

COVID-19 Daily Update

May 15, 2020

Summary

The United States has 1,427,867 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 86,386 reported related deaths. FDA issued a news release warning that the Abbott ID NOW point-of-care test for COVID-19 may provide inaccurate results. HHS Secretary Azar stated that the White House, which uses the test to screen staff, still has “confidence in the test” and attributed potential test inaccuracies to “user error.” Department of Commerce released a report highlighting that U.S. retail sales fell 16.4% from March to April, the largest monthly drop on record. The House is expected to vote on a \$3 trillion COVID-19 relief package on Friday, May 15. CDC released six one-page “decision tool” flow charts to help businesses safely re-open during the pandemic, including details for schools, child care programs, camps, restaurants and bars, mass transit, and workplaces.

A new Gallup poll found that the number of Americans who say they are social distancing dropped by 17% since late March. A number of states further lifted social distancing restrictions on Friday, May 15. Maryland allowed stores, salons, and houses of worship to re-open with social distancing requirements, even as cases remain relatively steady. Louisiana re-opened gyms, barbershops, movie theaters and bars. The chairman of the House Transportation Committee called on airlines to dramatically cut back the number of seats they offer on aircrafts to promote social distancing. Many airlines say they have been voluntarily leaving middle seats empty on flights in order to promote social distancing. New rentals in Manhattan plummeted by 71% last month and Manhattan’s vacancy rate is now at its highest level in 14 years.

New York State reported 132 deaths on Friday, the lowest daily death toll since March 26. Five regions in upstate New York began a gradual re-opening on Friday, May 15. Governor Cuomo extended his stay-at-home order for the rest of the State through May 28. Remaining regions may re-open “the moment they hit their benchmarks.” New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Delaware will allow beaches and lakeshores to open at 50% capacity over Memorial Day weekend. New York State extended the suspension of the collection of medical and student debt owed to the State for another 30-day period until June 16. New York State Department of Health released a preliminary case definition for pediatric multi-system inflammatory syndrome, an illness in children that has been associated with COVID-19. New York City reports 110 cases of the illness. Mayor de Blasio announced that New York City is unlikely to ease restrictions on businesses and gatherings until at least the first half of June.

Presidential updates

- [*Executive Order Delegates Authority Under the Defense Production Act*](#), May 14
 - President Trump issued an executive order delegating authority under the Defense Production Act to the CEO of the United States International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), “for the domestic production of strategic resources needed to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak, or to strengthen any relevant domestic supply chains.”
 - DFC is an independent federal agency that provides financing for private development projects.
 - DFC is authorized to “make loans, make provision for purchases and commitments to purchase, and take additional actions to create, maintain, protect, expand, and restore the domestic industrial base capabilities” needed to respond to COVID-19.
 - DFC may adopt any rules and regulations necessary to implement the order.
- [*President Trump Appoints Leaders for Accelerated Coronavirus Vaccine Effort*](#), May 14
 - President Trump appointed Moncef Slaoui, the former chairman of vaccines at GlaxoSmithKline, as the chief adviser of Operation Warp Speed, the government’s effort to accelerate the development of a COVID-19 vaccine.
 - Slaoui recently expressed that mass-producing a successful vaccine by January 2021 is a “credible objective” but acknowledged it would be difficult.
 - President Trump appointed General Gustavo Perna, as the chief operating officer of Operation Warp Speed. Perna is a four-star general and is a logistics expert in charge of the Army’s supply chain.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [*COVID-19 Situation Report – 115*](#), May 14
 - WHO [launched](#) two apps to facilitate access to COVID-19 guidance. The WHO Academy app provides tools, training, and virtual workshops for health care workers. The WHO Info app provides real-time access to WHO news and developments.
 - WHO published [guidance](#) on laboratory biosafety for COVID-19 clinical specimens.

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

- [*CDC Releases ‘Decision Tools’ to Guide Re-Opening*](#), May 15
 - CDC released six one-page “decision tool” flow charts to help businesses safely re-open during the pandemic, including details on [schools](#), [child care programs](#), [camps](#), [restaurants and bars](#), [mass transit](#), and [workplaces](#).
 - All of the documents require establishments to comply with local health official orders and to be able to protect higher-risk employees. The guidance reiterates the value of handwashing and social distancing, the need to protect more vulnerable populations, and the importance of regularly monitoring employee health.
 - CDC previously drafted more extensive [guidelines](#), which were not released. According to those familiar with internal discussions, federal officials [rejected](#) the guidelines as “too uniform and regressive” for places with a minimal number of COVID-19 cases.

- [Guidance on COVID-19 for Immunocompromised Individuals](#), May 14
 - CDC highlighted recommendations on COVID-19 prevention for immunocompromised individuals.

New York State

- [Governor Cuomo Extends New York Stay-At-Home Order](#), May 15
 - New York State reported 132 deaths on Friday, the lowest daily death toll since March 26.
 - Five regions in upstate New York re-opened on Friday, May 15, including Central New York, the North Country, the Finger Lakes, the Southern Tier, and the Mohawk Valley.
 - Phase one of the State’s plan [allows](#) the following businesses to re-open: construction; manufacturing and wholesale supply chain; retail for curbside pickup and drop-off; and agriculture, forestry, and fishing.
 - Governor Cuomo extended his stay-at-home order for the rest of the State through May 28. Remaining regions may re-open “the moment they hit their benchmarks.”
 - New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Delaware will allow beaches and lakeshores to open at 50% capacity over Memorial Day weekend. Contact sports are prohibited, pools must remain closed, and beachgoers must wear face coverings. If restrictions are not enforced, the states will step-in and close the beach. Governor Cuomo noted that local governments could still decide to keep beaches closed.
- [Governor Cuomo Holds Daily COVID-19 Press Conference](#), May 14
 - New York State announced an initial \$3 million in funding for businesses to manufacture emergency medical supplies and equipment.
 - President Trump expedited \$3.9 billion in federal funding for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). New York State received the first installment on May 14.
- [New York Issues Criteria for Health Care Professionals Defining Pediatric Multi-System Inflammatory Syndrome](#), May 14
 - New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) established a preliminary case definition for pediatric multi-system inflammatory syndrome (PMIS), an illness in children that has been associated with COVID-19. Suspect and confirmed cases of PMIS must be reported to NYSDOH.
 - The clinical criteria define PMIS patients as hospitalized individuals under the age of 21 with a minimum one-day history of fever and have: (1) one or more of the following symptoms: hypotension or shock; features of severe cardiac illness; severe end-organ involvement such as neurological or renal disease; or (2) two or more of the following symptoms: maculopapular rash; bilateral non-purulent conjunctivitis; mucocutaneous inflammatory signs; acute gastrointestinal symptoms.
- [New York Renews Suspension of State Debt Collection](#), May 14
 - New York State halted the collection of medical and student debt owed to the State of New York that was specifically referred to the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) for collection.

- A new executive order extends the suspension for another 30-day period until June 16. OAG will then reassess whether another extension is necessary.
- More than 165,000 matters fit the criteria for a suspension of state debt collection, including patients that owe medical debt to state hospitals, students that owe debt to State University of New York (SUNY) campuses, and other fees owed to State agencies. The temporary policy also suspends the accrual of interest and the collection of fees.

New York City

- [Mayor de Blasio Holds Media Availability on COVID-19](#), May 15
 - Mayor de Blasio announced that New York City is unlikely to ease restrictions on businesses and gatherings until at least the first half of June. New York City beaches will not open for Memorial Day weekend.
 - The City plans to “reset” its approach to enforcing social distancing. Police will focus on breaking up large groups and will no longer enforce orders requiring people to wear face coverings. Police will be deployed to Central Park this weekend to limit access to the popular Sheep Meadow.
 - The City will open new cooling centers to accommodating social distancing this summer. Free air-conditioners will be provided to some low-income seniors and public housing residents. “Misting oases” and spray showers will be set up in public parks.
 - The City asked the Public Service Commission to subsidize 900,000 utility bills, doubling its current commitment, as unemployed workers continue to struggle financially.
 - New York City reported 110 cases of pediatric multi-system inflammatory syndrome.
- [Health Advisory: Updated NYC Health Department COVID-19 Recommendations](#), May 14
 - New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH) updated its COVID-19 recommendations based on recent CDC guidance.
 - NYCDOH extended the duration of isolation and monitoring for asymptomatic people who test positive for COVID-19 with a molecular-based diagnostic test, from seven to ten days.
 - Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 and are symptomatic should remain at home until: any fever has subsided for at least three days; other symptoms have improved; and at least 10 days have passed since the onset of symptoms.
 - NYCDOH recommends a test-based strategy or a longer isolation period of 14 days for immunocompromised individuals or people in certain settings, including hospitalized patients and residents and employees of long-term care facilities. The test-based strategy [requires](#) that symptomatic COVID-19 cases isolate until their fever and any respiratory symptoms improve, and they receive negative results from at least two viral COVID-19 tests conducted at least 24 hours apart.

Other Related Updates

- [*House to Vote on \\$3 Trillion COVID-19 Relief Package*](#), May 15
 - The House is expected to vote on a \$3 trillion COVID-19 relief package on Friday, May 15, which includes nearly \$1 trillion for state and local governments, an extension of unemployment benefits, another round of \$1,200 direct payments to American families, and a \$25 billion bailout for the Postal Service.
 - White House officials released a [statement](#) threatening to veto the package, stating that House Democrats are more concerned with “delivering on longstanding partisan and ideological wish lists than with enhancing the ability of our nation to deal with the public health and economic challenges we face.”
- [*Poll Finds that Social Distancing Has Dropped Significantly in the United States*](#), May 15
 - A new Gallup poll found that the number of Americans who say they are social distancing dropped by 17% since late March. The poll found that many people in states with active stay-at-home restrictions are no longer social distancing.
 - The survey was conducted through interviews of 4,159 adults from May 4-10. 58% of Americans reported that they are either completely (17%) or mostly (41%) isolating themselves, down from a high of 75% who said they were isolating (completely or mostly) between March 30 and April 4.
 - Among states that have maintained stay-at-home restrictions – which includes New York, California and Massachusetts – the share of people isolating decreased to 64%, from a high of 71% during the period of April 20-26.
- [*British Medical Journal Article Issues Call to Revive CDC*](#), May 15
 - The Lancet, a British medical journal, published an editorial exploring CDC’s role in the pandemic, describing CDC as “an ineffective and nominal adviser” in the United States’ COVID-19 response.
 - The authors describe a series of events which have stripped CDC’s ability to mount effective public health responses, including decreased funding and a strained relationship with the federal government.
 - The article claims that the Trump administration has undermined CDC’s leadership during the pandemic by cutting staff, silencing officials, and repeatedly questioning CDC guidance. The article mentions a recent incident in which Dr. Birx cast doubt on CDC’s mortality and case data, stating “there is nothing from CDC that I can trust.”
 - The article notes that CDC made mistakes during the early stages of the pandemic, but concluded that “punishing the agency by marginalizing and hobbling it is not the solution.”
- [*Department of Commerce Monthly Sales Report for Retail and Food Services*](#), May 15
 - Department of Commerce released a report highlighting that U.S. retail sales fell 16.4% from March to April, the largest monthly drop on record. Restaurants and bars reported a 50% decline, furniture stores reported a 67% decline, and clothing stores reported an 89% decline.
 - The plunge in retail spending is a key reason why the U.S. economy is contracting. Purchases at retailers are a major component of overall consumer spending, which fuels about 70% of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP).

- [NIH begins clinical trial of hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin for COVID-19](#), May 14
 - National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) is sponsoring a clinical trial to evaluate whether the malaria drug hydroxychloroquine, given together with the antibiotic azithromycin, can prevent hospitalization and death from COVID-19.
 - The trial will enroll 2,000 adults with confirmed COVID-19 who are experiencing fever, cough, or shortness of breath. Participants will be randomly assigned to receive short-term treatment with either hydroxychloroquine and azithromycin or matching placebos.

- [HHS To Award \\$5 Million for Health Services Research Related to COVID-19](#), May 14
 - Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), through the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), awarded \$5 million to support novel, high-impact studies that evaluate the responsiveness the U.S. health care system to the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - AHRQ will fund research focused on the role of primary care practices during the pandemic; the impact of COVID-19 on socially vulnerable populations and people with multiple chronic conditions; and the innovations and challenges encountered in the expansion of telehealth. The deadline to apply for funding is June 15.

- [Department of Labor COVID-19 Updates](#), May 14
 - The Department of Labor (DOL) issued updated [guidance](#) on the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) program authorized by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.
 - DOL issued an [alert](#) listing safety tips to protect nursing home and long-term care facility workers from exposure to COVID-19.
 - DOL issued an [alert](#) listing safety tips to protect retail pharmacy workers from COVID-19, including encouraging customers to submit prescriptions online or by phone, installing clear plastic barriers at pickup counters, and increasing the use of self-serve checkouts to minimize interaction with customers.

- [Variation in False-Negative Rate of COVID-19 Tests by Time Since Exposure](#), May 14
 - A study, published in the Annals of Internal Medicine, examined how the predictive value of reverse-transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) tests for COVID-19 varies with time from exposure and symptom onset.
 - PCR tests are diagnostic tests that detect genetic material from the virus to determine whether someone has an active infection. PCR tests are increasingly being used to “rule out” COVID-19 infection among high-risk persons, such as exposed inpatients and health care workers.
 - Researchers concluded that PCR tests provide little diagnostic value immediately after SARS-CoV-2 exposure. The probability of false-negative results is 100% on the first day of exposure, falling to 38% when symptoms begin and then to 20% at 3 days after symptom onset.
 - Researchers recommend that an infection should not be ruled out on the basis of a PCR test alone; doctors should also carefully consider the clinical and epidemiologic situation.

- [*FDA Warns of Possible Inaccuracy in Abbott ID NOW Point-of-Care Test Results*](#), May 15
 - FDA issued a [news release](#) warning that the Abbott ID NOW point-of-care test for COVID-19 may provide inaccurate results.
 - 15 adverse event reports and several scientific studies have suggested that users are receiving inaccurate negative test results. FDA is investigating whether the issue is due to the use of certain swabs or viral transport media. Abbott agreed to conduct post-market studies to further evaluate any accuracy issues.
 - The Abbott point-of-care test is used to screen White House staff. HHS Secretary Azar [stated](#) that the White House still has “confidence in the test” and attributed potential test inaccuracies to “user error.”

- [*State Department Condemns Attempts by PRC-Affiliated Actors to Steal American COVID-19 Research*](#), May 14
 - Secretary of State Pompeo issued a statement condemning “attempts by cyber actors and non-traditional collectors affiliated with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to steal U.S. intellectual property and data related to COVID-19 research.”
 - Department of State called on China to “cease this malicious activity” and highlighted that information theft “jeopardizes the delivery of secure, effective, and efficient treatment options” for COVID-19.

- [*FDA COVID-19 Update: Daily Roundup*](#), May 14
 - FDA issued an [emergency use authorization](#) (EUA) to increase the availability of infusion pumps with remote monitoring capabilities to provide continuous infusion of medications, parenteral nutrition, and other fluids into patients during the pandemic.
 - FDA updated [guidance](#) for pharmacy compounders experiencing personal protective equipment (PPE) shortages.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [*Rapid Clinical Developments Increase Insider Trading Risks*](#), May 15
- [*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

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