

COVID-19 Daily Update

June 15, 2020

Summary

The United States has 2,102,765 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 115,862 reported related deaths. Food and Drug Administration rescinded its emergency use authorization for hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine to treat hospitalized COVID-19 patients, stating that the drug carries too many risks without any apparent benefit. The action will not affect clinical trials, which are expected to continue. President Trump's plan to hold a campaign rally in Tulsa next weekend faces opposition from public health experts, who warn that there is a high risk of COVID-19 spreading in the 19,000-seat arena. WHO officials warned that there has been a sharp decline in information on circulating influenza strains, a critical step in developing seasonal flu vaccines, due to the pandemic's strain on laboratories and international transportation.

The American Thoracic Society called for a moratorium on the use of tear gas and other chemicals against protestors at demonstrations, warning that such agents "cause significant short- and long-term respiratory health injury and likely propagate the spread of viral illnesses, including COVID-19." Health officials in Houston warned that a lockdown might be re-imposed as the region reports a significant and uncontrolled level of virus spread in the community. China locked down a section of Beijing on June 15, as the government tried to contain a new cluster of COVID-19 cases linked to a wholesale food market in the city. The United States Tennis Association is expected to hold the 2020 U.S. Open as originally scheduled in New York at the end of August. The games will be played without spectators; players will be subject to frequent virus testing and will be lodged together at a hotel outside of Manhattan. The European Union lifted travel restrictions for all arrivals from members of the Schengen area on June 15.

New York reported 25 deaths and 1,608 total COVID-19 hospitalizations on June 15. Approximately 620, or 1.1%, of the 56,611 tests conducted in the state on June 14 were positive for COVID-19. New York expanded phase three of re-opening to allow gatherings of up to 25 people. Low-risk youth sports will be able to resume in phase three regions on July 6. Five regions have already entered phase three, including Central New York, Finger Lakes, Mohawk Valley, North Country, and Southern Tier. Two regions, the Capital Region and Western New York, are expected to enter phase three this week. Governor Cuomo recently warned that if local officials fail to crack down on gatherings outside of bars and restaurants in Manhattan and the Hamptons, the State would suspend re-opening plans. Mayor de Blasio pushed back and stated that the City does not believe that "taking away [businesses'] livelihood is the answer." The City deployed workers over the weekend to disperse large groups in the streets and help business owners separate patrons.

Presidential updates

- [*Public Health Officials Express Concern About Viral Spread at Trump Rally*](#), June 14
 - President Trump will hold a campaign rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma on June 20.
 - The rally will be held indoors in a 19,000-seat arena that has cancelled all other events through the end of July; there is no requirement that attendees wear masks.
 - Scientists believe the virus spreads far more easily in crowded enclosed spaces than it does outdoors, where circulating air has a better chance of dispersing virus particles.
 - Director of Harvard's Global Health Institute, [described](#) the upcoming rally as "an extraordinarily dangerous move for the people participating and the people who may know them and love them and see them afterward."
 - The Director of the Tulsa City-County Health Department asked the campaign to move the date back because of a "significant increase in [the City's] case trends." The Director expressed concern about the Department's "ability to protect anyone who attends a large, indoor event."
 - Dr. Bhadelia, the medical director of the special pathogens unit at Boston University School of Medicine, recommended moving the event outdoors, reducing the number of people, introducing social distancing, and requiring all attendees to wear a mask.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [*COVID-19 Situation Report – 146*](#), June 14
 - China [reported](#) a new cluster of 77 COVID-19 cases in Beijing; preliminary investigations revealed that initial symptomatic cases were linked to a crowded wholesale food market.
 - WHO published a draft [report](#) on the feasibility, potential value, and limitations of establishing studies on COVID-19 through "human challenge trials," in which healthy young adult volunteers are intentionally infected with the virus in order to test treatments.

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

- [*CDC Diagnostic Test for COVID-19*](#), June 14
 - CDC developed a diagnostic test for COVID-19. FDA authorized the kit on February 4 for use by laboratories that are certified to perform high-complexity tests under the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA).
 - Since the distribution of CDC test kits began, high demand for the required extraction reagents resulted in global shortages; some public health laboratories have been unable to obtain testing reagents to support their testing volumes, resulting in testing delays.
 - On June 12, FDA approved an [amendment](#) to the test's emergency use authorization (EUA) to allow state public health laboratories and others the flexibility to use [alternative](#) reagents.
- [*Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19*](#), June 14
 - Critical infrastructure workers are permitted to continue working following an exposure to COVID-19, provided that they remain asymptomatic and additional precautions are implemented to protect them and the community.

- CDC updated guidance on implementing safety practices for critical infrastructure workers who had exposure to a person with suspected or confirmed COVID-19.

New York State

- [*Governor Cuomo Holds Press Conference on COVID-19*](#), June 15
 - New York reported 25 deaths and 1,608 total COVID-19 hospitalizations on June 15.
 - Approximately 620, or 1.1%, of the 56,611 tests conducted in State on Sunday, June 14, were positive for COVID-19. New York City’s percentage of positive tests was 1.3%.
 - New York will now allow gatherings of up to 25 people in regions in the third phase of re-opening.
 - Five regions have already entered phase three of re-opening, including Central New York, Finger Lakes, Mohawk Valley, North Country, and Southern Tier. Western New York will enter phase three on Tuesday, June 16, followed by the Capital Region on Wednesday.
- [*New York State COVID-19 Updates*](#), June 14
 - New York expanded phase three of re-opening to allow low-risk youth sports to resume on July 6. The State allows up to two spectators per child.
 - New York extended the special open enrollment period in the State’s Health Plan Marketplace for an additional 30 days through July 15.
 - Governor Cuomo signed legislation requiring that the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) conduct a study on the health impacts of COVID-19 on minority communities. The State previously conducted an antibody testing survey at churches in lower-income New York City communities and communities of color, which showed higher infection rates among individuals in these communities compared to the overall population.

New York City

- [*Mayor De Blasio Comments on City’s Re-Opening Violations*](#), June 15
 - New York recently received 25,000 complaints about businesses violating rules of the State’s phased re-opening. People have been gathering outside of bars and restaurants that provide to-go services in Manhattan and the Hamptons on Long Island.
 - Governor Cuomo warned that if local officials did not crack down on such behavior, the State would suspend re-opening plans.
 - Mayor de Blasio pushed back against the Governor’s remarks and noted that the City deployed workers to disperse large groups and help business owners separate patrons. De Blasio stated that “these businesses are allowed to be open per the Governor’s guidelines, and we don’t believe imprisoning people or taking away their livelihood is the answer.”
- [*City Health Department Issues COVID-19 Templates*](#), June 14
 - New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH) published templates for employers to use when monitoring COVID-19 screening and cleaning practices.

- New York requires that businesses implement mandatory health screening assessments and document that they have reviewed the responses. NYCDOH published a [sample log](#) designed for employers to review health screening documentation.
- New York requires regular cleaning and disinfection in the workplace, and more frequent cleaning of shared objects, frequently touched surfaces, and high transit areas. NYCDOH published a [template](#) to ensure compliance with these requirements.

Other Related Updates

- [*FDA Revokes Emergency Authorization of Hydroxychloroquine and Chloroquine to Treat COVID-19*](#), June 15
 - FDA published a letter, announcing that it will revoke emergency authorization of two malaria drugs, hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine, for the treatment of COVID-19 “based on the totality of scientific evidence available.”
 - FDA previously authorized stockpiles of the drugs to be used in hospitals to treat patients with COVID-19.
 - FDA stated that recent studies demonstrated that the drugs are “unlikely to produce an antiviral effect” and that the current national treatment guidelines do not recommend using the drugs outside of clinical trials.
 - According to the letter, the request to revoke the authorization came from Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), a unit of Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that is in charge of supplying treatments in public health emergencies.

- [*How to Make Surgical Masks More Effective*](#), June 14
 - An article in the New England Journal of Medicine, highlighted the [efforts](#) of two former Apple employees to address the shortage of N95 respirators by making surgical masks more effective.
 - The former engineers created “Fix the Mask,” which offers two designs for a brace that makes surgical masks more effective by forming a tighter seal around the nose and mouth.
 - One version of the brace can be made at home by linking three rubber bands together, while another can be made from a rubber sheet.
 - When 12 physicians at one hospital tried the rubber band solution, all passed the hospital’s fit test. Instructions for the mask solutions are available [here](#).

- [*Department of Labor Summarizes Recent Actions on COVID-19*](#), June 14
 - Department of Labor (DOL) summarized recent agency actions on COVID-19.
 - Labor Secretary Scalia testified before the Senate Finance Committee on unemployment insurance efforts during the pandemic.
 - Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) published [answers](#) to frequently asked questions about face coverings, surgical masks, and respirators on the workplace.
 - DOL awarded nearly \$17 million in [dislocated worker grants](#) under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act to provide re-employment services to eligible individuals affected by mass layoffs during the pandemic.

- DOL enforced provisions of the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act (EPSLA) under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), and found that a Georgia company wrongly denied an employee paid sick leave despite a health care provider's recommendation to self-quarantine while awaiting COVID-19 test results.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [HHS Highlights Federal Telehealth Initiatives in Response to COVID-19](#), June 10
- [There's No Place Like ... the Office? A Return to Work Guide for Private Equity Sponsors in NY, CA and IL](#), June 10
- [CDC Guidance for Dental Settings Re-Opening During the COVID-19 Response](#), June 10
- [HHS Announces Enhanced Relief Fund Payments for Dental and Other Medicaid & CHIP Providers](#), June 10

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