

COVID-19 Daily Update

May 18, 2020

Summary

The United States has 1,500,753 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 90,312 reported related deaths. WHO agreed to launch an independent evaluation into its COVID-19 response “at the earliest appropriate moment.” Chinese President Xi Jinping insisted that China acted with “openness, transparency and responsibility” during the pandemic. China pledged to contribute \$2 billion to WHO’s response efforts and supported an independent evaluation of WHO “after [COVID-19] is brought under control.” Monday, May 18, is the deadline for businesses to return small business loans received from the Paycheck Protection Program. The Congressional Oversight Commission found that the Federal Reserve and Treasury Department disbursed only \$37.5 billion of the \$500 billion in emergency bailout funds allocated under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to provide liquidity to businesses and states. Moderna announced positive results from the early stages of its COVID-19 vaccine trial. The study found that the vaccine generates antibodies against COVID-19 in levels that are similar to or higher than those found in the plasma of recovered COVID-19 cases.

Illinois Governor Pritzker issued an emergency rule, making it a class A misdemeanor for restaurant, bar, gym, and other establishment owners to violate Illinois’ stay-at-home order. Violators are subject to up to a year in jail and up to a \$2,500 fine. State lawmakers criticized the measure as “an affront to the separation of powers” in which “legislatures make laws and governors enforce them.” In states that are opening, many retail stores are temporarily closing fitting rooms, quarantining returned items for 72 hours before putting them back on the sales floor, and designating certain shopping hours for high-risk customers. Uber laid off another 3,000 employees, less than two weeks after the company cut 3,700 jobs due to plummeting demand. Thousands of protesters flooded Germany’s largest cities, including Berlin and Munich, to voice their anger with government restrictions on public life.

New York State reported 106 deaths on Monday, May 18, the lowest one-day death toll since March 26. Western New York, which encompasses Allegany, Erie and Niagara counties, will re-open on Tuesday, May 19. Five regions in upstate New York re-opened on Friday, May 15. Governor Cuomo encouraged professional sports teams in the State to start planning to hold games without any fans in attendance. Mayor de Blasio announced that he expects New York City to meet the State’s re-opening criteria by the first half of June, assuming the current trend holds. The City has yet to meet the requirements on contact tracing capacity, hospital-bed and intensive-care bed vacancy rates, and the rate of new hospitalizations. New York City reported 145 cases of pediatric multi-system inflammatory syndrome, an illness in children that has been associated with COVID-19.

Presidential updates

- [*President Trump Tweets in Support of Re-Opening the Country*](#), May 18
 - President Trump recently [tweeted](#) “REOPEN OUR COUNTRY!” and “TRANSITION TO GREATNESS.” More than two-thirds of states have [relaxed](#) restrictions in some significant way. Several more states, including Connecticut, Kentucky, and Minnesota, will move to re-open this week.
 - President Trump recently expressed his [support](#) for the return of live sporting events. The President stated that “we want to get it back to where it was, we want big, big stadiums loaded with people.”
 - Health Secretary Azar [defended](#) the administration’s push to re-open the economy and asserted that “everything does not depend on a vaccine.” Azar noted that “almost half of our reporting counties haven’t had a single death” and added that more than 60% of confirmed coronavirus cases are in only 2% of reporting counties. Azar lamented every death as tragic but said “we have maintained our health care burden within the capacity” to treat the outbreak.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [*WHO Pledges Evaluation Into Agency’s Response to the Coronavirus Outbreak*](#), May 18
 - WHO plans to launch an independent “comprehensive evaluation” into its international response to COVID-19 “at the earliest appropriate moment.”
 - Chinese President Xi Jinping addressed the World Health Assembly and announced that China will provide \$2 billion to WHO to help respond to the outbreak over two years. Xi insisted that China had acted with “openness, transparency and responsibility” when the epidemic was detected in Wuhan. Xi alleged that China shared all relevant information, including the genome sequence of the virus, “in a most timely fashion.” China supported the idea of a comprehensive review of the global response to COVID-19 “after it is brought under control.”
 - President Trump has repeatedly attacked WHO, claiming that it helped China conceal the extent of the coronavirus pandemic in its early stages. Health Secretary Azar recently commented that it was time to be frank about why COVID-19 has “spun out of control” and stated that “there was a failure by [WHO] to obtain the information that the world needed and that failure cost many lives.”
- [*WHO COVID-19 Updates*](#), May 17
 - WHO Director General Tedros [warned](#) that the “majority of the world’s population remains susceptible to the virus.” Early serology studies found that, even in the worst-affected regions, no more than 20% of the population has COVID-19 antibodies. In most places, less than 10% of the population has COVID-19 antibodies.
 - WHO created a [case form](#) to report suspected cases of pediatric multi-system inflammatory syndrome in children.

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

- [*CDC Initiatives Supporting the COVID-19 Response*](#), May 17
 - CDC published a document summarizing its initiatives, activities, and tools created in support of the pandemic.

- CDC implemented multiple surveillance systems to monitor virus changes, estimate disease burden, evaluate the spread and intensity of COVID-19, and identify when to adjust community mitigation measures.
- CDC issued guidance to state and local health departments on contact tracing, infection control, and COVID-19 testing. CDC issued guidance to help establishments re-open, such as child care facilities, schools, and employers with high-risk workers.
- [*COVID-19 Serology Surveillance*](#), May 17
 - CDC highlighted its serology surveillance program. Serology tests detect antibodies in the blood; the presence of antibodies indicates that an individual had a previous infection.
 - CDC developed a laboratory blood test for broad-based surveillance to determine what proportion of the U.S. population has been infected with SARS-CoV-2. CDC also uses its antibody test to evaluate the performance of commercial antibody tests.
 - CDC highlighted its serology surveillance [strategy](#) and [survey types](#), including large-scale, community level, and special populations serological studies.

New York State

- [*Governor Cuomo Holds COVID-19 Press Conference*](#), May 18
 - New York State reported 106 deaths on Monday, May 18, the lowest one-day death toll since March 26.
 - Governor Cuomo encouraged professional sports teams in the State to start planning to hold games without any fans in attendance.
 - Western New York, which encompasses Allegany, Erie and Niagara counties, will re-open on Tuesday, May 19. Five regions in upstate New York re-opened on Friday, May 15. The Capital Region only requires additional contact tracers before it meets the criteria to re-open.
 - Governor Cuomo noted that the COVID-19 test he took on live TV on Sunday, May 17, was negative.
- [*New York State Expands COVID-19 Testing Capabilities*](#), May 17
 - New York State conducts around 40,000 diagnostic tests per day at more than 700 COVID-19 testing sites. The State launched a new online [resource](#) for individuals to locate their nearest COVID-19 testing site.
 - Governor Cuomo announced a new partnership to bring COVID-19 testing to 60 CVS pharmacies across the state; each location will conduct at least 50 tests per day.
 - The following New Yorkers are now eligible for COVID-19 diagnostic testing: individuals with COVID-19 symptoms; individuals who had contact with a known COVID-19 case; workers in health care or nursing homes; essential workers that directly interact with the public; and anyone who may return to the workplace in phase one of the state's re-opening plan.

New York City

- [*New York City Expected to Meet Re-Opening Criteria in the First Half of June*](#), May 18
 - Mayor de Blasio announced that he expects New York City to meet the State's re-opening criteria by the first half of June, assuming the current trend holds.

- The State requires a rate of new hospitalizations below 2 per 100,000 residents per day, or approximately 170 new hospitalizations per day in New York City. The City currently has around 200 new hospitalizations per day.
 - The State requires a hospital-bed vacancy rate of at least 30%. The City current has a 29% hospital-bed vacancy rate.
 - The State requires an intensive-care bed vacancy rate of at least 30%. The City currently has a 24% intensive-care vacancy rate.
 - Long Island and the mid-Hudson region, which includes Westchester, Rockland, and other counties north of the city, have not yet met the State’s re-opening criteria.
 - New York City reported 145 cases of pediatric multi-system inflammatory syndrome, an illness in children that has been associated with COVID-19.
- [*NYC Department of Health Weekly Update*](#), May 17
 - New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH) summarized updated guidance and scientific literature on COVID-19 for the week of May 17.
 - NYCDOH highlighted “silent hypoxemia” as an emerging medical issue in COVID-19 patients, in which patients have extremely low blood oxygen saturation levels but don’t feel any sense of suffocation or lack of air.
 - NYCDOH noted that many New Yorkers who have died at home with probable COVID-19 may have had silent hypoxemia and did not consider seeking medical attention before suddenly experiencing respiratory distress.
 - [*New York City Announces Testing Partnership With CityMD*](#), May 17
 - New York City announced a partnership with CityMD, to offer walk-in COVID-19 diagnostic testing to New Yorkers at 123 locations across the five boroughs. CityMD committed to cover testing costs for uninsured individuals. Tests are offered 7 days per week and no appointment is necessary.
 - [*Improving Sleep Habits During the COVID-19 Pandemic*](#), May 16
 - NYCDOH issued guidance on how to improve sleeping habits during the pandemic. NYCDOH highlighted that many New Yorkers may be struggling with feelings of uncertainty, loss, or grief. Many might experience higher levels of depression and anxiety that can cause trouble sleeping.
 - NYCDOH highlighted NYC Well and the New York State COVID-19 Emotional Support Helpline, two confidential helplines staffed by trained counselors who provide brief counseling and care referrals.

Other Related Updates

- [*Paycheck Protection Program: Deadline to Return Government Loans*](#), May 18
 - Monday, May 18, is the deadline for businesses to return funds received from the Paycheck Protection Program, a federal program providing loans to small business that were affected by COVID-19.
 - The program came under increased scrutiny after many big companies received loans. Lawmakers opened congressional inquiries and demanded that large firms return the money, while the Trump administration tightened eligibility rules.

- Treasury Secretary Mnuchin previously warned that companies receiving more than \$2 million in small business loans under the Paycheck Protection Program may be audited by the Small Business Administration. Companies could face “criminal liability” if it turns out they were not eligible to apply for the relief money.
- According to [data](#) compiled by the New York Times, at least 61 public and private companies have returned their small-business loans, including Ruth’s Chris Steak House, Shake Shack, and the shoe start-up Allbirds.
- A recent [survey](#) found that black and Latino business owners have struggled to receive program funds and many say they are on the brink of closing permanently.
- [Congressional Oversight Commission Issues Inaugural Assessment of the CARES Act Emergency Economic Stabilization Funds](#), May 18
 - The Congressional Oversight Commission issued a [report](#) assessing how the Federal Reserve and Treasury Department are administering \$500 billion in emergency bailout funds allocated to the Treasury for loans to provide liquidity to businesses, states, and localities under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.
 - The Commission found that the Treasury has disbursed only \$37.5 billion of CARES Act funds under this provision. The disbursed funds were invested in the Fed’s Secondary Market Corporate Credit Facility, which purchases outstanding corporate bonds through a special purpose vehicle.
 - The Treasury has not disbursed any of the \$46 billion in grant and loan money earmarked for airlines or for businesses “critical to maintaining national security.”
 - The Commission signaled several areas of concern, including whether the Federal Reserve will favor large companies over smaller ones and how the Treasury plans to assess the success or failure of the program.
- [Coronavirus Vaccine Trial by Moderna Shows Promising Early Results](#), May 18
 - Moderna, a biotech company, reported positive results from a phase one study of its experimental COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccine was among the first to begin testing in healthy human volunteers in mid-March.
 - The study, led by National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), involved 45 healthy people who received one of three different doses of the vaccine.
 - The trial showed encouraging early signs that the vaccine generates antibodies against COVID-19, in levels that were similar to or higher than those found in the plasma of recovered COVID-19 cases.
 - Moderna will enroll around 600 healthy volunteers for phase two of the trial in June to determine which dose will be tested in the final phase three study, which could begin as early as July.
- [Study Examines the Effectiveness of COVID-19 Interventions in Germany](#), May 16
 - A study, published in *Science*, presented a Bayesian approach for monitoring the effect of non-pharmaceutical government interventions on the spread of COVID-19.
 - Researchers combined an established epidemiological model with Bayesian inference change points to examine the impact of three major governmental interventions in Germany: (1) canceling large events; (2) closing schools and the majority of stores; (3) initiating a contact ban and closing all non-essential stores.

- Each social distancing measure led to a decline in COVID-19 cases that became detectable two weeks after its implementation. Only the implementation of the third measure stopped exponential growth of the epidemic.
- The study warns that “lifting restrictions too much will quickly lead to renewed exponential growth and ... we would be effectively blind to this worsened situation for nearly two weeks in which ... transmission will be uninhibited.”

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [U.S. Employer Return-to-Work FAQs](#), May 18
- [ESG Considerations for Asset Managers in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), May 18
- [Rapid Clinical Developments Increase Insider Trading Risks](#), May 15

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