

December 14, 2020

Summary

The United States has 16,258,147 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 299,191 reported related deaths. The country recorded more than 3,000 related deaths on December 9 alone, a new daily record. FDA granted emergency use authorization for Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for people aged 16 years and older, including pregnant women. CDC's vaccine advisory committee endorsed administering the vaccine to people aged 16 years and older but has not yet issued a recommendation regarding administering the vaccine during pregnancy. The federal government began shipping doses of Pfizer's vaccines to the states on December 13. Some states began administering the vaccines today. A House subcommittee is investigating whether the White House destroyed evidence that it pressured CDC to alter publications regarding COVID-19 to suit President Trump's political agenda.

During the week ending December 10, nineteen states set new records for the most new confirmed COVID-19 cases recorded in one week. Record new cases in Virginia prompted Governor Ralph Northam to impose a "modified stay-at-home" order effective at 12:01 a.m. December 14 that includes a curfew, reduced gathering limits on social events, and a mask mandate when outdoors. On December 10, California became the first state to add more than 30,000 new cases in one day; Los Angeles County alone added 12,600 new cases on the day. Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker announced the state would return to an earlier stage of business restrictions, closing theaters and performance venues, some high-contact indoor recreational facilities, reducing capacity to 40% at nearly every other business, library, museum, and house of worship, and restricting indoor dining to groups of six.

New York reported 83 deaths and 5,712 hospitalizations on Sunday, December 13, 2020. Approximately 9,044, or 5.66%, of the 159,844 tests administered in New York on December 13 were positive for COVID-19. On December 11, Governor Cuomo ordered indoor dining closed in New York City. The Governor relaxed guidelines requiring gyms, barbershops and hair salons to close in orange micro-cluster zones, instead requiring 25% capacity in gyms and requiring barbers and hair dressers to take weekly COVID-19 tests in orange zones. A New York City nurse became the first person to receive the vaccine in New York, as the City and State plan to vaccinate a small portion of health care workers who interact with coronavirus patients. New York City plans to assess students' learning to determine how significantly the pandemic has limited students' educational growth.

Presidential updates

- [*Lawmakers Investigate White House Interference at the CDC*](#), December 10
 - The House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus is investigating whether the White House destroyed evidence that it pressured CDC to alter publications regarding the pandemic to suit its political agenda.
 - On December 7, the subcommittee interviewed the editor-in-chief of CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), Charlotte Kent.
 - Kent told lawmakers that she was instructed to delete an August 8th email from HHS senior advisor Paul Alexander demanding that she modify an MMWR regarding the coronavirus's effect on children because it conflicted with the White House's push to re-open schools.
 - Kent testified that she believed the instruction to delete the email came from CDC Director Redfield. Kent also said that, though she declined to delete the email, she later discovered that it had disappeared from her inbox.
 - On December 10, Subcommittee Chair Representative James Clyburn sent a letter to Redfield and Health Secretary Azar expressing his concern regarding Kent's testimony and calling for them to preserve all relevant documents. Clyburn is reportedly seeking to interview Redfield.
 - Republican members of the Subcommittee said that Clyburn's letter mischaracterized Kent's testimony, including by failing to note that Kent also said that the scientific integrity of the MMWR was never compromised.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [*WHO COVID-19 Updates*](#), December 14
 - WHO published a free online [tool](#) designed to produce a rapid but comprehensive estimate of the incremental costs of introducing and deploying vaccines to a given population. The cost estimate output can be entered directly into the WHO's previously published vaccine introduction readiness assessment [tool](#), which helps countries assess readiness to introduce vaccines and identifies gaps in country vaccine programs.
 - WHO published a [checklist](#) to support school re-opening and preparation for COVID-19 resurgences or similar public health crises. The checklist is designed to support policy-makers, staff, and officials in the education and health sectors, as well as various other stakeholders including teachers and parents.

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

- [*CDC Advisory Committee Issues Recommendation Regarding Pfizer's COVID-19 Vaccine*](#), December 12
 - On December 11, FDA issued an emergency use authorization for Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for people aged 16 years and older, including pregnant women.
 - The next day, Advisory Committee on Immunization Practice (ACIP), which makes recommendations regarding vaccine use in the United States, [endorsed](#) administering Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine to people aged 16 years and older.
 - CDC Director Redfield adopted ACIP's endorsement as official agency policy.
 - ACIP has not yet made a recommendation regarding administering the vaccine during pregnancy. However, ACIP reportedly discussed administering the vaccine to pregnant

women during meetings held over the weekend and is expected to make a recommendation soon.

- Clinical trials of the vaccine did not include pregnant women. However, some experts [say](#) that the benefits of vaccination outweigh the risks. Notably, the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology recently [called](#) on the government to allow pregnant women access to COVID-19 vaccines.
- [CDC Interpretation of Forecasts of New Deaths and Hospitalizations](#), December 10
 - CDC [consolidated](#) data from 40 models projecting the COVID-19 death rate. Predicted rates of increase differ among the forecasts, depending on assumptions about the prevalence and rigor of social distancing behaviors.
 - CDC's national ensemble forecast indicates an uncertain trend in new COVID-19 deaths over the next four weeks. CDC predicts that the number of cumulative COVID-19 deaths will be between 332,000 and 362,000 by January 2.
 - CDC [consolidated](#) data from 11 models projecting the number of daily COVID-19 hospitalizations. The forecasts estimate 9,300 to 29,000 new COVID-19 hospitalizations by January 4.
- [COVIDView Weekly Surveillance Summary of U.S. COVID-19 Activity](#), December 11
 - CDC summarized key COVID-19 disease indicators for the week ending December 5.
 - The national average of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 increased from 12.1% to 13.3% from November 28 to December 5.
 - The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 increased in nine of ten regions.
 - The overall cumulative hospitalization rate was 278.7 per 100,000, up from 262.8 per 100,000 during the previous week. Within the past month, all age groups have reached their highest weekly hospitalization rate since the start of the pandemic. The hospitalization rates for the most recent weeks are expected to increase as additional data are reported. Based on death certificate data, the percentage of total deaths attributed to pneumonia, influenza, or COVID-19 (PIC) was 14.3%. The weekly percentages of deaths due to PIC increased for seven weeks from early October through mid-November and are expected to increase for the most recent weeks as additional data are reported.

New York State

- [New York State COVID-19 Updates](#), December 14
 - New York reported 83 deaths and 5,712 hospitalizations on Sunday, December 13, 2020.
 - Approximately 9,044, or 5.66% of the 159,844 tests administered in New York on December 13 were positive for COVID-19.
 - On December 11, Governor Cuomo [ordered](#) New York City restaurants to shut down indoor dining due to an increase in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations. Outdoor dining and takeout may remain open. Many restaurateurs have [indicated](#) that this most recent closure may be the “death blow” for their struggling eateries. Queens Chamber of Commerce Chief Executive Tom Grech said that he estimates that one thousand of the borough's six thousand restaurants have already closed, and that as many as two

thousand more restaurants could close as a result of the latest order. Governor Cuomo and restaurant officials are hopeful that federal or state legislators will provide a multi-dollar stimulus package to support the restaurant industry.

- Amending earlier guidance, the December 11 order will [allow](#) gyms to operate at 25% capacity and barbershops and salons to remain open so long as the workers take weekly COVID-19 tests in orange micro-cluster zones. Previously, gyms, barbershops, and salons were required to close in orange micro-cluster zones. The Governor's Office stated that the change in policy reflected "the State's principles of recalibration and balancing public health measures with economic impact."

New York City

- [New York City COVID-19 Updates](#), December 14
 - New York City [intends](#) to assess students to gauge the extent of learning loss caused by school closures during the pandemic. Mayor de Blasio said that the assessments would be used to determine school-system needs, and would not be used to determine school placements.
- [New York City Kicks Off Covid-19 Vaccine Drive](#), December 14, 2020
 - The first COVID-19 vaccination provided in New York was administered to Sandra Lindsay, a critical-care nurse at Long Island Jewish Medical Center in Queens.
 - Only a small percentage of New York-based doctors, nurses, and other front-line health care workers will receive the vaccine. The doses will be reserved for workers who are most likely to be exposed to the virus while caring for infected patients.
 - Governor Cuomo expects that New York will receive 170,000 doses of the vaccine during the first week of distribution.

Other Related Updates

- [Vaccinations Begin in United States](#), December 14
 - The first shots were [administered](#) in the United States mass vaccination campaign against COVID-19 on the morning of December 14.
 - A majority of the initial injections on December 14 are expected to go to health care workers. Many hospitals will stagger vaccination schedules among workers to spread out the impact of side effects including fevers, aches, and fatigue.
 - Residents of nursing homes are expected to begin receiving the vaccine next week.
 - The vast majority of Americans will not be eligible for the vaccine until the spring or later. Dr. Anthony Fauci stressed that social distancing and mask compliance will remain crucial in the months ahead.
- [Federal Government Begins Shipping Coronavirus Vaccines to the States](#), December 13
 - The federal government began shipping doses of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine to all fifty states from Pfizer distribution centers in Michigan and Wisconsin.
 - FedEx and UPS are transporting the vaccine via plane and guarded truck.
 - Warp Speed Official General Gustave E. Perna said that 145 sites across the country received vaccine doses today, 425 sites will receive doses on December 15, and 66 more sites will receive doses on December 16.

- Pfizer designed special containers for shipping the vaccine, which must be stored at negative 94 degrees Fahrenheit. The containers have tracking devices and enough dry ice to keep the vaccine sufficiently cold for 10 days. Sites receiving vaccine doses will also receive additional shipments of dry ice, for longer-term storage.
- [Baricitinib Plus Remdesivir Shows Promise as Treatment](#), December 11
 - A [study](#) published in New England Journal of Medicine showed the combination of baricitinib, an anti-inflammatory drug, and remdesivir, an antiviral, reduced time to recovery for people hospitalized with COVID-19.
 - Researchers hypothesized that because many severe symptoms of COVID-19 are caused by a poorly regulated inflammatory response, a therapeutic designed to target inflammation could be helpful for patients.
 - The drug combination reduced median time to recovery in hospitalized COVID-19 patients from eight days to seven days.
 - Patients who required high-flow oxygen or non-invasive ventilation during their hospitalization appeared to have the largest benefit: their median time to recovery was shortened from 18 days to 10 days.
 - Participant conditions at day 15 of the study were significantly improved when they received the two therapeutics, and recipients who received both also had slightly fewer serious adverse affects.
 - The study enrolled 1,033 volunteer participants in eight countries. Enrolled participants were randomized to receive a regimen of either oral baricitinib tablets and intravenous (IV) remdesivir, or oral placebo tablets and IV remdesivir.
 - The study was supported by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), as part of the NIH Adaptive COVID-19 Treatment Trial (ACTT-2)
- [FDA COVID-19 Updates](#), December 14
 - Following a December 10 recommendation from an advisory committee, Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [granted](#) an emergency use authorization for Pfizer/BioNTech’s COVID-19 vaccine, the first authorization for a vaccine against COVID-19 in the United States.
 - An FDA advisory committee will [host](#) a public meeting to consider whether to recommend Moderna’s COVID-19 vaccine on December 17, beginning at 9 a.m.

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:

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