

COVID-19 Daily Update

May 20, 2020

Summary

The United States has 1,539,633 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 92,645 reported related deaths. President Trump signed an executive order directing agency heads to “temporarily or permanently rescind, modify, waive, or exempt” entities from regulatory standards that may inhibit economic recovery. President Trump threatened to withhold federal funds from Michigan and Nevada if the states expand vote-by-mail efforts, citing concerns of mail fraud. Nevada is planning an all-mail vote for its primary elections in June, and Michigan’s Secretary of State recently mailed absentee ballot applications to all registered voters. CDC released detailed guidance to help businesses safely-reopen during the pandemic, which largely mirrors an earlier draft rejected by federal officials. Department of Homeland Security extended border closures for non-essential travel between the United States and Mexico and Canada through June 22.

Several states eased additional social distancing guidelines on Wednesday, May 20. Connecticut re-opened offices, retail stores, malls, restaurants, and zoos. Flags that had been lowered to half-staff during the peak of the pandemic were raised to mark the State’s return to business. Kentucky allowed in-person worship services to resume. Walt Disney World in Florida re-opened its shopping and entertainment complex. Hundreds of McDonald’s workers in 20 cities went on strike on Wednesday to pressure the fast-food chain to improve what protesters say are inadequate employee protections. Protesters plan to offer free haircuts on the lawn outside of the Michigan capitol building, to protest Governor Whitmer’s stay-at-home order. Cambridge University became the first British university to move all student lectures online for the entire upcoming academic year. A survey of 23,000 nurses in the United States from April 15 through May 10 found that 87% of nurses reported needing to re-use personal protective equipment, including respirators.

New York State reported 112 deaths on Wednesday, May 20, up from 105 on Tuesday. A State antibody survey found that 27% of residents in low-income neighborhoods tested positive for COVID-19 antibodies, a rate significantly higher than the city-wide average of about 20%. New York’s Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) announced a pilot program to use ultraviolet light to disinfect subway cars and buses. MTA plans to purchase 150 ultraviolet lamps from Puro, a tech startup, for \$1 million. According to MTA officials, early research from Columbia University on whether UV light is effective in killing the SARS-Cov-2 virus showed “encouraging results.” Mayor de Blasio stated that pediatric vaccinations have seen a “shocking” decline over the last few months, highlighting that the number of vaccines administered to children over the age of 2 declined by 91% as compared with the same period last year.

Presidential updates

- [Executive Order on Regulatory Relief to Support Economic Recovery](#), May 19
 - President Trump signed an executive order directing agency heads to use any previously-issued emergency authorities “to the fullest extent possible” to “support the economic response to the COVID-19 outbreak.”
 - The order commands agency heads to “temporarily or permanently rescind, modify, waive, or exempt” entities from regulatory standards that may inhibit economic recovery.
 - The order requires that agency heads “exercise appropriate temporary enforcement discretion” to promote job creation and economic growth. The order also encourages agency heads to promote economic recovery through non-regulatory actions.
- [President Trump Suggests Holding G7 Summit In-Person](#), May 20
 - President Trump suggested holding the next G7 summit in person. The White House previously announced in March that the June summit would take place via video-teleconference to limit the risks associated with COVID-19.
 - The President said in a [tweet](#) that, “I am considering rescheduling the G-7, on the same or similar date, in Washington, D.C., at the legendary Camp David.” The President added that “the other members are also beginning their COMEBACK. It would be a great sign to all - normalization!”
- [President Trump Threatens to Withhold Funding from Michigan and Nevada for Expanding Mail Voting](#), May 20
 - President Trump threatened to withhold federal funds from Michigan and Nevada, if the states expand vote-by-mail efforts.
 - The President [accused](#) Michigan’s Democratic secretary of state, Jocelyn Benson, of “illegally” mailing ballots to all of the State’s registered voters. President Trump stated that he “will ask to hold up funding to Michigan if they want to go down this Voter Fraud path!”
 - Benson [replied](#) that the State sent absentee ballot “applications, not ballots” to registered voters, similar to other election officials in “Iowa, Georgia, Nebraska, and West Virginia.” Other Michigan officials expressed a desire to send out vote-by-mail applications in the hopes of easing the stress on in-person voting locations.
 - Nevada is planning an all-mail vote for its primary elections in June; election officials will automatically mail a ballot to all registered voters. President Trump [tweeted](#) that “if they do, ‘I think’ I can hold up funds to the State. Sorry, but you must not cheat in elections.”
 - Five states already [vote](#) entirely by mail, including Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington, and Utah. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, at least 21 other states allow some smaller elections, like school board contests, to be conducted by mail. Election officials in mail voting states have not reported significant issues with voter fraud.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [*COVID-19 Situation Report – 120*](#), May 19
 - The first virtual World Health Assembly (WHA) concluded on May 19. More than 130 countries adopted a [resolution](#) calling for the intensification of COVID-19 control efforts, equitable access to essential health technologies, and an independent evaluation of the global response, including WHO’s performance.
 - WHO published [guidance](#) summarizing available COVID-19 public health and social measures and proposing strategies to limit any harm resulting from these interventions.

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

- [*CDC Releases More Detailed Guidance on Re-Opening*](#), May 20
 - CDC released [detailed guidance](#) to help businesses safely re-open during the pandemic. The new document supplements the six one-page “decision tool” flow charts released late last week on schools, child care programs, camps, restaurants and bars, mass transit, and workplaces.
 - CDC recommends that food service businesses give high-risk workers jobs that limit customer interaction. CDC urges schools to consider closing school buildings for 1-2 days to disinfect the premises if a person in a school building tests positive for COVID-19. CDC offers different measures based on the level of community spread.
 - The new 60-page document largely mirrors an earlier draft which, according to those familiar with internal discussions, federal officials [rejected](#) as “too uniform and regressive” for places with a minimal number of COVID-19 cases.
 - The new document omits a section on “communities of faith” that had troubled Trump administration officials and tones down the guidance in several instances. For example, language that initially directed schools to “ensure social distancing” was change to “promote social distancing;” the phrase “if possible” was added in several sentences.
- [*Considerations for Institutes of Higher Education*](#), May 19
 - CDC published guidance on how institutes of higher education can protect students and employees during the pandemic. CDC issued similar [recommendations](#) for summer camps.
 - CDC noted a “guiding principle” that the “more an individual interacts with others, and the longer that interaction, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread.”
 - In the “lowest risk” setting, faculty and students engage in virtual-only learning. In a “more risk” setting, schools host hybrid virtual and small in-person classes with staggered or rotated schedules. In the “highest risk” setting, schools fully re-open with in-person classes, activities, and events.
 - CDC recommends spacing classroom desks at least 6 feet apart and taping off seats and rows in lecture halls to maintain social distance. Schools should close shared spaces, such as dining halls, game rooms, exercise rooms, and lounges, and consider providing grab-and-go options for meals.
- [*High COVID-19 Attack Rate Among Attendees at Events at Arkansas Church*](#), May 19
 - A recent study, published by CDC as an early release, highlighted the risks posed by large gatherings on the spread of COVID-19.

- The study analyzes events at an Arkansas church attended by 92 people in early March. Of the 45 attendees who were tested for COVID-19, 78% tested positive. An additional 26 people in the community also developed COVID-19 believed to be linked to the church.
- The pastor and his wife, who attended the events while asymptomatic, were the first to test positive and are believed to be the index cases.
- Seven people were hospitalized, and three died. Six of the seven hospitalized persons and all three deaths occurred in those aged 65 years or older, consistent with other data indicating a higher risk for COVID-19–associated hospitalization and death among those aged 65 years or older.

New York State

- [*Governor Cuomo Holds COVID-19 Press Conference*](#), May 20
 - New York reported 112 deaths on Wednesday, May 20, up from 105 on Tuesday.
 - Governor Cuomo released the results of a State antibody survey in low-income New York City neighborhoods.
 - The study found that 27% of residents in low-income neighborhoods tested positive for COVID-19 antibodies, a rate significantly higher than the city-wide average of about 20%. In Brownsville in Brooklyn and Morrisania in the Bronx, more than 40% of tested residents had COVID-19 antibodies.
 - Religious gatherings of up to 10 people can resume in New York State on Thursday, May 21, if attendees wear masks and socially distance.

New York City

- [*New York MTA Launches Pilot Program to Disinfect Mass Transit With UV Light*](#), May 20
 - New York’s Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) announced a pilot program to use ultraviolet light to disinfect subway cars and buses.
 - MTA plans to purchase 150 ultraviolet lamps from Puro, a tech startup, for \$1 million. Ultraviolet technology is currently used to disinfect hospital emergency rooms, operating rooms, and universities. Early research from Columbia University on whether UV light is effective in killing the SARS-Cov-2 virus showed “encouraging results.”
 - MTA currently shuts down the subway system each night to disinfect its 3,500 subway cars between 1 AM and 5 AM. Officials say that the laborious nightly process costs “hundreds of millions of dollars” and noted that it could be “streamlined and made more cost-effective” by the UV light program.
- [*Rent Payments and Property Sales Tax Revenues Plummet in NYC*](#), May 20
 - According to a Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY) [report](#), the State and City of New York collected a combined \$78.5 million in tax revenue on the sale of commercial and residential properties in April, a steep decline from \$217.5 million in March. The decrease marks a 64% decrease from March to April 2020 and a 48% decrease from April 2019 to April 2020.
 - REBNY described the statistics as “alarming” and indicative that “the [real estate] industry as a whole is suffering.” REBNY officials described the real estate sector as “the City’s economic engine.” Real estate related taxes generated 53% of the City’s

tax revenue in 2019. Tax revenue funds essential services, including first responder and MTA employee salaries, and public park and public transportation maintenance.

- [*New York City Department of Health COVID-19 Updates*](#), May 19
 - New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH) released a new COVID-19 [data page](#), with detailed demographic information on COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths organized by borough, age, sex, race, ethnicity, and neighborhood poverty level.
 - NYCDOH created a [program](#) to deliver methadone to New Yorkers affected by COVID-19. Methadone is a treatment for opioid use disorder and reduces the risk of overdose.
 - NYCDOH issued [guidance](#) on treating sexually transmitted infections (STIs) during the pandemic.

Other Related Updates

- [*United States Extends Border Closures with Canada and Mexico*](#), May 20
 - Department of Homeland Security (DHS) [extended](#) border closures with Canada and Mexico until June 22. The closure limits “non-essential travel” but allows the flow of “legitimate, commercial trade.”
- [*DOJ Warns California About State Restrictions on Religious Institutions*](#), May 20
 - Department of Justice (DOJ) issued a [letter](#) to California Governor Newsom, raising several “civil rights concerns” about the way religious institutions are treated in California’s re-opening plan.
 - DOJ noted that California’s re-opening plan allowed restaurants and shopping malls to re-open before religious institutions could hold worship services.
 - DOJ stated that it “does not seek to dictate” how California protects the safety of its citizens but insisted that any restrictions must treat secular and religious activities equally. The letter states, “simply put, there is no pandemic exception to the U.S. Constitution and its Bill of Rights.”
 - Federal judges previously declined to block Governor Newsom’s restrictions on religious gatherings; DOJ notes that these “decisions do not justify California’s actions.”
- [*The Incidence of Acute Myocardial Infarction During the Pandemic*](#), May 19
 - A study, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, examined the decrease in the number of patients with emergency conditions presenting to hospitals during the pandemic.
 - Researchers analyzed records from a large California health system and found that the weekly rates of hospitalization for acute myocardial infarction fell by as much as 48% during the COVID-19 pandemic. Acute myocardial infarction is the medical name for a heart attack.
 - From January to March, the weekly heart attack hospitalization rate was 4.1 per 100,000 people. From April 8 to 14, the hospitalization rate dropped to 2.1 per 100,000 people.

- [Department of Labor COVID-19 Updates](#), May 19
 - Department of Labor (DOL) released [resources](#) for employers, employees, and states to prevent unemployment insurance fraud.
 - Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued new enforcement [policies](#) for COVID-19. OSHA plans to increase in-person workplace inspections in areas of lower community spread.
 - DOL [summarized](#) recent occupational licensing reforms. Many state legislatures and governors suspended testing and certification requirements for health care professionals during the pandemic.

- [Limitations on the Role of Climate in the Early COVID-19 Pandemic](#), May 19
 - A modeling study, published in *Science*, concluded that the warmth and humidity of the summer months may not offer substantial relief from the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Researchers used data on two coronaviruses closely related to SARS-CoV-2 to predict the course of the pandemic over the coming months.
 - The study found that “while variations in weather may be important for endemic infections, during the pandemic stage of an emerging pathogen the climate drives only modest changes to pandemic size.” Instead, the study found that population’s level of immunity has a much greater influence on the trajectory of an outbreak.
 - Researchers conclude that “both tropical and temperate locations should prepare for severe outbreaks of [COVID-19] and that summertime temperatures will not effectively limit the spread” of the infection.

- [FDA COVID-19 Update: Daily Roundup](#), May 19
 - FDA [approved](#) a new drug, succinylcholine chloride injection, to facilitate tracheal intubation and to provide skeletal muscle relaxation during mechanical ventilation.
 - FDA and U.S. Food and Drug Administration (USDA) issued a joint [memorandum of understanding](#). The memorandum creates a process to determine when USDA may exercise its authority under the Defense Production Act (DPA) to prevent service interruptions at FDA-regulated food facilities.
 - FDA announced plans to [collaborate](#) with Action to use advanced analytical techniques to examine the use of diagnostics and medications during the pandemic and the risk factors for COVID-19 complications in different patient populations.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [“Disputing Tax” Newsletter on COVID-19 Tax Issues](#), May 19
- [Federal Reserve Releases Additional Terms and Conditions and FAQs on the Term Asset-Backed Securities Loan Facility \(TALF\)](#), May 19
- [House Passes Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act \(HEROES Act\)](#), May 19
- [Paycheck Protection Program Loan Forgiveness Application](#), May 18
- [U.S. Employer Return-to-Work FAQs](#), May 18

- [ESG Considerations for Asset Managers in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), May 18

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