

COVID-19 Daily Update

May 14, 2020

Summary

The United States has 1,400,500 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 84,985 reported related deaths. The Department of Labor reports that another 2,981,000 workers filed initial claims for unemployment benefits last week. More than 36 million workers have filed for unemployment benefits over two months. Dr. Rick Bright, former director of Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), testified before the House Energy and Commerce Committee. Bright stated that the United States does not have “a standard, centralized, coordinated plan to take this nation through” the pandemic. Bright expressed doubt that an effective and safe COVID-19 vaccine could be developed within 12 to 18 months. A United Nations policy brief found that several countries recorded higher-than-average levels of depression and anxiety since the start of the pandemic.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court struck down a stay-at-home order issued by Wisconsin Governor Evers as unlawful and unenforceable, marking the first time a statewide stay-at-home order has been reversed by a court of last resort. The ruling will force the Democratic governor and Republican-controlled Legislature to work together on the State’s response. Wisconsin residents flocked to bars following the ruling. Local governments, such as the City of Milwaukee and Dane County, rushed to enact their own restrictions that echo the State’s “Safer at Home” order. In California, 18 of 58 counties received state approval to further ease social distancing restrictions and re-open dine-in restaurants, destination retail, and community centers. California Governor Newsom expressed concern that tourists could flock to newly opened areas. Officials in Los Angeles County signaled that stay-at-home orders would likely extend through August. Harvard Medical School announced that its classes for incoming students would be held remotely in the fall. A study published in the New England Journal of Medicine found that cats “can readily become infected” with the COVID-19 and may be able to pass it on to other cats.

New York reported 157 deaths on Thursday. A fifth region in upstate New York, Central New York, met the seven benchmarks required to gradually re-open. Four other regions, the North Country, the Finger Lakes, the Southern Tier, and the Mohawk Valley, met the re-opening criteria earlier this week. Governor Cuomo called on Congress to provide \$500 billion in fiscal support for state budgetary shortfalls resulting from the pandemic. Cuomo noted that COVID-19 “is not a red state and blue state crisis” and urged Congress to “put partisanship aside.” New York City identified 18 additional cases of pediatric multisystem inflammatory syndrome, and reported 100 total cases of the illness.

Presidential updates

- [President Trump Plans to Visit Pennsylvania on Thursday Afternoon](#), May 14
 - President Trump plans to visit a personal protective equipment distribution center in Allentown, Pennsylvania on Thursday.
 - Pennsylvania faces a “fiercely partisan” debate over the easing of stay-at-home orders.
 - Democratic Pennsylvania Governor Wolf recently extended the state’s stay-at-home orders through June 4. Republican officials in 6 counties stated that they would ignore the order and allow some businesses to re-open on Friday, May 15. In response, Governor Wolf threatened to pull federal relief funds, liquor licenses, and other permits from those counties.
 - President Trump waded into the fight on Twitter, and recently [stated](#) that, “the great people of Pennsylvania want their freedom now, and they are fully aware of what that entails.”
- [Remarks by President Trump in a Meeting with the Governors of Colorado and North Dakota](#), May 13
 - President Trump stated that he does not agree with the cautious stance Dr. Fauci expressed this week during his Senate testimony. Dr. Fauci warned lawmakers to take the risks of COVID-19 in children seriously and noted it is unlikely that a vaccine will be ready before Fall classes begin.
 - President Trump expressed that the country “should absolutely open the schools” and noted that he does not “consider our country coming back if the schools are closed.”
- [White House Fact Sheet on Federal Support to Underserved Communities Affected by COVID-19](#), May 13
 - The White House issued a fact sheet summarizing federal programs providing “health and economic support” to underserved communities affected by COVID-19.
 - The measures include \$60 billion in loans under the Paycheck Protection Program targeted to support minority and disadvantaged communities, and halting evictions in government-assisted housing.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [COVID-19 Situation Report – 114](#), May 13
 - United Nations and WHO issued a [joint statement](#) on COVID-19 in prisons, and highlighted that “overcrowding constitutes an insurmountable obstacle for preventing... COVID-19.”
 - WHO published its [2020 World Health Statistics](#) and noted that “people around the world are living longer and healthier lives” but that progress “will be thrown off track by COVID-19.”
 - Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director Etienne highlighted the rapid spread of COVID-19 in the Americas and noted that “it took our region three months to reach 1 million cases, but less than three weeks to nearly double that number.”

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

- [*CDC Interprets Cumulative COVID-19 Death Forecasts*](#), May 14
 - CDC consolidated data from 12 models projecting the COVID-19 death rate. All 12 models indicate an increase in national COVID-19 deaths in the coming weeks. Predicted rates of increase differ among the forecasts, depending on assumptions about the prevalence and rigor of social distancing behaviors.
 - National forecasts suggest that the number of cumulative reported deaths is likely to exceed 100,000 by June 1. State-level forecasts indicate that states with low numbers of deaths reported to date are not likely to see a rapid rise in the coming weeks, while states with high numbers of deaths reported to date are likely to see substantial increases.

New York State

- [*New York Governor Cuomo Holds Coronavirus Briefing*](#), May 14
 - New York reported 157 deaths on Thursday.
 - A fifth region in upstate New York, Central New York, met the seven benchmarks required to gradually re-open. Four other regions, the North Country, the Finger Lakes, the Southern Tier, and the Mohawk Valley, met the re-opening criteria earlier this week.
- [*47 Counties in New York Permitted to Resume Elective Surgeries*](#), May 13
 - New York State announced that 47 counties in New York State are eligible to resume elective surgeries, including Albany, Cortland, Oswego, and St. Lawrence. Governor Cuomo noted that these counties do not have a “significant risk of a surge of COVID-19 in the near term.”
- [*Governors Cuomo and Hogan Call On Congress to Act On State Fiscal Relief*](#), May 13
 - New York Governor Cuomo and Maryland Governor Hogan called on Congress to provide federal COVID-19 support to states, including: (1) \$500 billion in fiscal support for state budgetary shortfalls resulting from the pandemic; (2) enhanced Federal Medical Assistance Percentages (FMAP) funding to provide health care and social service support to vulnerable populations; and (3) a 100% federal cost share for FEMA response and recovery efforts.
 - The Governors asserted that COVID-19 “is not a red state and blue state crisis” and urged Congress to “put partisanship aside, and to get this done for the American People.”
- [*Governor Cuomo Authors Op-Ed on Federal COVID-19 Assistance*](#), May 13
 - Governor Cuomo authored an op-ed in the Washington Post, calling for limits on federal COVID-19 funding for corporations. Cuomo urged Congress to withhold federal funding from corporations, unless businesses “hire back all... pre-pandemic workers.”
 - Cuomo highlighted that the U.S. unemployment rate climbed to 14.7% — the highest rate on record since tracking began in 1948. The Governor asserted that allowing corporations to “permanently reduce their payrolls” because of the pandemic would

“result in greater inequality, greater income disparity, and potentially greater social unrest.”

- [*New York Attorney General Calls on NYPD to Ensure Equal Social Distancing Enforcement in NYC Communities*](#), May 13
 - New York Attorney General James issued a statement to the New York City Police Department (NYPD) to “address the department’s apparent unequal enforcement of social distancing rules throughout the City.”
 - Attorney General James requested social distancing enforcement data from NYPD, detailing all 311 complaints of alleged social distancing violations, and NYPD arrests records relating to a failure to comply with social distancing rules.
 - The request follows recent reports of aggressive NYPD social distancing enforcement tactics in black and Hispanic neighborhoods, which provide a stark contrast to the police response in predominantly white neighborhoods.

New York City

- [*Mayor de Blasio Holds Media Availability on COVID-19*](#), May 14
 - New York City identified 18 additional cases of pediatric multisystem inflammatory syndrome, and reported 100 total cases of the illness.
 - The City broadened its guidance on COVID-19 testing. Mayor de Blasio announced that individuals should be tested for COVID-19 if they: show symptoms; have close contact with a confirmed case; or work with vulnerable populations, such as nursing home residents. Widespread testing was previously discouraged to reserve supplies for the sickest patients.
 - Mayor de Blasio criticized NYPD officers for arresting a woman for failing to wear a face mask in the subway. A video shows officers wrestling the woman to the ground after she slaps away one officer’s hand.
- [*NYC Department of Health COVID-19 Resources by Neighborhood*](#), May 13
 - New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH) published a listing of COVID-19 resources for neighborhoods across all five boroughs on health services, food, community assistance organizations, and financial stability.
- [*NYC Banking Commission Recommendations on Property Tax Interest*](#), May 13
 - The New York City Banking Commission recommended that the New York City Council create a new hardship exemption to eliminate interest on late payments for state property taxes due in July for taxpayers: (1) whose property is assessed below \$250,000; and (2) who are suffering from COVID-19-related financial hardship.
 - “Hardship” is defined as the death or serious illness of a property’s owner or immediate family member, loss of income, or enrollment in the Department of Environmental Protection’s Water Debt Assistance Program.

Other Related Updates

- [*Whistle-Blower Testifies on COVID-19 Before Congressional Committee*](#), May 14
 - Dr. Rick Bright, who was removed last month from his position as the director of the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), testified before the House Energy and Commerce Committee.
 - Bright believes he was removed from BARDA for objecting to the widespread distribution of chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine, two versions of a malaria drug that President Trump has promoted as a treatment for COVID-19. Bright asserted that ongoing studies of hydroxychloroquine “haven’t shown an overwhelming use or benefit.”
 - Bright stated that the United States does not have “a standard, centralized, coordinated plan to take this nation through” the pandemic. He further testified that the United States might be rushing too quickly to develop a COVID-19 vaccine, before the vaccine can be fully vetted for its effectiveness and safety. According to Bright, a 12-to-18-month development schedule would require everything to go perfectly and “we’ve never seen anything go perfectly.”
 - President Trump [responded](#) on Twitter, calling Bright “a disgruntled employee” that “should no longer be working for our government.” The President later [stated](#) that he watched some of Dr. Bright’s testimony, and insisted that there was a “tremendous response” to hydroxychloroquine.
 - The Office of Special Counsel, the federal whistleblower agency, made a preliminary determination of “substantial likelihood of wrongdoing” on the part of HHS in removing Dr. Bright from his position.

- [*Wisconsin Supreme Court Overturns Governor’s Stay-At-Home Order*](#), May 14
 - The Wisconsin Supreme Court struck down a stay-at-home order issued by Wisconsin Governor Evers, marking the first time a statewide stay-at-home order has been reversed by a court of last resort.
 - Democratic Governor Evers sought to extend restrictions on residents through the end of May. Republican legislators challenged this decision in court.
 - The Court held that the State Department of Health Services should have issued state restrictions through a process known as rule-making, which gives lawmakers veto power over agency policies. The ruling curbed the governor’s power to act unilaterally during the public health emergency. The ruling will force the Democratic governor and Republican-controlled Legislature to work together on the State’s response.
 - A dissenting justice called the decision “one of the most blatant examples of judicial activism in this court’s history.” Another dissenting opinion cautioned that the court should not be a referee between the warring parties controlling the other two branches of state government.
 - Governor Evers [expressed](#) frustration and deep concern about the safety of Wisconsin residents in the days ahead. Wisconsin residents [flocked](#) to bars following the ruling. Local governments, such as the City of Milwaukee and Dane County, rushed to enact their own restrictions that echo the State’s “Safer at Home” order.

- [*Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance Weekly Claims Report*](#), May 14
 - The Department of Labor (DOL) reports that another 2,981,000 workers filed initial claims for unemployment benefits last week. More than 36 million workers have filed for unemployment benefits over two months.
- [*United Nations Warns of Pandemic's Mental Health Costs*](#), May 13
 - United Nations issued a [policy brief](#) on mental health and COVID-19. UN found that, even before the emergence of the virus, depression affected 264 million people worldwide. Since the start of the pandemic, several countries have recorded higher-than-usual levels of depression and anxiety.
 - UN Secretary General Guterres asserted that COVID-19 increases “psychological suffering” including “grief at the loss of loved ones, shock at the loss of jobs, isolation and restrictions on movement, difficult family dynamics, uncertainty and fear for the future.”
- [*HHS Awards \\$15 Million to Support Telehealth Providers*](#), May 13
 - Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) awarded \$15 million to 159 organizations to increase telehealth capacity during the pandemic, through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.
 - The funding will be used to train students, physicians, and nurses on how to maximize telehealth for COVID-19 referrals for screening and testing, case management, and outpatient care.
- [*Outbreak of Severe Kawasaki-like Disease at Italian COVID-19 Epicenter*](#), May 13
 - An observational study, published in the Lancet, examined an outbreak of severe Kawasaki-like disease in children in Bergamo, Italy.
 - Researchers found that over the five years before the pandemic — January 2015 to mid-February 2020 — 19 children with Kawasaki disease were treated at Hospital Papa Giovanni XXIII in the province of Bergamo.
 - From February 18 to April 20, the hospital treated 10 children with similar hyper-inflammatory symptoms. Eight of them tested positive for coronavirus antibodies.
- [*Department of Labor Issues Alert for Rideshare, Taxi, And Car Service Safety During Coronavirus Pandemic*](#), May 14
 - The Department of Labor (DOL) issued an alert listing safety tips to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19 in the car service industry. DOL recommends lowering vehicle windows to increase airflow, limiting the number of passengers transported at a single time, and routinely disinfecting door handle and inside surfaces.
- [*Study Finds that Talking in Confined Spaces May Spread COVID-19*](#), May 13
 - A recent study, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, concluded that “there is a substantial probability that normal speaking causes airborne virus transmission in confined environments.”
 - Researchers used an intense sheet of laser light to visualize bursts of speech droplets produced during repeated spoken phrases. Researchers found that normal speech

generates airborne droplets that can remain suspended for ten minutes or longer and are eminently capable of transmitting disease in confined spaces.

- [*FDA COVID-19 Update: Daily Roundup*](#), May 13
 - FDA plans to host a virtual [Town Hall](#) on May 15, for researchers, clinical labs, and commercial manufacturers to discuss the production and use of 3D printed swabs during the pandemic.
 - FDA provided [information](#) on thermal imaging systems and non-contact infrared thermometers; these devices accurately measure surface skin temperature without being physically close to the person being evaluated.

- [*Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 in Domestic Cats*](#), May 13
 - A report published in the New England Journal of Medicine concluded that COVID-19 can be transmitted between domestic cats.
 - Researchers inoculated three domestic cats with the virus. Researchers housed the cats in separate areas. By day three, the virus was detectable in all three inoculated cats.
 - Researchers introduced three new cats with no history of COVID-19; one new cat was co-housed with each inoculated cat. Five days later, all three co-housed cats tested positive for COVID-19. All of the cats studied were asymptomatic.
 - Researchers noted that “cats may be a silent intermediate host of SARS-CoV-2, because infected cats may not show any appreciable symptoms that might be recognized by their owners.” Researchers recommend further investigation into the “potential chain of human–cat–human transmission.”

- [*Resumption of Sport and Exercise After COVID-19 Infection*](#), May 13
 - An article in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), provides a clinical framework on when competitive athletes and highly active individuals who have recovered from COVID-19 may safely resume physical activity.
 - Researchers recommend that asymptomatic patients should not exercise for 2 weeks after a positive COVID-19 result, and those with mild symptoms should not exercise until 2 weeks after symptom resolution.

- [*Lack of Efficacy of Hydroxychloroquine or Azithromycin on COVID-19 Clinical Course*](#), May 13
 - A retrospective study, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), found no impact of hydroxychloroquine, with or without azithromycin, on the in-hospital mortality rate of COVID-19 patients.
 - Researchers assessed 1,438 hospitalized COVID-19 patients who received hydroxychloroquine alone (271 patients) or with azithromycin (735 patients), azithromycin alone (211 patients), or neither drug (221 patients).
 - The overall in-hospital mortality rate was 20.3%. There was no significant difference in mortality across the groups. Cardiac arrest was significantly more likely in patients receiving hydroxychloroquine with azithromycin.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [IRS Provides COVID-19-Related Temporary Relief for Participants of Section 125 Cafeteria Plans and High Deductible Health Plans](#), May 14
- [Cares Act Includes Overhaul of Over-The-Counter \(“OTC”\) Drug Monograph Framework](#), May 14
- [COVID-19: Credit Funds: Considerations for Credit Fund Managers Overseeing ERISA Plan Assets in Light of the Pandemic](#), May 13

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