

COVID-19 Daily Update

May 17, 2020

Summary

The United States has 1,484,804 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 89,399 reported related deaths. Federal Reserve Chairman Powell predicted that the U.S. economy will recover from the pandemic, but estimated that the recovery process may last through the end of 2021. Vice President Pence announced five new members of the White House coronavirus task force. WHO and CDC issued guidance on pediatric multi-system inflammatory syndrome, an illness in children that has been associated with COVID-19. The House approved rule changes to allow members to vote by proxy and hold remote hearing, depositions, and markups during the pandemic. The House narrowly passed a \$3 trillion pandemic relief package on a 208 to 199 vote on Friday, May 15. Senate leadership has declared the bill “dead on arrival,” and the President has promised to veto it, if it makes it to his desk. Secret Service investigators found evidence of a sophisticated attack on U.S. unemployment systems. Evidence suggests the scheme was developed by a well-organized Nigerian fraud ring.

Several localities rolled back social distancing guidelines this weekend. In New Orleans, dining room service resumed at 25% capacity. California re-opened parks and hiking trails. Virginia Beach re-opened for fishing and exercise. North Carolina allowed religious services to resume without restrictions after a federal judge struck down Governor Cooper’s executive order limiting church services to 10 people. The judge found that the restrictions violated the right to worship freely and treated churches differently from other secular activities, as businesses were allowed to re-open at 50% capacity. Governor Cooper does not plan to appeal the ruling. McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas installed personal protective equipment vending machines in two terminals. The Italian government announced plans to re-open Italy’s borders on June 3; the government will eliminate a 14-day quarantine for anyone arriving from abroad.

New York State reported 139 deaths on Sunday, May 17, with 106 deaths in hospitals and 33 deaths in nursing homes. The State expanded its COVID-19 testing policy. Any worker in an industry set to re-start in phase one of New York’s re-opening plan is now eligible to get tested, including workers in construction, agriculture, retail, manufacturing, and wholesale trade. Governor Cuomo was tested for COVID-19 via nasal swab during his press conference to encourage residents to get tested. Horse racing tracks across the State and auto racing at a popular upstate raceway, will be allowed to re-open without spectators on June 1. New York City received several reports of residents gathering outside of bars and restaurants drinking “to-go” alcoholic beverages in Brooklyn and Manhattan. Police plan to break up any such gatherings; Mayor de Blasio noted that “we’re not going to tolerate people starting to congregate, it’s as simple as that.”

Presidential updates

- [*Remarks by President Trump on Vaccine Development*](#), May 15
 - President Trump unveiled additional details on Operation Warp Speed, a public-private partnership to facilitate the development, manufacture, and distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine by January 2021.
 - President Trump stated that “we have the military totally involved” and compared the effort to the Manhattan Project – the World War II effort to build the first nuclear weapon.
 - The President stated that the United States would work with other countries, including China, on the project, asserting that “we have no ego when it comes to this.”
 - There are currently 14 vaccine candidates for COVID-19. The federal government plans to begin manufacturing top candidates before they are approved, to eliminate any delay once approved.
 - HHS will coordinate efforts with CDC, FDA, National Institutes of Health (NIH), Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), Department of Defense, and private firms.
 - President Trump recently appointed Moncef Slaoui, the former chairman of vaccines at GlaxoSmithKline, and General Gustave Perna, a four-star general, to lead Operation Warp Speed. Department of Defense [identified](#) subject matter experts to further support the effort across diagnostics, therapeutics, vaccines, distribution, and security.
- [*New Members of the White House Coronavirus Task Force Announced*](#), May 15
 - Vice President Pence announced five new members of the White House coronavirus task force, including Agriculture Secretary Perdue, Labor Secretary Scalia, NIH Director Collins, FDA Director of the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, and HRSA Administrator Engels.
 - The task force is entering a “new phase” which is “focused on getting Americans back to work and allowing businesses to re-open.”

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [*WHO Issues Technical Guidance on COVID-19*](#), May 16
 - WHO published a [scientific brief](#) on pediatric multi-system inflammatory syndrome. WHO Director-General Tedros [emphasized](#) the urgent need for standardized data on the epidemiology, clinical presentations, severity, and outcomes of the illness.
 - WHO issued [guidance](#) to develop cleaning and disinfection procedures for COVID-19.
 - WHO and UNICEF published joint [guidance](#) on sustaining immunization systems during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

- [*COVIDView Weekly Surveillance Summary of U.S. COVID-19 Activity*](#), May 16
 - CDC summarized key COVID-19 disease indicators for the week ending May 9.
 - The national percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 decreased from the previous week; it decreased from 13.1% to 11.8% in public health labs and decreased from 13% to 10.2% in commercial labs.
 - The overall cumulative hospitalization rate is 60.5 per 100,000, with the highest rates in people 65 years and older (192.4 per 100,000) and 50-64 years (94.4 per 100,000).

- Based on death certificate data, the percentage of total deaths attributed to pneumonia, influenza, or COVID-19 decreased from 17.8% to 12.8% from the prior week, but remained above baseline.
- [*Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children Associated With COVID-19*](#), May 15
 - CDC issued guidance on multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children (MIS-C).
 - CDC defines an MIS-C case as: an individual under 21 years old, presenting with fever, laboratory evidence of inflammation, and evidence of clinically severe illness requiring hospitalization, with multi-system organ involvement; with no alternative plausible diagnoses; and who tests positive for a recent or current COVID-19 infection or was otherwise exposed to COVID-19 within four weeks prior to symptom onset.
- [*Evaluation Criteria for COVID-19 Testing in Animals*](#), May 15
 - CDC issued evaluation criteria for state public health officials to guide COVID-19 testing for animals, such as pets, livestock, and zoo animals, based on epidemiological risk and clinical features of the infection.

New York State

- [*New York State Expands COVID-19 Testing Policies*](#), May 17
 - New York State reported 139 deaths on Sunday, May 17; 106 deaths were in hospitals and 33 deaths were in nursing homes. 5,897 COVID-19 patients were hospitalized on Saturday, May 16, down from 6,220 the day before.
 - Five regions in upstate New York re-opened on Friday, May 15. Two more regions, the Capital Region and Western New York, require only additional contact tracers before they meet the criteria to re-open.
 - The State expanded its COVID-19 testing policy. Any worker in an industry set to re-start in phase one of New York’s re-opening plan is now eligible to get tested, including workers in construction, agriculture, retail, manufacturing, and wholesale trade. New York conducts 40,000 COVID-19 tests per day.
 - Governor Cuomo was tested for COVID-19 via nasal swab during his press conference to encourage residents to get tested. He stated “I’m not in pain, I’m not in discomfort... there is no reason why you should not get the test.”
- [*Governor Cuomo Holds COVID-19 Press Conference*](#), May 16
 - Horse racing tracks across the State and auto racing at Watkins Glen International, a popular upstate raceway, will be allowed to re-open without spectators on June 1.
 - Westchester and Suffolk Counties are eligible to resume elective surgery and ambulatory care.
- [*New York Blood Banks Faces Shortages*](#), May 15
 - New York Blood Center announced that its blood donation reserve has reached “dangerously low” levels. Schools, houses of worship, and businesses typically provide about 75% of the region’s blood supply.
 - For the last two months, blood banks across New York City, Long Island, Hudson Valley, and New Jersey have been able to maintain reserves large enough to last only one to three days, depending on the blood type.

- The New York Blood Center is planning on holding a limited number of mobile blood drives by appointment. Interested donors can locate the nearest center [here](#).

New York City

- [*Mayor de Blasio Warns Against Overcrowding on City Beaches and Streets*](#), May 17
 - City beaches will not open on Memorial Day Weekend. Lifeguards are not on duty and swimming is prohibited, but people will be allowed on the sand. The City will monitor the beaches to prevent crowding and warned that it will close the area if social distancing rules are violated.
 - New York City reported 469 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on May 15, down from 506 on May 14. New York City reported 137 cases of pediatric multi-system inflammatory syndrome, an illness in children that has been associated with COVID-19. 66 of the 137 cases tested positive for COVID-19 or its antibodies.
 - The City received several reports of residents gathering outside of bars and restaurants drinking “to go” alcoholic beverages in Brooklyn and Manhattan. Police plan to patrol the City and break up any such gatherings. Mayor de Blasio stated that the practice “puts lives in danger” and that “we’re not going to tolerate people starting to congregate, it’s as simple as that.”
- [*New York City Announces Detailed COVID-19 Heat Wave Plan*](#), May 15
 - New York City plans to provide 74,000 air conditioners to low-income seniors through a new, \$55 million program. 22,000 air conditioners will go to NYC Housing Authority residents, starting next week.
 - The City plans to create non-traditional cooling centers in sports venues and auditoriums. NYC Parks will create spray showers for kids and active New Yorkers in low income areas. The GetFood meal program for vulnerable residents will deliver hydrating beverages with meal packages.

Other Related Updates

- [*House to Allow Proxy Voting, Remote Hearings During Pandemic*](#), May 15
 - The House of Representatives approved rule changes to allow members to vote by proxy and hold remote hearings during the pandemic. House members voted in favor of the new rules on a largely party line vote of 217 to 189.
 - Rule Committee Chairman McGovern stated that the House must “temporarily embrace technology during this unprecedented time.” The Chief Administrative Officer will designate the software that panels will use to conduct remote hearings, markups, and depositions.
 - Past attempts at remote voting faced fierce opposition. Several years after 9/11, the House approved a lower threshold of floor quorums — a required number of present members — during national emergencies.
- [*House Passes \\$3 Trillion COVID-19 Aid Bill*](#), May 15
 - The House narrowly passed a \$3 trillion pandemic relief package on a 208 to 199 vote. The Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act (HEROES Act) provides aid for struggling state and local governments and another round of direct \$1,200 payments to taxpayers.

- The package contains \$100 billion for rental assistance and \$75 billion in mortgage relief; \$3.6 billion to bolster election security; and a \$25 billion bailout for the Postal Service.
- House Speaker Pelosi described the measure as an “offer on the table” and that Democrats are “open to negotiation.” Senate leadership has already [declared](#) the bill “dead on arrival,” and the President has [promised](#) to veto it.
- [Feds Suspect Vast Fraud Network Targeting U.S. Unemployment Systems](#), May 16
 - Secret Service investigators reported that a group of international fraudsters have mounted a sophisticated attack on U.S. unemployment systems.
 - Attackers used detailed information about U.S. citizens to file unemployment claims on behalf of people who have not been laid off. With many states rushing to pay claims during the pandemic, payments have gone straight to direct-deposit accounts.
 - Evidence suggests the scheme was developed by a well-organized Nigerian fraud ring. A Secret Service memo warns that the scheme could result in “potential losses in the hundreds of millions of dollars.”
 - Washington State has emerged as the primary target, but there is evidence of attacks in Florida, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, and Wyoming.
- [NIH Investigational Vaccine Protects Monkeys Against COVID-19 Pneumonia](#), May 15
 - National Institute of Health (NIH) scientists found that a single dose of ChAdOx1 nCoV-19, an investigational vaccine against COVID-19, protected six rhesus macaques monkeys from COVID-19 pneumonia.
 - The vaccine uses a replication-deficient chimpanzee adenovirus to deliver a SARS-CoV-2 protein to induce a protective immune response.
 - Six macaques that received the investigational vaccine 28 days before being infected with SARS-CoV-2 were compared with three control animals that did not receive the vaccine.
 - The vaccinated animals showed no signs of virus replication in the lungs, significantly lower levels of respiratory disease, and no lung damage compared to control animals.
- [FDA COVID-19 Update: Daily Roundup](#), May 15
 - FDA issued a [consumer update](#) on three different types of available COVID-19 tests: molecular tests, antigen tests, and antibody tests.
 - FDA and the Federal Trade Commission issued [warning letters](#) to two companies for selling fraudulent COVID-19 products.
 - FDA published a [detailed list](#) of email addresses that may be used to ask questions about COVID-19 diagnostic tests, personal protective equipment, and medical device shortages.
 - FDA issued an [emergency use authorization](#) (EUA) for an electrocardiogram device to remotely monitor the QT interval of COVID-19 patients undergoing treatment with drugs that may cause life-threatening arrhythmias.
 - FDA issued a [EUA](#) to Everlywell for an at-home nasal sample collection kit that can be sent to specified labs for COVID-19 diagnostic testing. Individuals must be screened using an online questionnaire that is reviewed by a health care provider.

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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