

COVID-19 Daily Update

May 31, 2020

Summary

The United States has 1,780,897 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 104,115 reported related deaths. There are now more than 6 million confirmed COVID-19 cases worldwide. President Trump announced that the United States will terminate its relationship with WHO and stated that the funds will be directed to other “deserving urgent global public health needs.” Several world leaders urged the President to reconsider his decision. A recent CDC report found that U.S. community transmission of COVID-19 likely began in late January or early February. The report notes that, until late February, the virus incidence was too low to be detected by syndromic surveillance. CDC Director Redfield defended CDC’s delayed rollout of COVID-19 testing early in the pandemic and asserted that even if widespread diagnostic testing had been in place, it would have been as ineffective as “looking for a needle in a haystack.” In a 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court rejected a California church’s attempt to overturn the State’s COVID-19 restrictions on in-person religious services.

Former FDA Commissioner Gottlieb noted his concern that mass protests over police violence in at least 75 U.S. cities will seed new COVID-19 outbreaks. Los Angeles suspended COVID-19 testing on Saturday afternoon due to safety concerns related to the protests. Greece will re-open to all international flights on July 1, with random COVID-19 screenings for all passengers. On Monday, June 1, primary schools will re-open in England with new social-distancing rules. United Airlines announced plans to reduce management and support staff by at least 30% by October, including senior-executive positions. The University of Michigan announced that it is “very optimistic” that the school will be able to host a “public-health-informed residential semester” this fall. Connecticut announced that the State will begin to allow gatherings of up to 10 people indoors and 25 people outdoors.

New York reported 56 deaths and 191 new hospitalizations on Sunday, May 31. Governor Cuomo commented that, “the reduction in New York’s new COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, intubations, and other metrics represent tremendous progress from where we were.” Cuomo signed a law establishing death benefits for the families of State and local government employees who died from COVID-19 during the pandemic. Dentist offices across the State will be allowed to re-open on Monday, June 1, provided that they follow social distancing and safety recommendations. The State plans to open a new testing center in each of the City’s 10 zip codes with the highest infection rates. Health officials urged protesters in the City to take social distancing precautions while demonstrating and invited them to get tested for the virus. Mayor de Blasio still anticipates that the City will move into the first phase of its re-opening on June 8.

Presidential updates

- [*President Trump Terminates Relationship With World Health Organization*](#), May 29
 - President Trump announced that the United States is “terminating our relationship with the World Health Organization” and accused WHO of failing to adequately respond to the pandemic.
 - The President expressed that “China has total control over the World Health Organization, despite only paying \$40 million per year compared to what the United States has been paying, which is approximately \$450 million a year.”
 - Trump stated that the funds will be re-directed “to other worldwide and deserving urgent global public health needs.”
 - WHO had no comment on the announcement, but WHO member states [expressed](#) disappointment in the retreat of the Agency’s largest single donor. South African Health Minister Mkhize called the decision “unfortunate.” Germany’s foreign minister said that Trump’s plan sends “the wrong signal at the wrong time.”
 - European Union officials issued a [joint statement](#) urging the President to reconsider his decision and stated that “actions that weaken international results” during the pandemic “must be avoided.”
 - In April, Trump temporarily halted U.S. funding to WHO and accused it of “mismanaging and covering up the spread of the coronavirus.” On May 18, Trump gave WHO 30 days to make substantial changes or permanent funding cuts. Trump’s announcement on May 29 happened less than two weeks after that ultimatum.
- [*President Trump Postpones G7 Summit*](#), May 31
 - President Trump postponed a Group of 7 meeting until at least September. The meeting was initially scheduled for June.
 - Trump previously announced in March that the June summit would take place virtually. Earlier in May, the President announced plans to invite participating leaders to Washington as a demonstration of a return to normalcy.
 - On Saturday, May 30, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany said that she would not attend the meeting in person, citing concerns about COVID-19.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [*COVID-19 Situation Report – 131*](#), May 31
 - WHO published a [surveillance protocol](#) for COVID-19 infections among health care workers.
 - WHO issued planning [recommendations](#) for mass gatherings during the pandemic.
 - WHO [launched](#) the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP), a policy initiative among 35 countries aimed at increasing the accessibility of COVID-19 vaccines, tests, and treatments.

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

- [*COVIDView Weekly Surveillance Summary of U.S. COVID-19 Activity*](#), May 29
 - CDC summarized key COVID-19 disease indicators for the week ending May 23.
 - The national percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 decreased from the previous week; it decreased from 8.4% to 7% in public health labs and decreased from 7.8% to 6.9% in commercial labs.

- The overall cumulative hospitalization rate is 73.3 per 100,000, with the highest rates in people 65 years and older (229.7 per 100,000) and 50-64 years (113.4 per 100,000).
- Based on death certificate data, the percentage of total deaths attributed to pneumonia, influenza, or COVID-19 decreased from 15.9% to 9.8% from the prior week, but remained above baseline.
- [*Evidence for Limited Early Spread of COVID-19 Within the United States*](#), May 29
 - A report, published by CDC as an early release, examined the timeline of the spread of COVID-19 in the United States.
 - The report examined syndromic surveillance, virus surveillance, phylogenetic analysis, and retrospectively identified cases and concluded that limited U.S. community transmission of COVID-19 likely began in late January or early February, after a single importation from China, followed by multiple importations from Europe.
 - The report found that, until late February, COVID-19 incidence was too low to be detected by emergency department syndromic surveillance for COVID-19-like illness.
 - Based on these findings, CDC Director Redfield [defended](#) CDC's delayed rollout of COVID-19 testing early in the pandemic. Redfield asserted that even if widespread diagnostic testing had been in place, it would have been like "looking for a needle in a haystack."

New York State

- [*Governor Cuomo Holds Daily Press Conference on COVID-19*](#), May 31
 - New York reported 56 deaths on Sunday, May 31. Since March, nearly 30,000 New Yorkers have died from COVID-19.
 - The State reported 191 new hospitalizations on Sunday, down from 3,400 hospitalizations per day at the peak of the pandemic.
 - The State plans to focus on controlling hot spots across New York City ahead of the City's targeted re-opening date on June 8. State officials will ensure that the City's 11 public hospitals and more than 100 private hospitals have "surge and flex" capacity, or the ability to shift and share resources as needed, to deal with a potential spike of new virus patients.
 - The State will open a new testing center in each of the City's 10 zip codes with the highest infection rates, which include predominately low-income and minority communities in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and parts of Queens.
 - Dentist offices across the State will be allowed to re-open on Monday, June 1, provided that they follow social distancing and safety recommendations.
- [*State Provides Death Benefits for Families of Frontline Government Workers*](#), May 30
 - Governor Cuomo signed a [law](#) establishing death benefits for the families of State and local government employees who died from COVID-19 during the pandemic. These include police officers, public health workers, transit workers and paramedics.
 - The benefits are more substantial than the regular death benefit received by the families of public workers.
 - Cuomo commented that "it is the least we can do to say thank you, and we honor you, and we remember you."

New York City

- [*Mayor de Blasio Holds Media Availability on COVID-19*](#), May 31
 - Mayor de Blasio estimated that between 5,000 and 6,000 people were involved in protests over police brutality in the City on Saturday, May 30.
 - Mayor de Blasio stated that the protests would not impact the City’s target date to re-open on June 8.
 - Officials strongly defended the right to protest but expressed concern that the protests could increase the spread of the virus.
 - New York City health officials urged protesters to take social distancing precautions while demonstrating and invited them to get tested for the virus. Atlanta Mayor Bottoms [*issued*](#) a similar warning stating that “if you were out protesting... you probably need to go get a COVID test this week.”
- [*Department of Health Guidance on Extending In-Person Health Care Services*](#), May 29
 - New York City Department of Health (NYCDOH) issued [*guidance*](#) for increased health care access in the City.
 - NYCDOH urged doctors to advise patients to promptly seek medical care for severe symptoms due to any condition.
 - When re-opening or expanding current in-person clinical services, providers should prioritize essential medical care, patients at higher risk for poor health outcomes, and patients who cannot access telemedicine.
 - NYCDOH asked providers to encourage patients to donate blood, highlighting the severe blood shortage nationally and in New York City. Extra precautions have been put in place to ensure donor safety during the pandemic.
- [*General Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfection for Non-Health Care Settings*](#), May 29
 - NYCDOH issued updated [*guidance*](#) for cleaning and disinfecting non-health care settings, such as commercial and residential buildings.
- [*City Expands COVID-19 Community Partnerships*](#), May 29
 - The City plans to add 375 workers to its community ambassador program, to educate residents about the importance of social distancing and to distribute free face coverings.
 - The City plans to create a public awareness campaign with equity-based messaging to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color.

Other Related Updates

- [*Supreme Court Rejects Church’s Challenge To California’s Coronavirus Rules*](#), May 30
 - In a 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court rejected a California church’s attempt to overturn the State’s COVID-19 restrictions on in-person religious services.
 - The California order limits religious congregations to 25% of building capacity or a maximum of 100 attendees, whichever is lower. Plaintiffs noted that “the only two industries with percentage caps are retail and houses of worship, and retail is set at a 50% cap.”
 - A divided three-judge panel on the Ninth Circuit previously found that the shutdown orders did not single out houses of worship for unfavorable treatment.

- Writing for the majority, Chief Justice Roberts highlighted that the Constitution generally grants broad leeway to state leaders in circumstances of medical uncertainty.
 - The Court found that the restrictions “appear consistent with the free exercise clause of the First Amendment” because the order imposes similar restrictions on secular activities “where large groups of people gather in close proximity for extended periods of time,” such as movies, sports, and theater performances.
 - Writing for three of the four conservative justices who dissented, Justice Kavanaugh stated that the order amounted to “discrimination against religious worship services and in favor of comparable secular businesses.”
- [*FDA COVID-19 Update: Daily Roundup*](#), May 29
 - FDA created a [template](#) to facilitate requests for emergency use authorizations (EUA) for COVID-19 tests with at-home self-collection.
 - FDA issued [warning letters](#) to two companies for selling fraudulent COVID-19 products.
 - FDA made its [FDA MyStudies](#) app available to investigators as a free platform to securely obtain patients’ informed consent for eligible clinical trials when face-to-face contact is not possible or practical due to COVID-19 control measures.
- [*COVID-19 in Admitted Pediatric Patients in the U.S. and Canada*](#), May 30
 - An article published in the New England Journal of Medicine reviewed three early reports on COVID-19 hospitalizations in 48 pediatric hospitals in the United States and Canada between March 14 and April 30.
 - The reports aggregated data from the International COVID-19 Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) Collaborative, the Children’s National Hospital in Washington, D.C., and Children’s Hospital Montefiore in New York City.
 - In all three cohorts, patients admitted to the pediatric intensive care unit (PICU) tended to be older, with a median age of 13, 17, and 15. Co-morbidities were very common in all three cohorts and included obesity, neurologic condition, seizure disorder, immunosuppression, and overall medical complexity.
 - Most patients presented with respiratory symptoms (73%, 76%, and 63%). Many patients (81%, 100%, and 77%) received respiratory support, including high-flow nasal cannula and non-invasive positive pressure ventilation, but less than half required intubation.
- [*State Department Update on Passport Services*](#), May 29
 - Department of State issued an update on passport services during the pandemic.
 - In March, the Department suspended expedited passport processing and restricted service at U.S. passport agencies.
 - The Department announced that it will follow a phased re-opening process.
 - In phase one, limited staff will return and existing passport applications will be processed on a “first in, first out basis.” Submitting new passport applications during phase one is not recommended.
 - In phase two, most staff will return to work. In phase three, all remaining staff will return to work and expedited passport processing will be resumed.

- During all phases, staff and customers must wear cloth face coverings and practice social distancing.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [Federal Reserve Releases Updated Main Street Lending FAQs and Form Agreements](#), May 29
- [Treasury Issues Loan Forgiveness Guidance Regarding Paycheck Protection Program](#), May 27
- [European Data Protection Board \(EDBP\) Sheds Light on Use of Health Data to Aid Research Efforts](#), May 27

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