

March 29, 2021

Summary

The United States has 30,291,863 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 549,664 reported related deaths. On the first anniversary of the CARES Act, Justice Department (DOJ) said it has charged 474 individuals with fraud or other criminal schemes related to the pandemic. Collectively, those individuals tried to scam the government and the public out of more than \$569 million.

CDC has announced that it will extend the moratorium on evictions through the end of June 2021. CDC also released a study showing that both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines are highly-effective under real-world conditions in preventing COVID-19 infections. Meanwhile, production of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is set to increase dramatically, with 11 million doses expected to ship out this week. With mass vaccinations well underway in the U.S., advocates are demanding broader global access, particularly to the Moderna vaccine developed with the assistance of NIH.

As of March 28, the country's rolling, seven-day COVID-19 case average is 63,204—an increase from the mid-month average of 54,441, indicating an upswing in positive case totals over the last two weeks. Certain states, such as Michigan and New Jersey, are struggling to reduce infection rates. Michigan is averaging about 4,100 cases per day—up from around 1,000 per day in February—and hospitalizations are rising sharply. However, COVID-19-related deaths in the United States continue to decline, with around 1,000 per day—the lowest since November 2020. Almost half of the states have announced plans to make COVID-19 vaccinations available to all adults by April 15, and 47 states (plus Washington D.C.) will expand eligibility to adults by May 1.

New York reported 57 deaths, 4,575 hospitalizations, and 890 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Sunday, March 28. Approximately 7,622, or 3.46% of the 184,530 tests administered in New York on March 28 were positive for COVID-19. As of March 28, New York has administered 9,056,970 doses of the vaccines to patients. 29.6% of New York residents have received at least one dose of the vaccines and 16.8% are fully vaccinated. On March 26, Governor Cuomo announced a partnership with SOMOS Community Care to provide COVID-19 vaccines directly to accredited SOMOS physicians, who will use their supply to inoculate underserved New Yorkers. On March 26, Governor Cuomo announced the launch of Excelsior Pass—a free platform developed in partnership with IBM, which utilizes secure technology to confirm an individual's recent negative COVID-19 test result or vaccination. New York residents ages 30 and older can start receiving COVID-19 vaccinations on March 30. New York State will then expand vaccine eligibility to residents ages 16 and older beginning April 6.

U.S. Government Updates

- [*DOJ Has Charged Nearly 500 With COVID-Related Fraud in Past Year*](#), March 26
 - On the first anniversary of the CARES Act, DOJ said it has charged 474 individuals with fraud or other criminal schemes related to the pandemic. Collectively, those individuals tried to scam the government and the public out of more than \$569 million.
 - Specifically, DOJ has brought cases against 120 defendants for fraud related to the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and 140 defendants for fraud related to unemployment insurance. Fraudsters also targeted Economic Injury Disaster Loans.

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

- [*COVID Data Tracker Weekly Review*](#), March 26
 - CDC summarized key COVID-19 disease indicators for the past week.
 - The seven-day average number of daily new cases reported was 56,995 as of March 24. This is a 6.7% increase compared to the previous week's average, but an overall 77.2% decrease compared to the national peak on January 11, 2021.
 - As of March 24, 130.5 million vaccine doses have been administered in the United States. Overall, approximately 85.5 million people in the United States have received at least one dose of vaccine, which is 25.7% of the population. Approximately 46.4 million people are fully vaccinated, which is 14.0% of the population. The seven-day average number of reported vaccine dose administrations was 2.5 million, a 0.7% acceleration compared to the previous week.
 - The average number of new daily hospital admissions for the seven-day period ending on March 23 was 4,714, a 0.1% increase compared to the previous week's average.
 - The seven-day average of reported deaths as of March 24 was 946 per day, an 8.2% decrease compared to the previous week's average.
- [*CDC Will Extend National Eviction Ban Through June 30*](#), March 29
 - CDC announced today that it is extending its national ban on evictions through the end of June. The moratorium was originally set to expire on Wednesday, March 31.
 - According to data from the Census Bureau collected between March 3 and March 15, 8.4 million adults said that their households are not caught up on rent payments.
 - CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said, "The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a historic threat to the nation's public health. Keeping people in their homes and out of crowded or congregate settings—like homeless shelters—by preventing evictions is a key step in helping to stop the spread of COVID-19."
 - The moratorium [applies](#) to individuals who earn \$99,000 or less per year or couples filing jointly that earn \$198,000 or less per year. Renters must certify to their landlords that they are unable to pay rent because of the pandemic and are likely to become homeless if forced to leave their home. They must also attest that they attempted to obtain other government assistance to make rental payments.

New York State

- [*New York State COVID-19 Updates*](#), March 29
 - New York reported 57 deaths, 4,575 hospitalizations, and 890 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Sunday, March 28, 2021.

- Approximately 7,622, or 3.46% of the 184,530 tests administered in New York on March 28 were positive for COVID-19.
- As of March 28, New York has administered 9,056,970 doses of the vaccines to patients. 29.6% of New York residents have received at least one dose of the vaccines and 16.8% are fully vaccinated.
- On March 26, Governor Cuomo [announced](#) a partnership with SOMOS Community Care to provide COVID-19 vaccines directly to accredited SOMOS physicians, who will use their supply to inoculate underserved New Yorkers. The program will initially cover 75 practices in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens, and will scale up to 100 practices as supply allows. The program will launch in the coming weeks.
- New York State will [open](#) 14 more community-based, pop-up vaccination sites throughout the State from March 25 – 29. Each site will administer first dose vaccines for 1 – 2 days at a time, depending upon the location, and then close. The sites will then reopen three weeks after their respective closing date to administer second doses. Governor Cuomo expects these sites to vaccinate around 4,200 people.
- New York residents ages 30 and older can [start](#) receiving COVID-19 vaccinations on March 30. New York State will then expand vaccine eligibility to residents ages 16 and older beginning April 6.
- On March 25, New York State Department of Health [released](#) revised nursing home visitation [guidance](#), aligning the State with recently published guidelines from U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The guidance, which takes effect immediately, permits visitation at all times for most residents. However, the guidance advises against visitation of unvaccinated residents in areas of high community spread, residents with confirmed COVID-19 infection, and residents in isolation or quarantine. Facilities must continue to adhere to strict infection control practices.
- [Governor Cuomo Announces Launch of Excelsior Pass](#), March 26
 - On March 26, Governor Cuomo announced the launch of Excelsior Pass—a free, voluntary platform developed in partnership with IBM, which utilizes secure technology to confirm an individual’s recent negative COVID-19 test result or vaccination. This program aims to facilitate the reopening of businesses and event venues in New York State.
 - Similar to a mobile airline-boarding pass, individuals will be able to print out their pass or store it on their smartphones using the Excelsior Pass Wallet application. Each pass will have a secure QR code, which participating businesses and venues can scan (using a companion application) to verify proof of negative COVID-19 test results or vaccination.
 - Major venues, such as Madison Square Garden and the Times Union Center, have announced that they will begin using this technology in the coming weeks.

New York City

- [New York City COVID-19 Updates](#), March 29
 - As of March 28, New York State will [allocate](#) 1,000 Johnson & Johnson vaccines to New York City bodega owners and employees. The State will administer these vaccines in mid-April.

- On March 23, Pandemic Response Lab (PRL) [announced](#) the launch of four national COVID-19 testing hubs to help children return to school safely. The hubs will open at PRL's existing lab in New York City, as well as three new locations in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, CA, and Seattle, WA. As part of this effort, PRL will provide pool testing (testing an entire class at once) for as little as one dollar per student.

Vaccines and Therapeutics

- [*Johnson & Johnson to Deliver 11 Million Vaccine Doses*](#), March 26
 - Following previous [concerns](#) that Johnson & Johnson was falling short of its goal of delivering 20 million vaccines by the end of March, the company is set to [deliver](#) 11 million doses of its single-shot vaccine this week. This would put Johnson & Johnson on track to meet its goal, after all.
 - Unexpected logistical delays [occurred](#) when key U.S. manufacturing partners, including Catalent Inc., did not immediately receive regulatory clearance to send out doses made in their facilities. With Catalent now [approved](#), production has increased sharply.
- [*The Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccines Are Very Effective in Real-World Conditions at Preventing Infections, the C.D.C. Reported*](#), March 29
 - According to a new [report](#) from researchers at CDC, both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are highly effective at preventing symptomatic and asymptomatic infections under real-world conditions.
 - Consistent with the previously released clinical trial data, two doses of either vaccine prevented 90% of infections by two weeks after the second shot. One dose alone prevented 80% of infections by two weeks after vaccination.
 - The study also suggested that asymptomatic infection and transmission to others by vaccinated people may be extremely unlikely, as infections were so rare.
 - The study's results do not show that variants render the vaccines less effective. Variants were circulating during the time of the study (December 14, 2020 through March 13, 2021), yet the vaccines still provided powerful protection.
- [*Advocates Want NIH to Use Its Moderna Vaccine Patent to Push for Global Access*](#), March 25
 - Last year, scientists from National Institutes of Health (NIH) designed the spike protein molecule needed so that Moderna's vaccine could trigger a human immune response against the COVID-19 virus. Now, that collaboration is the basis for a call by a group of public health advocates and academics who want the U.S. government to forcefully exert patent rights over Moderna's mRNA coronavirus vaccine.
 - The advocates—including nonprofit organizations PrEP4All, Public Citizen, and others—contend that NIH should aggressively negotiate with Moderna for patent licensing terms that would speed vaccinations to the developing world. They advocate that Moderna should be required to cooperate in a plan to dramatically increase production and reduce prices worldwide.
 - In a [letter](#) sent to Health Secretary Xavier Becerra, NIH Director Francis Collins, and National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony Fauci, the coalition explained that expanding vaccine access overseas is both the right thing to do and would reduce the risk of generating variants that could become vaccine resistant.

International

- Today, Johnson & Johnson said it has reached a deal with [African Union](#) (AU) to supply up to 220 million doses of its vaccine in exchange for \$2 billion from the African Export-Import Bank. AU will have the option to purchase an additional 180 million doses through 2022. According to World Health Organization (WHO), only 7.7 million vaccines have been administered in Africa.
- [Hong Kong](#) announced Monday that hundreds of residents stranded in Great Britain since late December would be allowed to return home starting next month. At the end of 2020, Hong Kong instituted an abrupt ban on direct travel from Britain. Hong Kong will also ease quarantine requirements for travelers arriving from “low risk” countries, including Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore.
- [India](#) is temporarily halting all exports of AstraZeneca’s vaccine—which India manufactures—in order to preserve doses to distribute to its own population. India is currently in the throes of a virus surge. Prior to the ban, India had exported doses to [76](#) countries.
- In a televised address on Sunday, [Venezuelan](#) President Nicolás Maduro offered to pay for COVID-19 vaccines with oil. The cash-strapped country, which has been in a years-long economic collapse, maintains some of the largest oil reserves in the world.

Other Updates

- [*Six States Are Opening Vaccination to All Adults*](#), March 29
 - Kansas, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, and Louisiana are expanding COVID-19 vaccine eligibility to all adults starting today.
 - On Tuesday, Minnesota will follow, and on Wednesday, Indiana and South Carolina will, as well.
 - About [half](#) of states have pledged to open vaccines to all adults by April 15, and almost all states will open vaccinations by May 1.
- [*Hawaiians Worry About a Flood of Tourists*](#), March 29
 - As Hawaii reopens to tourism, many locals are concerned that tourists will bring a new wave of COVID-19.
 - For most of the pandemic, Hawaii had the strictest tourism rules: anyone arriving in the islands had to quarantine for 14 days. Now, however, visitors need only a negative COVID-19 test within 72 hours of arrival.
 - At least 28,000 travelers have arrived in Hawaii on each of the past two Saturdays.
 - Since late February, daily new cases have doubled. With only 3,000 hospital beds for its population of 1.4 million, the increasing caseload has residents concerned.
 - Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are particular skeptical about the influx of tourists, as those populations face greater risk for COVID-19 and higher-than-average rates of chronic disease.
- [*Rutgers to Require Vaccine Proof for All Students Planning to Attend This Fall*](#), March 25
 - Rutgers, New Jersey’s flagship state school, will require students enrolling for in-person classes for the 2021 fall semester to show proof of a COVID-19 vaccine.

- Rutgers is the first large university in the United State to announce a vaccine requirement.
- The school’s president, Jonathan Holloway, said the rule will help the school make a “full return to our pre-pandemic normal.”
- The vaccination requirement does not apply to students enrolled in online program, or to those who cannot receive the vaccine for medical or religious reasons.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [American Rescue Plan Act \(ARPA\) Phase 5 Stimulus Package—Highlights of Certain Key Tax-Related Provisions in ARPA](#), March 26
- [American Rescue Plan Act of 2021– Summary of Key Provisions](#), March 25
- [Key Employee Benefit Provisions of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021](#), March 19

Send questions to:

- COVID-19-Implications@ropesgray.com