

December 10, 2020

### Summary

The United States has 15,393,571 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 289,451 reported related deaths. An FDA advisory committee recommended granting an emergency use authorization (EUA) for Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine. FDA is expected to follow the recommendation and grant an EUA on December 12. The initial shipment of 6.4 million doses will leave warehouses within 24 hours of authorization. The federal government pre-ordered doses of Pfizer's vaccine for 50 million people. Pfizer warned it will not be able to supply the United States with many additional doses until late June or early July because other governments have bought up most near-term supply. British regulators instructed hospitals not to administer Pfizer's vaccine to individuals with a history of severe allergic reactions, after two recipients suffered anaphylaxis. CDC is asking states to provide detailed data regarding vaccine recipients, including names, birth dates, and addresses. CDC officials say the data is necessary to ensure recipients receive their second dose and to monitor adverse events but some states are resisting, citing privacy concerns.

Cases continue to rise throughout the United States. New cases in the seven-day period ending December 9 were 19% higher than the same period two weeks prior. Hospitals throughout the United States are at critically low capacity - one third of Americans now live in areas where hospitals have fewer than 15% of ICU beds available. New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham announced the state expects hospitals to ration care based on chances of survival, as state ICU beds hit 103% capacity. Facing political pressure from Republican state legislators, including articles of impeachment against him, Governor Mike DeWine of Ohio announced he would allow a state curfew to expire even as cases continue to rise throughout the state.

New York reported 92 deaths, 5,164 hospitalizations, and 994 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Wednesday, December 9, 2020. Approximately 10,178, or 5.16%, of the 197,406 tests administered in New York on December 9 were positive for COVID-19. Governor Cuomo said New York will need to raise taxes to offset a projected \$8.7 billion deficit in its April 2021 budget, and joined a letter with Mayor Bill de Blasio and state legislators to New York's Congressional delegation urging Congress to provide billions in relief to the State. Governor Cuomo also announced that, following FDA's expected approval of Pfizer's vaccine, New York could receive its initial allocation of 170,000 doses this weekend. The State has set up 90 cold-storage facilities that will serve as vaccine distribution centers. New York officials warned hospitals to prepare for a surge in COVID-19 hospitalizations following the current rise in cases. Nearly 1.5 million Tri-State Area freelancers, self-employed workers, and gig workers will lose unemployment benefits they received since the spring through the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program, representing roughly half the total unemployed workers in the region.

## Presidential updates

- [\*White House Puts Forth Stimulus Proposal\*](#), December 8
  - The White House weighed in on Congress's ongoing stimulus negotiations by putting forth its own \$916 billion proposal.
  - Congress resumed stimulus negotiations earlier this month after a bipartisan group of Senators put forth a \$908 billion proposal, including \$180 billion in unemployment aid and nearly \$300 billion for small businesses. The bipartisan proposal has served as a starting point for lawmakers' negotiations.
  - On December 9, House Speaker Pelosi told reporters that "one way or another" Congress will pass a stimulus bill, but lawmakers [continue](#) to disagree on several key issues including aid for state governments, which is opposed by some Republicans, and a liability shield to protect businesses from coronavirus-related lawsuits, which is opposed by some Democrats.
  - The package put forth by the White House would cut the \$180 billion in unemployment aid included in the bipartisan proposal to just \$40 billion but it would add funding to send \$600 stimulus checks to most Americans.
  - Lawmakers in both parties have expressed support for a stimulus checks, though Democratic proponents argued that they should not replace robust unemployment aid.
  - Senators involved in crafting the bipartisan proposal opined that the government should focus on providing relief to those who have suffered economic harm as a result of the pandemic, instead of sending checks to all Americans, regardless of need.

## World Health Organization (WHO)

- [\*WHO COVID-19 Updates\*](#), December 10
  - With multiple vaccines likely demonstrating efficacy in large trials, WHO officials say vaccine [acceptance](#) is the next hurdle. WHO Technical Advisory Group on Behavioural Insights and Sciences for Health published a [report](#) outlining factors that drive people's behavior toward vaccines, highlighting the key factors of an enabling environment, social influences, and motivation. The report recommends addressing those drivers to encourage communities to accept the vaccine.
  - WHO [reported](#) on a study on ten major economies in North America, Europe, and Asia, that found equitable global access to COVID-19 vaccines will generate economic benefits of at least \$153 billion in 2020-21 and \$466 billion by 2025 in those major economies alone.

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

- [\*CDC May Require States to Provide Detailed Data Regarding COVID-19 Vaccine Recipients\*](#), December 8
  - CDC is asking states to sign [agreements](#) committing to provide the agency with detailed data regarding COVID-19 vaccine recipients, including names, birth dates, ethnicities, and addresses.
  - The bipartisan National Governors Association warned that collecting vaccine recipients' personal data "may create a lack of trust and discourage people from getting vaccinated." CDC's parent agency, Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), responded by saying that it was "exploring solutions" to protect privacy.

- Some states are refusing to sign the agreements or provide the data, citing privacy concerns. It is not clear whether states will face any consequences for refusing to sign.
- CDC officials said that the data will not be shared with other federal agencies and collecting it is “critically necessary” to ensure that people who move across state lines receive their second vaccine dose, to track adverse reactions, and to assess effectiveness of the vaccine among different demographic groups.

### **New York State**

- [New York State COVID-19 Updates](#), December 9
  - New York reported 92 deaths, 5,164 hospitalizations, and 994 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Wednesday, December 9, 2020.
  - Approximately 10,178, or 5.16% of the 197,406 tests administered in New York on December 9 were positive for COVID-19.
  - Governor Cuomo [said](#) that New York will need to raise taxes even if the state receives federal coronavirus relief. In April, the State adopted a \$178 billion budget for 2020–21 that depended upon federal aid that Congress has not provided. New York projects there will be an \$8.7 billion deficit for the fiscal year beginning April 1, 2021. That figure could double if New York does not find \$8 billion in recurring savings that was factored into the FY2020 budget.
  - Governor Cuomo [said](#) that, following expected FDA approval of Pfizer’s vaccine, New York could receive its initial allocation of 170,000 doses this weekend. New York has identified 90 cold storage sites throughout the state to store the vaccines and act as regional distribution centers.
  - New York officials [warned](#) hospitals to prepare for an increase in hospitalizations through mid-January. Currently, about 5,000 patients are hospitalized for COVID-19, the most since mid-May.

### **New York City**

- [New York City COVID-19 Updates](#), December 9
  - More than 1.5 million freelance, self-employed, and gig workers in the Tri-State Area will [lose](#) unemployment benefits that they had been receiving since the spring under the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program. These workers represent about half of the total number of workers in the area--2.4 million people--who received unemployment benefits in November. Last month, Governor Cuomo asked Congressional leaders to extend federal unemployment benefits through September 2021.
  - Governor Cuomo, Mayor De Blasio, New York Senate Majority Stewart-Cousins, Speaker Heastie and New York labor leaders [sent](#) a letter urging the New York Congressional delegation to secure \$4.5 billion in funding for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, \$9 billion in aid to New York City, and \$15 billion to New York State. The authors stated that funding was necessary to avoid layoffs to essential workers and to avoid significant borrowing. The letter characterized these funds as an “initial package” that “will fund states through next March[,] at which time a more substantial package will be passed.”

## **Other Related Updates**

- [\*FDA COVID-19 Updates\*](#), December 10
  - Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee (VRBPAC) formally [recommended](#) that FDA grant an emergency use authorization (EUA) for Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine.
  - The agency is expected to grant an EUA on December 12, though it may be delayed by last-minute legal or bureaucratic requirements. FDA is not [required](#) to follow the advisory group’s advice, but it often does.
  - The initial shipment of 6.4 million doses will leave warehouses within 24 hours of approval. About half of those doses will be sent across the country, while the other half will be reserved for the initial recipients to receive a second dose three weeks later.
  - One VRBPAC panel member asked Pfizer to conduct a separate study of people with a history of severe allergic reactions, fearing that “tens of millions” of people could reject the vaccine after British regulators cautioned against people with severe allergies getting inoculated.
  - The committee, composed of independent scientific experts, doctors, and statisticians, voted 17 to 4 to recommend approval, with one member abstaining.
- [\*United Kingdom Begins Vaccinations; Investigates Two Allergic Reactions\*](#), December 8
  - The United Kingdom [began](#) a mass vaccination campaign against COVID-19 on December 8, the first country in the world to do so with a clinically authorized, fully tested vaccine for the disease.
  - The first recipient was 90-year-old Margaret Keenan, who can “finally look forward to spending time with my family and friends in the new year after being on my own for most of the year.” The second recipient was a man named William Shakespeare.
  - The effort marks a turning point in the world race to end a pandemic that has killed 1.5 million people.
  - However, United Kingdom medical regulators [warned](#) that people with a history of serious allergic reactions should not get the vaccine as regulators investigated two anaphylactic reactions on the first day of the program.
  - National Health Service spokesperson Stephan Powis explained the advice was issued on a “precautionary basis” and the people who had allergic reactions had recovered.
  - Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of the school of public health at Brown University, advised patients who have had serious allergic reactions to other medicines or foods, or that carry an EpiPen, to delay vaccination while the two cases are investigated.
  - Nonetheless, health officials stated that the general population should not be anxious about receiving the vaccination.
- [\*ICU Beds Near Capacity Across United States\*](#), December 9
  - Newly [released](#) federal data detailing geographic information on COVID-19 patients in hospitals shows that more than one third of Americans live in areas where hospitals are running critically short of intensive care beds, with less than 15% of beds available.
  - Many areas are doing even worse – one in 10 Americans, mainly across the Midwest, South, and Southwest, live in areas where ICU beds are completely full or have fewer than 5% available.

- The number of people hospitalized in the United States has more than doubled since the beginning of November, and continues to reach new highs nearly daily.
  - New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham [announced](#) on December 7 that the state will likely implement a measure to allow hospitals to move to “crisis standards” and ration care based on patients’ chances of survival; New Mexico ICUs hit [103%](#) capacity on December 9.
  - At times this fall, the number of unoccupied ICU beds in the entire state of North Dakota dipped into single digits. On December 9, El Paso, Texas had 13 of 400 ICU beds available.
  - Survival rates from COVID-19 have improved over time as doctors learned which treatments were effective, but experts worry that hospital shortages could [reverse](#) those gains, increasing mortality rates as patients cannot receive necessary care.
- [Pfizer Issues Warning Regarding COVID-19 Supply Issues](#), December 8
    - Earlier this year, the federal government pre-ordered 100 million doses of Pfizer’s two-dose COVID-19 vaccine, enough to vaccinate 50 million people.
    - But this week, Pfizer said it will not be able to provide the United States with a substantial number of additional doses until late June or early July 2021 because other governments have bought up nearly all of its near-term supply.
    - The media reported that Pfizer offered to sell the government between 100 million and 500 additional doses earlier this year, warning that demand for the vaccine would quickly outstrip supply, but the government declined.
    - White House Press Secretary McEnany said reports that the government declined an offer to purchase additional vaccine doses from Pfizer were false.
    - Federal officials [said](#) they are not concerned about the government’s ability to purchase vaccines for the entire population, noting there are other vaccines in the pipeline.
    - However, after Pfizer’s announcement, President Trump signed an executive [order](#) instructing Health Secretary Azar to ensure that Americans have “priority access” to COVID-19 vaccines “developed in the United States or procured by the United States Government.” It is unclear exactly what the executive order requires or whether it can be enforced.
  - [China’s State-Backed Vaccine 86% Effective](#), December 9
    - Trials conducted in the United Arab Emirates found a state-backed vaccine produced in China was 86% [effective](#) protecting people against COVID-19. The trials did not reveal any serious safety concerns. The trials included 31,000 volunteers in the UAE.
    - The vaccine was developed by Sinopharm unit China National Biotec Group Co., and has already been administered to hundreds of thousands of people under emergency authorization in China.
    - The vaccine falls slightly short of the efficacy achieved by Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna’s vaccines, but can be stored at regular refrigeration temperatures, removing the logistical hurdles that come with cold storage requirements.
    - The vaccine is made using an inactivated version of SARS-CoV-2 to prime human immune systems, a common vaccine technology used for decades to treat a variety of diseases. Inactivated virus vaccines can require multiple booster shots to achieve strong immunity, and production requires handling large amounts of the virus.

- By contrast, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines use new mRNA technology that should be faster to manufacture, because they require only tiny volumes of raw material.
- President Xi Jinping [promised](#) to make any Chinese vaccine a “global public good,” and China [offered](#) lower-income countries in Southeast Asia and Africa the chance to be first in line for vaccine distribution. Those countries may struggle to compete with Western nations for early supplies of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.
- [Canada Approves Pfizer/BioNTech Vaccine](#), December 9
  - Canadian regulators [approved](#) of Pfizer/BioNTech’s COVID-19 vaccine on December 9, following approvals in the United Kingdom and Bahrain.
  - Dr. Supriya Sharma, chief medical adviser at Health Canada, assured the public they should feel comfortable getting the shot, which was “authorized only after a thorough assessment of the evidence demonstrated that it met Canada’s strict standards for safety, efficacy, and quality.”
  - Canada is set to receive up to 249,000 doses this month, and officials expect to start administering the first 30,000 doses next week.
- [Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance Weekly Claims Report](#), December 10
  - Department of Labor (DOL) [reports](#) that another 853,000 workers filed initial claims for unemployment benefits last week, up from 716,000.
  - The number of new claims had been trending downward since March, when nearly seven million people filed for unemployment insurance in a single week, but has spiked several times in recent months.
  - 427,609 new claims were filed 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.
- [NIH-Funded Calculator Helps Organizations Plan COVID-19 Testing](#), December 7
  - Researchers [developed](#) the COVID-19 Testing Impact [Calculator](#), a tool to help schools and businesses establish an effective and cost-efficient COVID-19 testing program.
  - The tool models four different COVID-19 testing methods and incorporates input about CDC-recommended countermeasures such as mask use, contact tracing, and social distancing, to estimate the cost, speed, and accuracy of each kind of testing.
  - The tool was developed by researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital and Massachusetts Institute of Technology using funding from the National Institutes of Health’s (NIH) Rapid Acceleration of Diagnostics (RADx) Tech program.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [Navigating Inability-To-Pay Claims With DOJ Amid COVID-19](#), November 20
- [SBA Proposes Detailed New Questionnaire to Evaluate Post-Hoc the Good Faith of PPP Applicants’ Prior Certifications of Loan “Necessity”](#), November 11

Send questions to:

- [COVID-19-Implications@ropesgray.com](mailto:COVID-19-Implications@ropesgray.com)
- [COVID-19RecoveryPolicies@ropesgray.com](mailto:COVID-19RecoveryPolicies@ropesgray.com)