

COVID-19 Daily Update

June 17, 2020

Summary

The United States has 2,150,923 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 117,423 reported related deaths. There are more than eight million reported cases worldwide. WHO announced that it will stop its clinical trial of hydroxychloroquine as a potential COVID-19 treatment, after results from other trials showed no benefit. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) revised its COVID-19 fatality projections. IHME forecasts that more than 200,000 Americans could die of COVID-19 by October 1. The estimate increased by 30,000 deaths over the last week due to an increase in cases and hospitalizations in 6 states, including Florida, California, Georgia, Arizona, Alabama, and Texas. Dr. Fauci recently stated that higher percentages of positive tests in many states “cannot be explained by increased testing” and strongly warned that the country is still in the first phase of the pandemic. Customs and Border Protection will resume training operations at multiple facilities this week.

Two major labor unions, the United Mine Workers of America and United Steelworkers, filed a lawsuit against the government in a bid to force regulators to protect mine workers from COVID-19; miners work in close quarters and often already suffer from respiratory illnesses. Texas reported an 11% daily spike in hospitalizations for patients with COVID-19 on Tuesday, June 16; hospitalizations have increased more than 84% since Memorial Day. Texas Governor Abbott defended the state’s re-opening plan by pointing to the total available hospital beds and the ability to create surge capacity if necessary. Australia’s tourism minister announced that the country’s borders would probably not re-open until next year.

New York reported 17 deaths on Wednesday, June 17, the lowest daily death toll since the beginning of the pandemic. Approximately 567, or .96%, of the 59,341 tests conducted in New York on June 17 were positive for COVID-19. Mid-Hudson Valley is on track to enter phase three of re-opening on June 23, following by Long Island on June 24. New York City is on track to enter phase two of re-opening on Monday, June 22, if the virus does not resurge. New York City Department of Health issued guidance for businesses allowed to re-open during phase two, including hair salons, outdoor dining, in-store retail, and office spaces. The City urged office-based employers to continue to allow as many employees as possible to work from home. The City launched five new testing sites on June 17, including two in Staten Island, one in Queens, one in the Bronx, and one in Brooklyn. Mayor de Blasio urged residents to pick up all phone calls from 212 area codes to facilitate contact tracing. Governor Cuomo plans to end his daily COVID-19 briefings on Friday, June 19, given the State’s progress, “to turn the page on the immediacy of this crisis.”

Presidential updates

- [Vice President Publishes Op-Ed on COVID-19 Cases](#), June 17
 - Vice President Pence published an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal on COVID-19.
 - Pence expressed that concern over a “second wave” of COVID-19 was “overblown” and that “the media has tried to scare the American people.” Pence asserted that the country is “winning the fight against the invisible enemy.”
 - Pence noted that less than 6% of Americans tested each week are positive for COVID-19. Cases have stabilized over the past two weeks, with the daily average case rate across the U.S. dropping to 20,000—down from 30,000 in April and 25,000 in May.
 - Pence stated that increased testing has allowed public health officials to identify and contain outbreaks in congregate settings such as prisons, nursing homes, and meatpacking facilities.
- [President Trump Attributes Increased COVID-19 Cases to Increased Testing](#), June 17
 - In a recent tweet, President Trump attributed the increase in cases to an increase in testing across the country. Trump [tweeted](#) that “without testing, or weak testing, we would be showing almost no cases... testing is a double edged sword – makes us look bad, but good to have!!!”
 - Dr. Fauci recently [warned](#) that we are still in the first wave of the pandemic. Fauci stated that higher percentages of positive tests in many states “cannot be explained by increased testing.”
 - Governor Cuomo [echoed](#) similar sentiments in his daily press briefing. Cuomo countered the federal government’s idea that “the numbers are going up because we’re doing more testing.” Cuomo asserted that “as a matter of mathematics... that is just not a true statement.” Cuomo highlighted that the number of hospitalizations is also rising “which, by definition, means more people are getting sick.”

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [COVID-19 Situation Report – 148](#), June 16
 - WHO [plans](#) to update clinical guidance to reflect how and when the dexamethasone should be used to treat COVID-19 patients.
 - WHO [announced](#) that it will stop its clinical trial of hydroxychloroquine as a potential COVID-19 treatment, after results from other trials showed no benefit.
- [Updated COVID-19 Isolation Criteria](#), June 17
 - WHO issued [criteria](#) for releasing COVID-19 cases from isolation.
 - Symptomatic cases can stop isolating ten days after symptom onset, so long as they remain symptom-free for an additional three days after the initial ten-day period.
 - Asymptomatic cases can be discharged ten days after a positive test for SARS-CoV-2.
 - The updated criteria reflects recent findings that patients whose symptoms have resolved may still test positive for COVID-19 virus for many weeks. WHO noted that despite a positive test result, these patients are not likely to be infectious and therefore are unlikely to transmit the virus to another person.

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

- [*CDC Develops New Contact Tracing Tool*](#), June 16
 - CDC created COVIDTracer, a spreadsheet-based tool that allows state and local public health officials to compare the resources needed for different contact tracing strategies.
 - Each strategy builds on the previous strategy. The first strategy involves identifying and isolating symptomatic cases. The second strategy adds contact tracing, where identified contacts self-monitor and self-isolate if they become symptomatic. The third and most robust strategy, adds more rigorous monitoring, where contacts are quarantined and monitored through daily phone calls for 14 days.
 - COVIDTracer also provides numerical results and graphs of the potential impact of contact tracing efforts on COVID-19's spread in comparison with social distancing interventions. This comparison aims to aid public health officials and policy makers to decide which strategy is likely to provide the most control with the available resources.
- [*COVID-19 Cases & Deaths by County*](#), June 16
 - CDC created an interactive tracking [tool](#) listing COVID-19 cases and related deaths by county across all 50 states.
- [*Guidance on Open Burning During the Pandemic*](#), June 16
 - CDC issued guidance on the public health risks associated with agricultural burning and backyard burning during the pandemic. CDC recommends that health officials temporarily ban open burning practices and encourage alternative methods of waste disposal.
 - Open burning produces smoke that contains air pollutants which can worsen existing heart and lung conditions. CDC warns that people with or recovering from COVID-19 may have diminished lung function and might be at particularly high risk of respiratory health effects after exposure to smoke from open burning.

New York State

- [*Governor Cuomo Holds Press Conference on COVID-19*](#), June 17
 - New York reported 17 deaths on Wednesday, June 17, the lowest daily death toll since the beginning of the pandemic.
 - Approximately 567, or .96%, of the 59,341 tests conducted in New York on June 17 were positive for COVID-19.
 - New York City is on track to enter phase two of re-opening on Monday, June 22, if the virus does not resurge. Mid-Hudson Valley is on track to enter phase three of re-opening on June 23, following by Long Island on June 24.
 - Governor Cuomo signed legislation prohibiting health care employers from penalizing employees for making complaints of employer violations.
 - Governor Cuomo stated that the federal government is making a “historic mistake” by allowing states to re-open too quickly. Cuomo warned that residents from other states with rising COVID-19 hospitalizations could travel to New York and spread the virus.
 - Governor Cuomo plans to end his daily COVID-19 briefings on Friday, June 19, given the State’s progress, “to turn the page on the immediacy of this crisis.”

New York City

- [*New York City Testing and Contact Tracing Update*](#), June 16
 - New York City conducts over 20,000 COVID-19 tests per day and plans to conduct 50,000 tests per day by early July.
 - The City [launched](#) five new testing sites on June 17, including two in Staten Island, one in Queens, one in the Bronx, and one in Brooklyn.
 - 5,347 new positive cases have been identified since the City's Test & Trace Corps launched on June 1. Over 85% of the positive cases provided their contact information and the Corps reached 94% of these individuals to collect further information.
 - Mayor de Blasio urged residents to pick up all phone calls from 212 area codes to facilitate contact tracing. With the current rate of infection, the City is prepared to monitor over 250,000 New Yorkers and their contacts this summer.
 - Any New Yorker in need of a free hotel room to safely self-isolate can call 1-844-4NYC for a referral.
- [*NYC Department of Health Phase Two Guidance*](#), June 16
 - New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH) issued guidance for businesses allowed to re-open during phase two, including [commercial building management](#), [hair salons](#), [in-store retail](#), [outdoor food service](#), [real estate](#), [repair and cleaning activities](#), and [vehicle sales and rental](#).
 - NYCDOH also issued guidance for [offices](#) on screening employees; accessing mental health support for employees; implementing hand hygiene and cleaning protocols; and creating commuting, travel, and visitor policies.
 - NYCDOH urged office-based employers to allow as many employees as possible to work from home. Employers must provide face coverings, at no cost, to employees. Employees should remain at least six feet apart from others. Employers should use alternatives to in-person meetings, such as telephone or videoconferences, and encourage staff to walk or bike to work.

Other Related Updates

- [*Economist Intelligence Unit Report Ranking Country Responses to Pandemic*](#), June 17
 - The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) constructed an [index](#) to rank how well governments across 21 countries have responded to the pandemic.
 - Each country was given an overall score out of four by weighing three risk factors, including obesity prevalence, share of the population over the age of 65, and international arrivals, against three "quality of response" indicators, including COVID-19 testing, the provision of non-COVID-19 health care, and death rates from the virus.
 - With a "poor" score of 2.11 out of 4, Belgium received the lowest point total in the index. To date, 9,663 people in Belgium have died of Covid-19, making it the country with the highest death rate per capita in the world. New Zealand, with a total score of 3.67, was ranked highest for its government is handling of the health crisis.
 - The U.S. received a "good" overall score of 3.11. The U.S. scored well for its testing and death rate, which despite being the highest in the world, is still lower per capita than many European countries such as the U.K., France, Spain, and Sweden.

- [IMHE Updates Predicted United States COVID-19 Death Toll](#), June 17
 - The University of Washington’s Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IMHE) recently revised its COVID-19 fatality projections for the United States.
 - IMHE forecasts that more than 200,000 Americans could die of COVID-19 by October 1. The estimate increased by 30,000 deaths over the last week due to an increase in cases and hospitalizations in 6 states, including Florida, California, Georgia, Arizona, Alabama, and Texas.
 - The number of daily deaths is expected to rise again in September, after reaching a plateau in June. IMHE projects an increase in the number of hospital beds and ventilators needed starting in September.

- [Impact of COVID-19 on Rural Areas](#), June 16
 - A modeling study, published in Nature Medicine, examined the disease and health care burden of COVID-19 across counties in the United States.
 - The study found that rural areas could face a greater strain on their health care systems and a higher per capita burden of COVID-19 than urban areas. Areas in need of additional support include much of the western United States, the northern Midwest, Florida, and northern New England.
 - The authors concluded that “ensuring equitable allocation of medical care and public health resources to communities away from major population centers will be crucial as the country attempts to mitigate the consequences of the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic.”

- [NIH Launches COVID-19 Research Initiatives](#), June 16
 - The *All of Us* Research Program, part of National Institutes of Health (NIH), announced new COVID-19 initiatives.
 - NIH will test provide antibody testing to 10,000 participants. Positive samples will undergo further testing to assess the level of the immune system’s response.
 - NIH launched an online survey to understand the impact of the pandemic on participants’ physical and mental health. The survey includes questions on COVID-19 symptoms, stress, social distancing, and economic impacts.
 - NIH gathered electronic health records from 200,000 participants. NIH is working to standardize the information to help researchers look for patterns and learn more about COVID-19 symptoms, associated health problems, and different treatment options.

- [FDA COVID-19 Update: Daily Roundup](#), June 16
 - FDA issued [guidance](#) for reporting adverse events related to medical devices authorized for emergency use during the pandemic.
 - FDA [revoked](#) the emergency use authorization (EUA) of Chembio Diagnostic System’s SARS-CoV-2 antibody test, due to performance concerns with the accuracy of the test.
 - FDA posted [templates](#) to help molecular diagnostic test manufacturers validate COVID-19 tests to broadly screen certain asymptomatic populations to ensure the safety of employees, patients, students, and others.

- [Health Department Issues Fact Sheet on Operation Warp Speed](#), June 16
 - Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) issued a fact sheet on Operation Warp Speed (OWS), the federal initiative to develop a COVID-19 vaccine by January 2021.
 - OWS selected fourteen promising vaccine candidates and plans to narrow the selection further. Seven candidates will undergo large-scale, randomized trials to demonstrate their safety and efficacy. OWS will begin manufacturing selected candidates while they are still in development to facilitate quick distribution.
 - HHS provided substantial funding for three vaccine candidates developed by Johnson & Johnson (\$456 million), Moderna (\$483 million), and AzstraZeneca (\$1.2 billion).

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [Anti-Corruption in Brazil During COVID-19: A Conversation with Officials from the Federal Prosecution Service and the Brazilian Office of the Comptroller General](#), June 16
- [How Companies Can Avoid Patent Venue Pitfalls Of Remote Work](#), June 15

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