

COVID-19 Daily Update

July 8, 2020

Summary

The United States has 3,016,515 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 131,666 reported related deaths. President Trump asserted that “we’re very much going to put pressure on the governors and the schools to re-open” in the fall. Trump described CDC guidance on re-opening school as “expensive” and “impractical.” The President threatened to “cut off funding” for schools that do not re-open. Dr. Fauci noted that “we should try as best as possible to get... children back to school” to avoid “secondary, unintended consequences... that override the so-called safety benefits.” Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology sued Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) to reverse the agency’s new policy limiting visas for international students engaging in online-only instruction. The universities assert that the policy would strand hundreds of thousands of students and “reflects an effort by the federal government to force universities to re-open in-person classes.” Vice President Pence urged state governors to encourage residents to wear face coverings when social distancing cannot be maintained.

Hospitalization rates and intensive care unit (ICU) admissions are increasing across several states. Arizona reported that 89% of the state’s ICU beds are now in use; officials expressed concern that hospitalizations will increase after the holiday weekend. In Texas, hospitalizations have doubled over the last two weeks to nearly 8,700 patients. Department of Health set up temporary surge testing sites in select communities in Florida, Louisiana, and Texas; 5,000 tests per-city per-day will be provided at no cost to those tested. Atlanta Mayor Bottoms, who recently tested positive for COVID-19, plans to sign an executive order mandating the use of face masks in public spaces. Atlanta is the latest city to test Georgia Governor Kemp’s order that bars local governments from setting their own public health policies. Kemp previously expressed that residents do not need mandates to follow best public health practices. Major movie theaters in New Jersey sued the State for refusing to allow them to re-open during the pandemic.

New York reported 11 deaths and 166 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Wednesday, July 8. Approximately 1.2% of the 57,585 tests conducted in New York on July 7 were positive for COVID-19. Long Island entered phase four of re-opening on Wednesday, July 8. Governor Cuomo will decide whether New York schools will re-open for the school year during the first week in August. Mayor de Blasio outlined the City’s current plan for re-opening public schools, assuming the area continues to meet all necessary public health thresholds. De Blasio expects that the “vast majority” of students will attend in-person classes for two or three days each week, with the remainder of instruction performed online. Students and staff will be required to socially distance and wear masks. Students will be given the choice to opt-out of in-person instruction and receive all lessons online.

Presidential updates

- [*Remarks by President Trump on Re-Opening Schools*](#), July 8
 - President Trump held a press conference on re-opening schools. Trump asserted that “we’re very much going to put pressure on the governors and the schools to re-open.”
 - Dr. Fauci recently [commented](#) that, “we should try the best as possible to get the children back to school... for the simple reason that the secondary, unintended consequences of having children not being able to go to school has ripple effects for the family that might have deleterious effects that really override the so-called safety benefits.”
 - President Trump [tweeted](#) that “I disagree with @CDCgov on their very tough & expensive guidelines for opening schools. While they want them open, they are asking schools to do very impractical things. I will be meeting with them!!!”
 - Trump did not explain specifically which CDC guidance he disagrees with. CDC currently [recommends](#) that schools modify layouts to maintain social distancing, install physical barriers where distancing is not possible, increase disinfection and cleaning of facilities, avoid serving communal meals in cafeterias, discourage sharing objects, and ensure ventilation systems are up-to-date.
 - President Trump [tweeted](#) that he “may cut off funding if [schools do] not open.”
 - President Trump’s comments come as scientists grapple with rising concerns about transmission of the coronavirus in indoor spaces. Most public schools are poorly ventilated and do not have the funding to update their filtration systems.
 - CDC Director Redfield commented that it “is not the intent of CDC’s guidelines to be used it as a rationale to keep schools closed.” CDC is “prepared to work with each school, each jurisdiction, to help them use the different strategies that we proposed that help do this safely so they come up with the optimal strategy for those schools.”
- [*Vice President’s Governors Briefing on COVID-19 Response*](#), July 7
 - Vice President Pence led a discussion with state governors and the White House coronavirus task force.
 - The group discussed efforts to expand testing, support long-term care residents, increase health care capacity, and safely re-open schools.
 - Pence asked governors to encourage residents to wear face coverings when social distancing cannot be maintained.
 - Dr. Birx discussed testing trends and encouraged governors to utilize pooled testing methods for COVID-19. Birx suggested that gatherings should be scaled back to ten people or fewer in counties and states particularly hard hit by the virus.
 - In separate [remarks](#), Birx stated that many states failed to anticipate that re-opening would lead to a surge of infections in adults between 18 and 35. Younger people largely complied with stay-at-home orders in the early months of the pandemic, “but when they saw people out and about on social media, they all went out and about.”

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [*COVID-19 Situation Report – 169*](#), July 7
 - WHO published [guidance](#) encouraging countries to build longer-term health emergency preparedness during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - A WHO [survey](#) found that COVID-19 has severely impacted access to HIV medicine; 73 countries are at risk of depleting their stock of antiretroviral medicines due to the pandemic.
 - WHO [warned](#) that it should not “be a surprise” if the global death toll from COVID-19 begins to increase more rapidly as the number of cases continues to grow at an alarming pace. WHO noted that there is a lag between rising cases and increases in deaths, because it can take weeks to fall seriously ill after contracting the virus.
- [*Heath Experts React to US Withdrawal From WHO*](#), July 7
 - Several public health experts have condemned President Trump’s decision to withdraw from WHO, effective July 6.
 - Dr. Ashish Jha, director of the Harvard Global Health Institute, described the move as “an extraordinarily bad decision that will both harm global public health and harm the health of the American people.”
 - Experts acknowledged WHO’s missteps during the pandemic, but broadly praised the organization and pointed to its successful history. Former CDC Director Frieden noted that “without WHO, the world would not have eradicated smallpox, multidrug resistant tuberculosis would have spread much more widely, and we would have much weaker systems to track influenza and other deadly infections.”

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

- [*Multi-State Assessment of SARS-CoV-2 Seroprevalence in Blood Donors*](#), July 7
 - CDC plans to conduct a nationwide COVID-19 seroprevalence survey in 25 metropolitan areas to understand the percentage of people in the United States who may have been infected with SARS-CoV-2.
 - CDC will collect and test 1,000 anonymous blood donation samples from each area; collection and testing will be conducted every month for 12 months and again at 18 months. About 325,000 samples will be tested overall.
 - Sample collection began in June and will continue until May 2021, with one final collection in November 2021. Testing the same geographic locations each month over time will allow CDC to understand the percentages of people who have antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 at different points in time.
- [*COVID-19 Among Workers in Meat and Poultry Processing Facilities*](#), July 7
 - A recent study, published by CDC as an early release, highlighted the risk of COVID-19 in meat- and poultry-packing facilities across the United States.
 - From April through May, over 16,000 workers were diagnosed with COVID-19 at 239 facilities. 86 workers died. Roughly 9% of workers tested positive for the virus. For facilities reporting racial data, 87% of cases were in racial or ethnic minorities.
 - CDC noted that “targeted workplace interventions and prevention efforts that are appropriately tailored to the groups most affected by COVID-19 are critical to

reducing both COVID-19–associated occupational risk and health disparities among vulnerable populations.”

- [CDC COVID-19 Resources](#), July 7
 - CDC highlighted [considerations](#) for planning events during the pandemic, including community gatherings, concerts, conferences, parades, weddings, and sporting events.
 - CDC posted [answers](#) to frequently asked questions on COVID-19 for people who use drugs or have substance use disorders.
 - CDC published [information](#) for funeral home workers on handling decedents who had COVID-19.
 - CDC updated its [page](#) on COVID-19 cases and deaths by county.

New York State

- [New York State COVID-19 Updates](#), July 8
 - New York reported 11 deaths, 841 COVID-19 hospitalizations, and 166 virus cases in intensive care on Wednesday, July 8.
 - Approximately 1.2% of the 57,585 tests conducted in New York on July 7 were positive for COVID-19.
 - Governor Cuomo will [decide](#) whether school districts in the state will be allowed to re-open in New York State in the first week in August. School districts must submit re-opening plans to the State by July 31.
 - All county fairs in the state will be canceled until further notice out of an abundance of caution.
 - New York will [allow](#) shopping malls to re-open in phase four regions, if they install enhanced HVAC filtrations systems and enact measures to ensure compliance with social distance protocols.
 - Long Island [entered](#) phase four of re-opening on Wednesday, July 8, in which tourist attractions such as zoos, museums, and aquariums may re-open. Officials warned that 15 to 25% of positive test results in Nassau County are from people visiting from out of state.

New York City

- [New York City Public Schools Won't Fully Re-Open This Fall](#), July 8
 - Mayor de Blasio outlined the City's preliminary plans for re-opening its public schools, assuming the area continues to meet all necessary COVID-19 public health thresholds.
 - Classroom attendance will be limited to one to three days per week, depending on how many students can fit into school buildings while social distancing. Large spaces, like cafeterias, auditoriums, and gyms, will be used for instruction.
 - De Blasio expects that the “vast majority” of students will attend in-person classes for two or three days each week, with the remainder of instruction performed online. Students will have an option to receive all instruction online.
 - Students and staff will be required to wear masks. Each building will be deep cleaned on a nightly basis with electrostatic sprayers which dispense disinfectant so that it adheres to surfaces without the need to physically touch them, and will have improved HVACs for ventilation.

- [*New York City Improves Disease Surveillance to Avert COVID-19 Surge*](#), July 8
 - New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH) has undertaken several new disease surveillance initiatives to drive down the number of COVID-19 cases and prevent a potential resurgence of the virus.
 - The City developed SaTScan, a new analytical tool to track COVID-19. SaTScan works by comparing coronavirus cases reported by laboratories against the expected number of cases in an area over time. If the system shows more cases than typically expected, it triggers a signal to health department epidemiologists to investigate further.
 - Increases in contact tracing capacity have also been implemented.
 - The City has started to test wastewater for evidence of COVID-19, to quantify the amount of viral material in samples and track any resurgence of the virus.

- [*City Postpones Annual Tax Lien Sale Until September*](#), July 7
 - City Department of Finance announced the postponement of the City’s annual tax lien sale until September.
 - Mayor de Blasio commented that “postponing the lien sale will give some relief to those struggling to make ends meet, and more time for New Yorkers to apply for our hardship programs.”

- [*City Department of Health Publishes COVID-19 Guidance for Residents*](#), July 7
 - New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH) published COVID-19 guidance.
 - NYCDOH posted [guidance](#) for residents on accessing routine and emergency medical care during the pandemic.
 - NYCDOH published a [letter](#) for health care providers on the City’s Test & Trace Corps initiative.
 - NYCDOH provided [answers](#) to frequently asked questions for child care program providers.
 - NYCDOH published a [health alert](#) on preventing heat-related illness and death during the pandemic.
 - NYCDOH highlighted [tips](#) for managing burnout during the pandemic. NYCDOH warns that burnout is a result of chronic work-related stress causing people to feel physically and emotionally exhausted and indifferent about work.

Other Related Updates

- [*Harvard and MIT Sue ICE in Federal Court Over New Immigration Policy*](#), July 8
 - Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) sued Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in federal court to block a new visa policy for international students.
 - ICE recently announced that it will no longer issue visas to “students enrolled in schools and/or programs that are fully online for the fall semester.”
 - Harvard is planning to teach its fall classes entirely online, and many other universities are planning a hybrid model, with some in-person instruction coupled with online classes.

- Harvard President Bacow issued a [statement](#) describing the policy as “cruel” and “reckless.” Bacow suggested that the policy was designed to pressure universities to hold in-person classes “without regard to concerns for the health and safety of students, instructors and others.”
- Acting Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Cuccinelli defended the new policy and stated that “if they’re not going to be a student or they’re going to be 100% online, then they don’t have a basis to be here... they should go home, and then they can return when the school opens.”
- [Officials Testify About COVID-19 Before House Committee on Homeland Security](#), July 8
 - The House Committee on Homeland Security held a hearing on “the national response to the worsening coronavirus pandemic.”
 - Several state officials testified virtually, including Illinois Governor Pritzker, public health directors from Texas and Alabama, and the Mayor of Tupelo, Mississippi.
 - Governor Pritzker called on President Trump to implement a national mask mandate; Pritzker described a mask mandate as “the most important thing we can do to save lives.”
 - Pritzker criticized the federal government’s response to the pandemic and asserted that “there was no national plan to acquire personal protective equipment or testing supplies, and as a result, people died.”
 - Pritzker urged the administration to “provide clarity on insurance coverage for COVID-19 testing.” Pritzker warned that the pandemic caused severe losses in local and state tax revenues and that “without help [from the federal government], there will be massive layoffs of public servants, teachers and firefighters.”
- [The Case for Rapid, Inexpensive Home Testing for COVID-19](#), July 6
 - An article in the New England Journal of Medicine highlighted the role of inexpensive, rapid home diagnostic tests in fighting COVID-19.
 - The author notes that current polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests conducted on a nasopharyngeal swab, while accurate, have several issues; PCR tests are expensive, slow, and strain the lab supply chain.
 - Testing volume for COVID-19 has overwhelmed commercial and national reference labs; turnaround times for results are at the very least several days, and can be a week or longer.
 - The author highlighted the need to adopt broad testing through at-home COVID-19 tests, despite concerns over decreased accuracy. At-home tests can be conducted frequently, using saliva, and provide results in less than an hour. Estimates project that at-home tests would cost between \$1 and \$5.
 - A recent [study](#) found that the key determinant of how well a broad testing strategy will limit the spread of the virus is the frequency of testing; testing strategies are only marginally improved by high test sensitivity.
- [NIAID Launches Clinical Trials Network for COVID-19 Prevention Tools](#), July 8
 - National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) launched the COVID-19 Prevention Trials Network (COVPN) to test investigational vaccines and monoclonal antibodies intended to protect people from COVID-19.

- The network will function as a unit of Operation Warp Speed, the federal initiative coordinating the development, manufacturing, and distribution of COVID-19 diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines.
 - The network will conduct its first phase three clinical trial this summer on an investigational vaccine developed by NIAID scientists in collaboration with Moderna.
 - Dr. Fauci noted that “centralizing our clinical research efforts into a single trials network will expand the resources and expertise needed to efficiently identify safe and effective vaccines and other prevention strategies against COVID-19.”
- [*Department of Labor COVID-19 Updates*](#), July 7
 - Department of Labor (DOL) issued [guidance](#) for oil and gas workers to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
 - DOL [initiated](#) a public service messaging effort to encourage employees to contact Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) with concerns about workplace safety during the pandemic.
 - [*Health Department Launches Surge COVID-19 Testing in Hotspot Jurisdictions*](#), July 7
 - Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) set up temporary surge testing sites in communities with a high number of new COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations, including Jacksonville, Florida; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; and Edinburg, Texas.
 - HHS will offer 5,000 tests per-city per-day, at no cost to those tested. The sites will be available for up to 12 days.
 - HHS noted that the largest increases in COVID-19 positivity rates continue to be in the 18 to 29 age group, with upticks in young people under 18 and people aged 30 to 39.
 - [*FDA COVID-19 Update: Daily Roundup*](#), July 6
 - FDA [warned](#) of an increased risk of a false-positive result with a COVID-19 test manufactured by Becton, Dickinson and Company.
 - FDA issued [warning letters](#) to five companies for selling fraudulent COVID-19 products.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [*Key Considerations for COVID-19 Emergency Triage Policies in Illinois*](#), July 6

Send questions to:

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