

# COVID-19 Daily Update

July 15, 2020

## Summary

The United States has 3,459,053 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 136,900 reported related deaths. CDC Director Redfield highlighted that “broad adoption of cloth face coverings is a civic duty, a small sacrifice reliant on a highly effective low-tech solution that can help turn the tide favorably in ... efforts against COVID-19.” Four former CDC directors published an op-ed arguing that the federal administration’s critical stance against CDC has contributed to a “willful disregard for public health guidelines ... leading to a sharp rise in infections and deaths.” Department of Health will now require hospital administrators to report COVID-19 data to a centralized HHS database instead of reporting to CDC. Unlike CDC’s repository, the HHS database will not be open to the public. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agreed to rescind its directive limiting visas for international students engaging in online-only instruction in the United States. Schools will now follow ICE guidance from March that allows flexibility regarding student visa eligibility.

Epidemiologists caution that to control community spread, the average COVID-19 positivity rate of a region should not exceed 5%. New York Times data show that only New York City and Chicago have achieved that public health goal out of ten of the nation’s largest school districts. Miami-Dade County in Florida and Clark County in Nevada report positivity rates more than four times greater than the 5% threshold. As death tolls spike across most of the South and West, some health systems in Texas and Arizona announced plans to use refrigerated trucks as “mobile morgues.” Walmart and Sam’s Club joined Costco, Starbucks, and Best Buy to implement a nationwide requirement for customers to wear masks inside their stores, beginning on Monday, July 20. Walmart will station “health ambassadors” outside of stores to remind customers of the new rule. National Retail Federation expressed hope that Walmart’s move is “a tipping point in this public health debate” and urged all retailers to adopt a similar policy.

New York reported 5 deaths, 831 hospitalizations, and 165 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Tuesday, July 14. Approximately 831, or 1.3%, of the 63,598 tests conducted in New York on July 14 were positive for COVID-19. Governor Cuomo commented that “we cannot go back to the hell we experienced three months ago” and urged residents to “continue to be smart by wearing a mask, social distancing, and washing our hands.” Cuomo highlighted a recent survey indicating that 53% of adults in the state wore face masks in April, 30% of residents remained home when possible in June, and the state performed 18,176 COVID-19 tests per 100,000 residents in June. New York announced that the enrollment period for New Yorkers to apply for insurance coverage through the State’s health insurance marketplace will be extended for another 30 days, through August 15.

## Presidential updates

- [White House Coronavirus Task Force Holds Briefing on COVID-19](#), July 14
  - The White House coronavirus task force held a press briefing on COVID-19.
  - Vice President Pence asserted that “while the rise in cases [across the country] is serious,” our ability to respond to this pandemic is substantially better than two and three months ago.”
  - Pence spoke with higher education leaders in Louisiana and encouraged the State to re-open K-12 schools and its colleges for in-person instruction in the fall.
  - Dr. Birx stated that we have to “protect the most vulnerable” and urged residents to “wear a masks, stay out of bars, make sure you don’t have large gatherings in your households.”

## World Health Organization (WHO)

- [COVID-19 Situation Report – 176](#), July 15
  - WHO [warned](#) that the pandemic is intensifying the vulnerabilities and inadequacies of global food systems.
  - A WHO [survey](#) found that 75% of 82 countries reported COVID-19 related disruptions in routine immunization programs due to fears of contracting the virus, restrictions on movement, and economic hardships. Director-General Tedros warned that “the avoidable suffering and death caused by children missing out on routine immunizations could be far greater than COVID-19 itself.”
  - Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) [created](#) the “PAHO Revolving Fund” to ensure member state access to COVID-19 treatments and vaccines. The fund “will enable countries – regardless of income level – to secure better prices and assume less risk than if they negotiate individually.”

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

- [CDC Press Release on Mask Use to Prevent COVID-19 Spread](#), July 14
  - CDC issued a press release reviewing new studies on the efficacy of face masks and highlighting the importance of widespread mask use in preventing the spread of COVID-19.
  - CDC published an [editorial](#) in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). CDC stated that “at this critical juncture when COVID-19 is resurging, broad adoption of cloth face coverings is a civic duty, a small sacrifice reliant on a highly effective low-tech solution that can help turn the tide favorably in national and global efforts against COVID-19.”
  - CDC published a case [study](#) on the benefits of wearing a cloth face covering. The study describes the lack of SARS-CoV-2 transmission at a Missouri hair salon where face masks were required by City ordinance. Two stylists tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 and worked with 139 customers while symptomatic. Of the 100 clients who were interviewed, 98% were also wearing face coverings. No clients developed symptoms. Four household contacts of one stylist tested positive.
  - CDC highlighted a recent [study](#) on masks published in JAMA. Researchers reported that the SARS-CoV-2 positivity among health care workers at Mass General Brigham decreased from 14.7% to 11.5% after a universal mask policy was instated.

- A CDC national interest [survey](#) found that immediately after the White House Coronavirus Task Force and CDC advised Americans to wear cloth face coverings in April, the proportion of U.S. adults who chose to do so increased, with 3 in 4 reporting they had adopted the recommendation.
- [COVID-19 Toolkit for Colleges and Universities](#), July 14
  - CDC published a “toolkit” with COVID-19 guidance for colleges and universities on cleaning and disinfecting, SARS-CoV-2 testing, students participating in study abroad programs, shared or congregate housing, and considerations for events.
- [Former CDC Directors Criticize Federal Response to COVID-19](#), July 14
  - Four former CDC directors published an op-ed in the Washington Post on the federal response to COVID-19.
  - Tom Frieden, Jeffery Koplan, David Satcher, and Richard Besser led CDC over a period of more than 15 years, spanning Republican and Democratic administrations.
  - The article described recent federal efforts to “undermine” and “cast public doubt on [CDC’s] recommendations and role in informing and guiding the nation’s pandemic response.”
  - The authors state that “we cannot recall over our collective tenure a single time when political pressure led to a change in the interpretation of scientific evidence.”
  - The article stated that the administration’s critical stance against CDC has contributed to a “willful disregard for public health guidelines... leading to a sharp rise in infections and deaths.”

## **New York State**

- [New York State COVID-19 Updates](#), July 15
  - New York reported 5 deaths, 831 hospitalizations, and 165 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Wednesday, July 5.
  - Approximately 831, or 1.3%, of the 63,598 tests conducted in New York on July 14 were positive for COVID-19.
  - Governor Cuomo commented that “we cannot go back to the hell we experienced three months ago” and urged residents to “continue to be smart by wearing a mask, social distancing, and washing our hands.”
  - New York [announced](#) that the enrollment period for New Yorkers to apply for insurance coverage through the State’s health insurance marketplace will be extended for another 30 days, through August 15.
  - Governor Cuomo [highlighted](#) a recent [study](#) that named New York the most responsible state in fighting COVID-19. The study indicates that 53% of adults in the state wore masks in April, 30% of residents remained home when possible in June, and the State performed 18,176 COVID-19 tests per 100,000 residents in June.

## **New York City**

- [\*New York City COVID-19 Updates\*](#), July 14
  - New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH) [reports](#) that there were at least eight COVID-19 related deaths in the City on Saturday, July 11, reversing initial reports that Saturday marked the first day since March that there were no COVID-19 deaths in the City.
  - The City Planning Commission [announced](#) plans to start holding remote meetings, beginning in August, on land use developments in housing, jobs, health facilities, and resiliency projects. Deputy Mayor Been commented that “with our city beginning to re-open...resuming [the] City’s public land use review process is vital to creating the affordable homes and job opportunities New Yorkers.”
  - New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH) published [answers](#) to frequently asked questions on COVID-19 testing, including diagnostic tests and antibody tests.

## **Other Related Updates**

- [\*Health Department Strips CDC of Control of Coronavirus Data\*](#), July 15
  - Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) published a [document](#) directing hospital administrators to provide COVID-19 data to a centralized HHS database managed by TeleTracking, a health data firm headquartered in Pittsburgh.
  - The requested data include information on the number of COVID-19 patients treated, and the number of available hospital beds and ventilators.
  - Hospitals were directed to stop reporting the requested data to the National Healthcare Safety Network site, CDC’s system for gathering data from more than 25,000 medical centers around the country.
  - HHS noted that the data will “assist the White House Coronavirus Task Force in tracking the movement of the virus, identifying potential strains in the health care delivery system, and informing distribution of supplies.”
  - Unlike CDC’s site, the HHS database will not be open to the public, which could affect the work of researchers, modelers, and health officials who rely on the data to make projections and decisions.
  - A former assistant secretary for preparedness and response commented that “centralizing control of all data under the umbrella of an inherently political apparatus is dangerous and breeds distrust” and “appears to cut off the ability of agencies like CDC to do its basic job.”
  - HHS Spokesman Caputo described CDC’s system as inadequate and noted that “CDC still has at least a week lag in reporting hospital data” when “America requires it in real time.” Caputo stated that “CDC, an operating division of HHS, will certainly participate in this streamlined all-of-government response – they will simply no longer control it.”
- [\*Experimental COVID-19 Vaccine Generates Immune Response\*](#), July 14
  - According to interim results published in *New England Journal of Medicine*, Moderna’s mRNA-1273 vaccine candidate against SARS-CoV-2 is generally well-tolerated and induces an immune response in humans.
  - The vaccine is designed to induce neutralizing antibodies directed at a portion of the coronavirus “spike” protein, which the virus uses to bind to and enter human cells. The trial was supported by National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID).

- Three groups of 15 participants received two intramuscular injections, 28 days apart, of either 25, 100, or 250 micrograms of the investigational vaccine.
- Researchers measured levels of vaccine-induced neutralizing antibody activity through day 43 after the second injection. Two doses of vaccine prompted high levels of neutralizing antibody activity that were above the average values seen in convalescent sera obtained from persons with confirmed COVID-19.
- [\*Health Department Announces Initiative for COVID-19 Testing in Nursing Homes\*](#), July 14
  - Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced a new initiative to increase COVID-19 testing in nursing homes.
  - HHS initiated a one-time large-scale procurement of rapid point-of-care COVID-19 diagnostic tests. The tests will be distributed to nursing homes in COVID-19 hotspot areas to facilitate staff and resident testing.
  - Each nursing home will receive one diagnostic test instrument and associated tests. Following initial distribution, nursing homes can purchase additional tests directly from the respective manufacturers.
  - The systems include two antigen tests created by Quidel Corporation and Becton, Dickinson and Company. The tests detect fragments of proteins found on or within the virus by testing samples collected from the nasal cavity, and provide results in minutes. HHS notes that antigen tests may be slightly more likely to have a false negative result than molecular PCR COVID-19 tests.
- [\*FDA COVID-19 Update: Daily Roundup\*](#), July 15
  - FDA updated its [page](#) on Coronavirus Treatment Acceleration Program (CTAP), an emergency program to rapidly approve possible COVID-19 therapies.
  - FDA issued [warning letters](#) to two companies for selling unapproved products for the treatment of COVID-19.
  - FDA [allowed](#) certain outsourcing facilities and pharmacies to compound dexamethasone sodium phosphate as part of an effort to address shortages of drugs “urgently needed for hospitalized COVID-19 patients.”

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [European Regulatory Update for Asset Managers](#), July 13
- [Spotlight on UK supply chains as UK authorities investigate lockdown working conditions](#), July 10
- [COVID Public Nuisance Claims Are Coming: Opioid Litigation May Be A Model for the Next Wave of Public Health Litigation](#), July 10

Send questions to:

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