

COVID-19 Daily Update

May 25, 2020

Summary

The United States has 1,657,441 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 98,034 reported related deaths. President Trump issued a proclamation barring foreign nationals who have been in Brazil within the last 14 days from entering the United States. The order does not apply to U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents, and will not affect bilateral trade. CDC released guidance to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in communities of faith. President Trump recently classified houses of worship “as essential places that provide essential services” and called on governors to re-open all churches, synagogues, and mosques. Department of Health and Human Services provided an updated national testing strategy to Congress on Sunday, May 24. The new plan holds individual states responsible for planning and carrying out all COVID-19 testing, while the federal government will provide some supplies needed for the tests.

WHO temporarily suspended its trial of hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine over safety concerns, while data are reviewed by the trial’s data and safety monitoring board. A study sponsored by National Institutes of Health found that remdesivir reduced the median recovery time for hospitalized COVID-19 patients. Media reports suggest that many Americans flocked to beaches and pools during Memorial Day weekend in defiance of social distancing guidelines. FDA Commissioner Hahn urged people to practice safe social distancing because the virus “is still not contained.” Many concert promoters, theater presenters, orchestras, and dance companies cancelled their 2020 events. The President of Lincoln Center commented that “it’s very hard right now to see a path to anything which looks like the traditional fall season.”

New York reported 96 deaths on Monday, May 25. The Mid-Hudson Valley Region met New York’s required benchmarks and will re-open on Tuesday, May 26. Long Island could re-open as early as Wednesday, May 27, if the number of COVID-19 deaths continues to decline. Long Island Railroad plans to disinfect all trains and buses daily, and to add 105 train cars to its current capacity to help with social distancing on trains. Governor Cuomo signed an executive order allowing “any non-essential gathering of ten or fewer individuals, for any lawful purpose or reason,” provided that social distancing protocols are followed. Groups may gather in any region of the State, even in regions that have not been cleared to re-open. New York will provide death benefits to the families of public employees who died during the pandemic, including health workers, police officers, firefighters, transit workers, and emergency medical workers. New York launched a program to provide flexible loans to small businesses that did not receive federal COVID-19 assistance.

Presidential updates

- [Trump Lays Wreath at Arlington National Cemetery](#), May 25
 - President Donald Trump participated in a Memorial Day ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arlington National Cemetery. Vice President Pence, Defense Secretary Esper, and General Jones participated in the ceremony.
 - The cemetery remains closed to the general public in an effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Only those with family passes may visit the cemetery on Memorial Day.
 - All attendees are required to wear a face covering and must observe social distancing rules. President Trump and other federal officials did not wear a face covering during the ceremony.
- [President Trump Threatens to Move Republican Convention Out of North Carolina](#), May 25
 - In a series of [tweets](#), President Trump threatened to move the Republican National Convention out of North Carolina if Governor Cooper restricts the number of convention attendees. The convention is scheduled for August 24-27 in Charlotte, North Carolina.
 - The City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County issued a joint statement in response, stating that they “will continue to plan for the RNC while respecting national and state guidance regarding the pandemic.”
- [Proclamation on Suspension of Entry of Certain Additional Persons Who Pose a Risk of Transmitting Novel Coronavirus](#), May 24
 - President Trump issued a proclamation barring any “immigrants or non-immigrants” who have been in Brazil within the last 14 days from entering the United States. The order does not apply to U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents of the United States.
 - The proclamation states that “CDC... has determined that Brazil is experiencing widespread, ongoing person-to-person transmission of SARS-CoV-2.” Brazil is among the hardest hit countries in the pandemic, with more than 350,000 reported cases and at least 22,000 related deaths.
 - White House Press Secretary McEnany commented that “today’s action will help ensure foreign nationals who have been in Brazil do not become a source of additional infections in our country.” The new travel restrictions will not affect bilateral trade.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [WHO Pauses Trial of Hydroxychloroquine Amid Safety Concerns](#), May 25
 - WHO temporarily suspended its trial of hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine over safety concerns, while data are reviewed by the trial’s data and safety monitoring board.
 - The Solidarity Trial has recruited nearly 3,500 patients from 17 countries to evaluate the safety and efficacy of four drugs against COVID-19, including remdesivir, ritonavir, interferon, and hydroxychloroquine. The trial will continue for the remaining three drugs.
- [COVID-19 Situation Report – 123](#), May 23
 - WHO and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) signed an [agreement](#) to advance public health services for 70 million people who were displaced due to COVID-19.

- WHO published [guidance](#) on the transport and repatriation of COVID-19 human remains by air.

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

- [CDC Releases Recommendations for Communities of Faith](#), May 22
 - CDC released [guidance](#) to prevent COVID-19 exposure in communities of faith. CDC also released an [FAQ](#) for administrators and leaders of faith-based organizations.
 - CDC recommends temporarily limiting the sharing of frequently touched objects, promoting social distancing, and disinfecting high-touch surfaces between services.
 - CDC specifically notes that the guidance “is not intended to infringe on rights protected by the first amendment.” CDC urges state and local authorities “to take this vital right into account when establishing their own re-opening plans.”
 - President Trump recently [classified](#) houses of worship “as essential places that provide essential services” and called on governors to re-open all churches, synagogues, and mosques. The President asserted that “if they don’t do it, I will override the governors” and stated that “in America, we need more prayer, not less.”
- [COVIDView Weekly Surveillance Summary of U.S. COVID-19 Activity](#), May 22
 - CDC summarized key COVID-19 disease indicators for the week ending May 16.
 - The national percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 decreased from the previous week; it decreased from 10.7% to 8.5% in public health labs and decreased from 9.9% to 7.9% in commercial labs.
 - The overall cumulative hospitalization rate is 67.9 per 100,000, with the highest rates in people 65 years and older (241.1 per 100,000) and 50-64 years (105.9 per 100,000).
 - Based on death certificate data, the percentage of total deaths attributed to pneumonia, influenza, or COVID-19 decreased from 18.5% to 12% from the prior week, but remained above baseline.

New York State

- [Governor Cuomo Holds Press Conference on COVID-19](#), May 25
 - New York reported 96 deaths on Monday, May 25, marking the second time that the death toll fell below 100 deaths since late March.
 - New York State will provide death benefits to the families of public employees who died during the pandemic. These include the families of health workers, police officers, firefighters, transit workers, and emergency medical workers.
 - Benefits will be paid out of state and local pension funds. Governor Cuomo reiterated his request that the federal government provide hazard pay to essential workers during the pandemic.
- [Governor Cuomo Issues Executive Order Allowing Gatherings of 10 People](#), May 23
 - Governor Cuomo signed an [executive order](#) allowing “any non-essential gathering of ten or fewer individuals, for any lawful purpose or reason,” provided that social distancing protocols are followed. Groups may gather in any region of the State, even in regions that have not been cleared to re-open.
 - Cuomo initially allowed groups of 10 people to gather for religious services or for Memorial Day celebrations, but later expanded the policy after it was challenged by

New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU). NYCLU filed a suit alleging that the order was unlawful because it banned protests and other activities protected by the First Amendment.

- Councilman Mark Levine condemned the order and [tweeted](#) that “this shocking order, forced by a lawsuit, changes nothing about the risks associated with group gatherings — especially those held indoors.” He urged that “no one should interpret this as advice to change their behavior.”
- [Additional Activities Resume in New York State](#), May 24
 - Professional sports leagues in New York are now allowed to begin training camps while following appropriate health protocols. Governor Cuomo encouraged sports to “come back without having people in the stadium.”
 - Governor Cuomo highlighted that Long Island could re-open as early as Wednesday, May 27, if the number of COVID-19 deaths continues to decline.
 - Long Island Railroad plans to disinfect all trains and buses daily; to add 105 train cars to its current capacity, an increase of roughly 15%, to help with social distancing on trains; and to require that all riders wear masks.
 - Campgrounds and RV parks opened statewide on Monday, May 25. Veterinarian practices will be allowed to open in all regions beginning on Tuesday, May 26.
- [Eighth New York Region Meets State’s Re-Opening Criteria](#), May 23
 - The Mid-Hudson Valley Region met New York’s required benchmarks and will re-open on Tuesday, May 26. Seven other regions have re-opened in recent weeks, including the Capital Region, Western New York, Central New York, North Country, Finger Lakes, Southern Tier, and Mohawk Valley.
- [New York Launches Fund to Help Small Businesses](#), May 22
 - New York launched the New York Forward Loan Fund to provide flexible loans to small businesses that did not receive federal COVID-19 assistance. The \$100 million program will distribute loans to businesses with 20 or fewer employees and less than \$3 million in gross revenues, with a focus on minority and women owned small businesses.
 - New York will make its contact tracing curriculum available at no cost to all states through the National Governors Association. The State’s comprehensive online curriculum was developed in partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University.

New York City

- [City Council Releases Recommendations for Safely Opening NYC Beaches](#), May 23
 - Members of the New York City Council released guidelines and recommendations for the City to safely re-open beaches this summer. City beaches remain closed for swimming and sunbathing.
 - Speaker Johnson noted that, “[a]ccess to city beaches isn’t just a summer fun issue. It is an equity issue and a public health issue. All New Yorkers, not just those wealthy enough to travel out of the city, deserve access to the beach this summer.”

- The Council recommends: putting flags in the sand to indicate where beachgoers can sit while social distancing; creating walking lanes; limiting entry; increasing transportation options; and providing lifeguards with personal protective equipment and testing.
- [*New York City Extends Open Streets Program*](#), May 22
 - New York City opened an additional 13 miles of streets for pedestrians and cyclists on Saturday, May 23. There are now 43 miles of “open streets” across New York City to provide “space to socially distance outside.”

Other Related Updates

- [*HHS Provides National Testing Strategy*](#), May 25
 - Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) provided an updated testing strategy to Congress on Sunday, May 24. The Washington Post obtained the 81-page document from an individual on Capitol Hill.
 - The new report elaborates on an 11-page blueprint released by the White House last month. The blueprint gave states the primary responsibility for testing, and stated that the federal government would “provide strategic direction and technical assistance” and “act as a supplier of last resort.”
 - The new report similarly holds individual states responsible for planning and carrying out all COVID-19 testing, while the federal government will provide some supplies needed for the tests.
 - The new report states that existing testing capacity, if properly targeted, is sufficient to contain the outbreak. The United States currently conducts around 400,000 tests per day. Some epidemiologists continue to [assert](#) that the United States does not have sufficient testing capacity.
 - Democratic Congressional leaders, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senator Chuck Schumer, issued a joint statement in response to the new testing plan, accusing the administration of “reject[ing] responsibility and dump[ing] the burden onto the states.”
- [*White House Goal on Testing Nursing Home Residents Will Not Be Met*](#), May 25
 - On May 11, the White House coronavirus task force strongly [urged](#) governors to test all nursing home residents and staff for COVID-19 “within the next two weeks.”
 - Dr. Birx acknowledged on Friday, May 22, that the two-week recommendation was a “challenge” but stressed that the efforts were needed because of the particular vulnerability of nursing homes.
 - A review by the Associated Press found that at least half of the states will not meet the White House’s May 25 deadline. Many states noted that testing all residents and staff within a two-week window requires unrealistic logistics, costs, and manpower. Other states questioned whether universal testing in nursing homes is a prudent use of resources, calling the practice “fairly useless” without first garnering more widespread testing capabilities.

- [Peer-Reviewed Data Shows Remdesivir for COVID-19 Improves Recovery Time](#), May 22
 - A randomized, controlled [study](#), published in the New England Journal of Medicine, examined the use of intravenous remdesivir in hospitalized COVID-19 patients with evidence of lower respiratory tract involvement.
 - The study was sponsored by National Institutes of Health (NIH) through National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID).
 - 1,063 participants across 10 countries received a 10-day course of remdesivir or a placebo. The median time to recovery was 11 days for patients treated with remdesivir compared with 15 days for those who received the placebo. The trial results also suggested a survival benefit, with a 14-day mortality rate of 7.1% for the group receiving remdesivir versus 11.9% for the placebo group.
 - According to NIH, “the findings support remdesivir as the standard therapy for patients hospitalized with COVID-19 and requiring supplemental oxygen therapy.”
 - Researchers noted that the mortality rate of 7.1% at 14 days in the remdesivir arm indicates the need to evaluate antivirals with other therapeutic agents to improve clinical outcomes for COVID-19 patients.

- [Exemption Allowing Entry of Foreign Professional Athletes into the United States](#), May 22
 - Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Wolf signed an [order](#) exempting certain foreign professional athletes who compete in professional sporting events from proclamations barring their entry into the United States.
 - These include athletes in Major League Baseball (MLB), National Basketball Association (NBA), Professional Golfer’s Association (PGA) Tour, National Hockey League (NHL), Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP), and Women’s Tennis Association (WTA).
 - Secretary Wolf commented that “professional sporting events provide much needed economic benefits, but equally important, they provide community pride and national unity.”

- [PCR Assays for SARS-CoV-2: Testing the Tests](#), May 22
 - A study, published in the Journal of Clinical Microbiology, examined the accuracy of commercially available COVID-19 diagnostic tests.
 - Researchers compared their laboratory-developed, CDC-based test with four commercial SARS-CoV-2 molecular tests in 169 nasopharyngeal swabs.
 - Among samples testing positive with the CDC assay, 13 of 13 were detected with Xpert Xpress, 11 of 11 with Simplexa, 24 of 26 with Panther Fusion, and 19 of 20 with Cobas 6800.
 - The study also tested detection of SARS-CoV-2 RNA in various commercial transport media and under different storage conditions (room temperature, refrigerated, frozen) for up to 14 days. Media and storage conditions minimally influenced test results.
 - Researchers concluded that available COVID-19 tests have “high specificity and sensitivity” and noted that “the virus appears very stable under current transport and storage conditions.”

- [FDA COVID-19 Update: Daily Roundup](#), May 22
 - FDA and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released [recommendations](#) to address shortages in personal protective equipment (PPE) and sanitation supplies in the food and agriculture industry.
 - FDA issued [guidance](#) to allow manufacturers to make minor food formulation changes without making conforming label changes. The guidance also provides temporary regulatory flexibility in food labeling requirements for the vending machine industry.
 - FDA and FTC issued [warning letters](#) to two companies for selling fraudulent COVID-19 products.
 - FDA updated an [FAQ](#) on COVID-19 testing to highlight that test developers may use at-home specimen collection only if home collection is specifically authorized under the test's emergency use authorization (EUA).

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [COVID-19 and the Challenges of Remotely Running a College Athletics Department](#), May 22
- [Illinois Revises Immunity from Civil Liability for Certain Health Care Providers](#), May 21
- [Credit Agreements: Amendments to Consider in Light of COVID-19](#), May 21
- [The UK Information Commissioner's Regulatory Approach and Priorities During COVID-19](#), May 21

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