



COVID-19 Daily Update

Friday, March 13, 2020 - Updated

Summary

Today, President Trump held a press conference on the federal coronavirus response, announcing a national state of emergency. According to Trump, this measure will allow for \$50 billion in financial assistance for states, localities, and territories. The President praised private sector efforts to facilitate increased coronavirus testing and announced several measures to reduce laboratory restrictions and billing/reimbursement restrictions on health care providers, in order to increase the availability of testing for COVID-19 and to facilitate the delivery of clinical services across the country.

Congressional leaders are closing in on a revised aid package for workers and businesses hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The House plans to vote on the legislation today, which broadly includes paid leave benefits, free coronavirus testing, and an expansion of unemployment insurance. Locally, Governor Cuomo announced that the first public drive-through testing facility on the east coast will begin appointment-only testing today in New Rochelle, and the DOH recommended allowing employees to telecommute, creating staggered work hours, informing employees of paid sick leave policies, and encouraging staff to help reduce overcrowding on public transportation. Outside of New York, the governor of Illinois ordered that all public schools, including in the city of Chicago, close from Tuesday March 17 through March 30.

General/Employer Guidance

Presidential and Congressional updates

- *President Trump Declares National Emergency Amid The Coronavirus Pandemic*, March 13
 - President Trump held an afternoon press conference on the federal coronavirus response and officially declared a national state of emergency. According to Trump, this measure will allow for \$50 billion to be spent on measures to fight the disease. As part of this effort, Trump urged every state to immediately set up an emergency response.
 - The President announced that he is conferring special authority to the Secretary of Health and Human Services to reduce restrictions on health care providers that may hinder the rapid delivery of clinical services. In particular, the Secretary of HHS will have the ability to waive laws relating to telehealth, federal licensing requirements for doctors, and hospital restrictions on the length of stay and number of beds. Medicare

- and Medicaid will also be suspending regulations to facilitate the provision of services.
- President Trump noted efforts to leverage the private sector to make coronavirus testing more widely available. He highlighted the efforts of several commercial labs working to develop new tests, including a new FDA approved test from Roche and a pending application for a diagnostic test of Thermo Fisher. The President estimates that there will be 5 million tests available within one month.
 - The President further instructed the Secretary of Energy to purchase crude oil for the U.S. strategic reserve, and he indicated that the government will suspend interest payments on federal student loans.
- *The White House and FDA released several documents, clarifying the measures announced in President Trump's earlier press conference.*
 - The President's proclamation confirmed the declaration of a national state of emergency. It also granted authority to the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) to waive or modify, for a temporary period, certain requirements of the Medicare, Medicaid, HIPAA, and State Children's Health Insurance programs and regulations throughout the duration of the COVID-19 public health crisis.
 - An additional memorandum urged the Director of HHS to take appropriate action should States request flexibility to authorize laboratories within the State to develop and perform tests used to detect COVID-19.
 - FDA issued enforcement discretion and proclaimed that FDA is not objecting to the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) authorizing certain laboratories in New York to begin patient testing after validating their tests and notifying the NYSDOH.
 - FDA confirmed that it has authorized the Roche cobas SARS-CoV-2 Test, the third Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) granted for a diagnostic test during the COVID-19 outbreak. This is the first commercially distributed diagnostic test to receive an EUA during the COVID-19 outbreak, and approval was granted within 24 hours of the FDA's receipt of the Roche application.
 - *House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced she and Treasury Secretary Steven T. Mnuchin reached a deal Friday on the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.*
 - The Act provides an economic stimulus package to address the coronavirus, providing paid sick leave for workers and billions of dollars to states for food programs and unemployment benefits.
 - In an address from the speaker's balcony hallway, Pelosi said, "The three most important parts of this bill are testing, testing, testing. This legislation facilitates free coronavirus testing for everyone who needs a test, including the uninsured." Under the Act, insurance companies would be required to cover coronavirus testing without a copay for consumers, and a federal national disaster program would reimburse the cost for people without insurance.
 - The White House, via Tweet, expressed support for the relief package.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- *Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) Situation Report – 52*, March 12
 - According to WHO, four new territories have reported cases of COVID-19 in the past 24 hours, including French Polynesia, Turkey, Honduras, and Côte d’Ivoire. Globally, the report notes 125,048 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 4,613 reported deaths.
 - WHO described its continued efforts to convene clinicians from over 30 countries on twice weekly conference calls to share knowledge, and highlight operational challenges and technical questions.
 - The major clinical challenge reported is the severity of the disease. A recent surge in critically ill patients requiring mechanical ventilation has strained some health systems and exhausted biomedical supplies and staff. This has highlighted the need to support health systems to become ready for such a surge in cases.

- *Joint ICAO-WHO Statement on COVID-19*, March 11
 - The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and WHO issued a joint statement reminding stakeholders of existing regulations, guidelines, and response plans available to support governments and the aviation industry. The statement highlighted the role of each organization in the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - ICAO explained its role in providing aviation-related information on COVID-19 public health measures to aviation authorities, airlines, and airports. It further encouraged “intense international cooperation and coordination” between government and other agencies, as well as between the private and public sectors.

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

- *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Update and Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations*, March 13
 - CDC held a conference call for clinicians to discuss current information about COVID-19 prevention and control measures. Many questions involved the use of respirator devices in a hospital setting. Based on its published strategies on optimizing the use of protective equipment, CDC suggested that doctors may deliver care from one patient to another without removing or changing a respirator. CDC distinguished this situation from respirator re-use, in which clinicians wear the respirator, remove it, and then put it back on later.
 - In addition, CDC discussed the use of remdesivir – a novel antiviral drug developed by Gilead Sciences as a treatment for Ebola virus disease. CDC noted that IV remdesivir is being offered across the country in three clinical trials for COVID-19 treatment. Other anti-viral drugs are being used in international clinical trials, but CDC noted that their results have not yet been published.
 - CDC also discussed the potential reduction in clinical out-patient visits, depending on the extent to which a community is affected. It suggested that doctors consider implementing text-based follow-ups and check-ins, where appropriate.

- Warning - Level 3, Avoid Nonessential Travel—Widespread Sustained Transmission, March 11
 - Updated CDC travel guidance recommends that travelers avoid all nonessential travel to over 20 specified countries in Europe, warning that there may be limited access to adequate medical care in affected areas.
 - CDC strongly suggested that travelers returning from the specified countries in Europe stay home for 14 days after returning from travel, monitor their health, and practice social distancing.

New York State

- During Novel Coronavirus Briefing, Governor Cuomo Announces New Mass Gatherings Regulations, March 12
 - During a recent briefing, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced the NY State will institute limits on mass gatherings and directed that events with 500 or more individuals in attendance to be cancelled or postponed.
 - Governor Cuomo also announced that nursing homes will limit visitors, to allow only for medically necessary visits. The state has asked nursing homes to set up online communication capacity so families may tele-visit loved ones. All nursing home workers will be screened daily when they enter a facility and are required to wear surgical masks to guard against any potential asymptomatic spread.
 - The State noted a new contract with BioReference Laboratories to run an additional 5,000 tests per day, in addition to the previously announced new partnerships with 28 private labs. Additionally, the Governor announced the first public drive-through testing facility on the east coast will start testing people on Friday in New Rochelle. Testing will be done by appointment only. New Rochelle residents who have been quarantined will be tested first.
- Statement From Secretary to the Governor Melissa DeRosa Regarding Rumors of New York City and Mass Transit Shutdown, March 12
 - The Secretary to the Governor, Melissa DeRosa, addressed rumors of a New York City and mass transit shut down. DeRosa adamantly stated that no locality will be shutting down, and that the mass transit system would continue running. She also noted that the state has the legal authority to overrule any locality's decision to issue an order of mass quarantine or shut down.

New York City

- Mayor de Blasio Issues State of Emergency, March 13
 - Mayor Bill de Blasio issued a state of emergency in New York City, in an effort to remove any legal and regulatory barriers related to the COVID-19 response. To receive regular updates on the latest developments on coronavirus in New York City, individuals are encouraged to text COVID to 692-692.
 - As part of increased social distancing measures, the City cancelled all existing and future standalone events with attendance exceeding over 500 persons until further notice. Establishments with a capacity of 500 people or less, including concert venues, theatres, museums, department stores and religious institutions are required to

- maintain an occupancy level at or below 50% of their legal capacity to ensure maximum social distancing.
 - The City has also set a target benchmark of getting 10 percent (roughly 35,000 people) of the City employees to telecommute and 20 percent (roughly 71,000 people) on staggered work schedules. Currently, 29 New York City residents are under mandatory quarantine and 1,784 are under voluntary home isolation. Those under mandatory quarantine receive daily calls and twice weekly, unannounced visits by DOHMH.
- *Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19): General Guidance for Businesses and Non-Health Care Settings Update*, March 12
 - The NYC Department of Health issued updated guidance for businesses on how to mitigate person-to-person transmission of COVID-19. The DOH recommends allowing employees to telecommute, creating staggered work hours, informing employees of paid sick leave policies, and encouraging staff to help reduce overcrowding on public transportation.
 - The DOH also noted that if an employee tests positive for COVID-19, there is no need to close down the business. Instead, it recommends following the general disinfection guidance. Preferred disinfection practices include keeping alcohol-based hand sanitizers in common areas, giving appropriate personal protective equipment to cleaning staff, and regularly disinfecting frequently touched surfaces. The NYC DOH does not recommend wearing a face mask if employees are not sick. Face masks are only recommended if directed by a health care provider.

Other Related Updates

- *Congress Nears Stimulus Deal With White House*, March 13
 - The Trump administration and congressional leaders are closing in on a revised aid package for workers and businesses hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The House plans to vote on the measure on Friday. It will then go to the Senate, which called off a recess that had been scheduled for next week in anticipation of a compromise.
 - The broad outlines of the legislation would, in addition to paid leave benefits and free coronavirus testing, expand unemployment insurance for furloughed workers; provide flexibility in child nutrition and food stamp funding; and help states and territories meet their Medicaid requirements.
- *Trump Administration Announces Measures To Speed Coronavirus Testing*, March 13
 - The federal government has announced a series of measures intended to speed testing for the coronavirus disease COVID-19. First, the Department of Health and Human Services announced Friday that it will fund two companies, DiaSorin Molecular and QIAGEN, for the development of rapid diagnostic tests for coronavirus. According to HHS, DiaSorin's test could be ready in six weeks, while QIAGEN's could be ready in 12 weeks.
 - HHS also announced a new leader of COVID-19 testing efforts: Adm. Brett Giroir, who is a physician. He will coordinate the testing efforts by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, state and local

authorities, and public and private labs. Finally, the FDA announced that it created a 24-hour emergency hotline for private-sector and academic labs.

- *Attorney General James Orders Companies to Stop Selling Fake Treatments for Coronavirus*, March 12
 - New York Attorney General Letitia James ordered two companies to immediately cease and desist selling and marketing products as a treatment or cure for the coronavirus.
 - Both companies tout the use of colloidal silver as the main ingredient in their products. The press releases notes that there is no evidence to support the use of colloidal silver as a treatment for any disease or condition. According to the National Institutes of Health, colloidal silver can actually be dangerous to a person's health. There is currently no Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved vaccine to prevent the coronavirus or treatment to cure it, and the World Health Organization has also said that there is no specific medicine to prevent or treat this disease.