Trump expanded the previously enacted travel restrictions against foreign nationals entering the country, disallowing entry to those present in the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland during the 14-day period preceding attempted entry into the United States. According to WHO, Europe has now become the epicenter of the pandemic, with more reported cases and deaths than the rest of the world combined, apart from China. The White House Office of Management and Budget issued new guidance on Saturday telling federal workers that “only mission-critical travel is recommended at this time.” The White House is also encouraging agencies to hold meetings by telephone or video-conference whenever they can. New York State has reported five coronavirus fatalities, and Governor Cuomo directed nonessential State employees in Rockland, Westchester, NYC, Suffolk, Nassau – current hotspot areas – to work from home for two weeks. Governor Cuomo authorized the State to open a drive-through mobile testing facility on Long Island in the coming week. New York City public schools will also begin to shut down this week. Outside New York, states including Illinois are beginning to close all restaurants and bars.

## General/Employer Guidance

### **Presidential updates**

- Remarks by President Trump, Vice President Pence, and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force in Press Briefing, March 14
  - In a press briefing on Saturday, President Trump addressed some of his previously announced measures to combat COVID-19, including a national emergency declaration, increased testing capabilities, and the new legislative package which passed on the House on Friday, including additional paid leave and unemployment support to those affected by the disease. The President also urged those who do not have to travel to avoid doing so.
  - Vice President Pence reported on recent White House Coronavirus Task Force, which plans to focus on implementing the President’s public and private partnership on testing; and ensuring that state and local authorities have the guidance and the support to ensure mitigation, particularly in areas where community spread has been identified.
  - Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, noted that the imminent increase in COVID-19 cases, but stressed that the nation still has the opportunity to influence the course of the pandemic. Dr. Deborah Birx, the federal coronavirus response coordinator, highlighted that anyone with symptoms should treat themselves as contagious – even if they received negative results when testing for COVID-19.

- Letter from President Donald J. Trump on Emergency Determination Under the Stafford Act, March 13
  - President Trump issued an official letter on his decision to issue an emergency determination under the Stafford Act. To support this decision, the President cited to WHO's declaration that COVID-19 is a global pandemic. As of the date of this declaration, 32 states have declared a state of emergency as a result of the virus. President Trump noted that the federal government is in a unique position to provide the necessary coordination to address a pandemic of this national size and scope.
  - According to FEMA, eligible emergency protective measures taken to respond to the COVID-19 emergency at the direction or guidance of public health officials' may be reimbursed under Category B of the agency's Public Assistance program.
  
- Proclamation on the Suspension of Entry as Immigrants and Nonimmigrants of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Coronavirus, March 14
  - President Trump issued a proclamation expanding the previously enacted travel restrictions against foreign nationals entering the country, suspending the entry of any alien who was physically present in the United Kingdom or the Republic of Ireland during the 14-day period preceding their entry or attempted entry into the United States. Like the previous order, the order does not apply to any U.S. citizens, permanent residents or their family members. This order is effective as of midnight on March 16, and does not apply to those who departed on a flight prior to that time.
  - To support this decision, President Trump highlighted the ongoing sustained person-to-person transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in both countries. President Trump also noted that CDC, along with State and local health departments, has limited resources, and that the public health system could be overwhelmed if sustained human-to-human transmission of the virus occurs in the United States on a large scale.
  
- Proclamation on the National Day of Prayer for all Americans Affected by the Coronavirus Pandemic and for our National Response Efforts, March 14
  - President Trump issued a proclamation that March, 15, 2020 will be a "National Day of Prayer for All Americans Affected by the Coronavirus Pandemic and for our National Response Efforts."

## **World Health Organization (WHO)**

- Situation Report – 54, March 14
  - WHO reports that 12 new countries have reported cases of COVID-19 in the last 24 hours. Globally, there are now 142,539 coronavirus cases and 5,393 confirmed deaths. WHO Director-General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, reports that Europe has now become the epicenter of the pandemic, with more reported cases and deaths than the rest of the world combined, apart from China.
  - The report also highlights interim guidance for clinicians taking care of hospitalized adult and pediatric patients with severe acute respiratory infection when a COVID-19 infection is suspected. It is not meant to replace clinical judgment or specialist consultation but rather to strengthen clinical management of these patients and provide to up-to-date guidance.
  
- WHO, UN Foundation and partners launch first-of-its-kind COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund, March 13
  - A new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Solidarity Response Fund was created by WHO, the United Nations Foundation, and the Swiss Philanthropy Foundation. It will raise money from

- a wide range of donors to support the work of WHO and partners to help countries respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- WHO and its partners are seeking financing for protective equipment for frontline health workers; to equip diagnostic laboratories; improve surveillance and data collection; to establish and maintain intensive care units; to strengthen supply chains; to accelerate research and development of vaccines and therapeutics; and to take other critical steps to scale up the public health response to the pandemic.

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

- *CDC Situation Summary*, March 14
  - In a recent situation summary, CDC explained its disease projects. More cases of COVID-19 are likely to be identified in the United States in the coming days, including more instances of community spread. CDC expects that widespread transmission of COVID-19 in the United States will occur. In the coming months, most of the U.S. population will be exposed to this virus.
  - Widespread transmission of COVID-19 could translate into large numbers of people needing medical care at the same time. Schools, childcare centers, and workplaces, may experience more absenteeism. Public health and healthcare systems may become overloaded, with elevated rates of hospitalizations and deaths. Other critical infrastructure, such as law enforcement, emergency medical services, and sectors of the transportation industry may also be affected. It is possible that healthcare providers and hospitals will be overwhelmed.
- *Estimating Risk for Death from 2019 Novel Coronavirus Disease, China*, March 13
  - A new study, published as an early release by the CDC, assessed the current severity of the epidemic in China.
  - The study estimates that the risk for death in Wuhan reached as high as 12% in the epicenter of the epidemic and  $\approx 1\%$  in other, more mildly affected areas. These elevated death risk estimates are probably associated with a breakdown of the healthcare system, indicating that enhanced public health interventions, including social distancing and movement restrictions, should be implemented to bring the COVID-19 epidemic under control.

## **New York State**

- *Governor Cuomo Calls on President Trump to Take Comprehensive Federal Action to Combat Novel Coronavirus Now*, March 15
  - In an open letter to President Trump, Governor Andrew Cuomo called for comprehensive federal action to combat COVID-19. The Governor urged Trump to deploy the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to leverage expertise to retrofit and equip existing facilities - such as military bases or college dormitories - to serve as temporary medical centers. He also called on the President, through the FDA and CDC, to authorize states to certify a wider array of testing labs and methods in an effort to maximize testing capacity to identify and isolate positive cases faster. Cuomo also called for a uniform federal standard for when cities and states should shut down commerce and schools, or cancel events.
  - The Governor directed nonessential State employees in Rockland, Westchester, NYC, Suffolk, Nassau - current hotspot areas - to work from home for two weeks. The Governor also directed DMV to move to “appointment only” to limit person to person contact. Finally, Governor Cuomo asked Chief Judge Janet DiFiore to develop a plan to reduce density in the court system, including limiting nonessential proceedings, without disrupting criminal justice system.

- *Governor Cuomo Announces Department of Financial Services Will Require Insurance Companies to Waive Co-payments for Tele-health Visits*, March 14
  - During a conference call briefing, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced the State Department of Financial Services will require insurance companies to waive co-pays for telehealth visits. This action will encourage New Yorkers to seek medical attention from their homes rather than visit a hospital or doctor's office.
  - The Governor also authorized the State to open a drive-through mobile testing facility on Long Island in the coming week. The addition of a mobile testing facility on Long Island is part of the State's initiative to replicate the New Rochelle Mobile Testing Center model at other locations, helping allow the state to run at least 6,000 tests per day starting next week.
  - Governor Cuomo said he will sign an Executive Order today to help relieve the economic impact of COVID-19 on workers and ensure school aid for schools that have been directed to close. This includes waiving the seven-day waiting period for unemployment insurance, and eliminating aid penalties for schools directed to close.
  
- *Cuomo Executive Order Temporarily Modifies Election Procedure*, March 14
  - Governor Andrew Cuomo signed an executive order temporarily modifying election procedures to help reduce the spread of COVID-19. The executive order suspends the candidate petitioning process — effective 5PM on Tuesday — for the June primaries for Congressional, State Senate, State Assembly and Judicial races.
  - The executive order modifies the signature requirements for ballot access; candidates will only need to collect 30 percent of the statutory threshold. For Congress, candidates would need 375 signatures rather than 1,250. For State Senate, candidates would need 300 signatures rather than 1,000. For Assembly, candidates would only need 150 signatures rather than 500.
  - The executive order also modifies deadlines and procedures to allow New Yorkers to vote absentee for the Queens Borough President special election on March 24. It extends the current deadline to register to vote absentee to March 23, the day before the special election.

## **New York City**

- *New York City to Close Public Schools*, March 15
  - New York City's public school system, the nation's largest with 1.1 million students, will begin to largely shut down this week. The schools will be closed on Monday for all students and staff, but teachers will be asked to report to work later in the week for training on how to provide remote learning.
  - Governor Andrew Cuomo ordered New York City school officials to develop a plan within 24 hours on how to offer child care to students of parents who work in essential industries like health care and to provide food to students who will need meals. Mayor de Blasio said that the goal is to reopen all the schools on April 20, though he cautioned that there is a strong chance that the schools will not reopen at all this school year. Public schools in Long Island and Westchester County will also close this week.
  - In addition to these measures, Governor Cuomo urged private businesses to voluntarily close and allow their employees to work from home and noted that the City is considering enacting mandatory closures. De Blasio announced a number of stronger measures, like ordering hospitals in the city to cancel all elective surgery, postponing an upcoming election for the Queens borough president, and closing city senior centers. He also added that the city will more aggressively enforce occupancy caps at bars and restaurants.

- *Statement from Mayor de Blasio on First COVID-19 Death in New York City*, March 14
  - Mayor Bill de Blasio confirmed the first coronavirus-related death in New York State - an 82-year-old woman in Brooklyn who had a pre-existing emphysema. In an official statement, de Blasio stated, “We’ve known from the outset that these people are the most at risk in this pandemic, and today’s news is a sad confirmation of that reality.”
  - He further urged all New Yorkers to take the necessary precautionary measures to protect the people most at risk.
  
- *Mayor de Blasio, Senator Schumer Hold Media Availability on COVID-19*, March 14
  - Mayor Bill de Blasio and Senator Charles Schumer recently held a joint press conference on COVID-19. Throughout the conference, both stressed that this crisis will span for several months and urged New Yorkers to take measures to protect older New Yorkers and those who have preexisting conditions.
  - The Mayor noted that there is a new confirmed case of a member of the FDNY. The member worked from Sunday through Tuesday, and went home on Tuesday with symptoms. While on duty the firefighter did not respond to any medical runs or treat any patients. As a matter of precaution, 31 members of that firehouse have been immediately quarantined.
  - Schumer discussed the need for additional policies to nationalize or mobilize key industries, noting that he hope “this is a wake-up call to our nation that we need to go a lot farther.” He further acknowledged that the state is still waiting on FDA approvals for a number of companies and direct support for testing.

## **Other Related Updates**

- *Updated Federal Travel Guidance in Response to Coronavirus*, March 14
  - The White House Office of Management and Budget issued new guidance on Saturday telling federal workers that “only mission-critical travel is recommended at this time.” The White House is also encouraging agencies to hold meetings by telephone or video-conference whenever they can. Agency and department heads can decide what constitutes as “mission-critical,” but the Office of Management and Budget asked decision-makers to consider if the travel can be “postponed, canceled, or handled remotely.”
  - The guidance for federal workers follows an announcement by the Department of Defense on Friday that it has halted domestic travel for its service members because of the coronavirus.
  
- *FDA Issues Emergency Use Authorization to Thermo Fisher*, March 13
  - FDA issued the fourth COVID-19 diagnostic Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) to Thermo Fisher for its TaqPath COVID-19 Combo Kit within 24 hours of receiving the request. FDA has been engaging with test developers and encouraging them to work with the agency.
  - Since the beginning of this outbreak, more than 80 test developers have sought the FDA’s assistance with development and validation of tests they plan to bring through the Emergency Use Authorization process. Additionally, more than 30 laboratories have notified the FDA that they are testing or intend to begin testing soon under new policy for laboratory-developed tests for this emergency.