

October 19, 2020

Summary

The United States has 8,180,502 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 219,891 reported related deaths. The United States is currently averaging 55,000 new COVID-19 cases per day, up 60% since mid-September; on October 16, the country recorded the most new infections in a day since July. Despite rising cases, Dr. Fauci told the press that he is not advocating for a national lockdown. Dr. Fauci emphasized the country should observe public health measures designed to prevent spread of the virus and to safely keep the economy open. CDC published study results showing that internet searches for mental health topics such as “anxiety” and “panic attack” increased during a statewide lockdown, suggesting that measures to curb the spread of the virus have negatively affected Americans’ mental health. National Governors Association (NGA), a bi-partisan group led by New York Governor Cuomo, sent the White House questions regarding its plan for distributing COVID-19 vaccines; NGA asked about federal funding for states’ vaccine distribution efforts and the federal government’s strategy for addressing vaccine shortages. On October 18, House Speaker Pelosi said that she and Treasury Secretary Mnuchin must reach a deal on a second round of stimulus spending by October 20 in order to pass stimulus legislation before the November elections.

Cases continue to rise throughout the country, particularly in the Midwest and Rocky Mountains, as rural areas that previously escaped the worst of the pandemic have seen cases soar to record numbers. North Dakota now has the most cases per capita in the country. States throughout the country began releasing vaccine rollout plans. Massachusetts governor Charlie Baker allowed the state’s moratorium on evictions and foreclosures to end, but announced \$171 million in new funds aimed to help renters, landlords, and rehousing programs. Nebraska governor Pete Ricketts announced the state will re-impose public health restrictions as cases climb to record numbers, including requiring hospitals to leave 10% of beds open for COVID-19 patients, and restrictions on indoor gatherings, restaurants and bars, and wedding and funeral events.

New York reported 14 deaths, 934 hospitalizations, and 198 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on October 18, 2020. Approximately 998, or 1.2% of the 82,009 tests administered in New York on October 18 were positive for COVID-19. Governor Cuomo announced he would realign cluster zones throughout New York City as he touted the effectiveness of the tiered restrictions. Governor Cuomo announced NYSDOH’s draft COVID-19 vaccination plan, which proposes to vaccinate New Yorkers in five phases based on the resident’s health needs and their line of work; medical professionals, first responders, and at-risk elderly patients will receive top priority. Governor Cuomo announced that movie theaters outside of New York City could reopen, subject to closure if positivity rates rise. A group representing private-sector businesses in New York City urged the city to adopt measures to increase public confidence in entering public spaces.

Presidential updates

- [*President Trump Addresses Group of Senior Citizens Regarding the Pandemic*](#), October 16
 - While addressing a group of senior citizens in Fort Myers, Florida, President Trump said that his administration is “moving heaven and earth . . . to deliver lifesaving therapies in record time, and to distribute a safe and effective vaccine before the end of the year.”
 - Trump said that Operation Warp Speed, the federal government’s COVID-19 vaccine acceleration initiative, will be able to deliver at least 100 million doses of a COVID-19 vaccine this year.
 - Last week, Dr. Fauci [said](#) that researchers should know by November or December whether some vaccine candidates currently in clinical trials are safe; however, even if a candidate proves safe, initial quantities will likely only be a few million doses.
 - Trump announced that the federal government recently finalized a partnership with CVS and Walgreens to deliver COVID-19 vaccines directly to nursing homes at no cost to the residents.
 - President Trump noted that his administration is working with FDA and HHS to expand production of monoclonal antibody therapies like the one President Trump received while he was being treated for COVID-19 earlier this month. Trump said that his administration will make monoclonal antibody treatments “available to everyone who needs it for free—anybody in the country.”
 - Several companies are [working](#) on developing and securing FDA approval for monoclonal antibody treatments, including drug maker Regeneron which provided the treatment administered to President Trump. However, monoclonal antibodies are [difficult](#) and expensive to produce.
 - On October 9, HHS [announced](#) that Operation Warp Speed is providing AstraZeneca with \$486 million to support development and manufacture of its monoclonal antibody treatment.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [*WHO COVID-19 Updates*](#), October 19
 - WHO officials [expressed](#) concern that lack of clarity regarding vaccine liability could cause delay for the WHO vaccine drive. WHO’s global vaccine plan, COVAX, will provide vaccines at low or no cost to 92 low or middle income countries. However, the plan lacks clearly stated terms regarding who will be responsible for liability if the vaccine causes health problems, and fear of liability may lead some governments to delay or avoid deploying COVAX vaccines, prolonging the pandemic in places ill-equipped to cope.

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

- [*COVIDView Weekly Surveillance Summary of U.S. COVID-19 Activity*](#), October 16
 - CDC summarized key COVID-19 disease indicators for the week ending October 10.
 - The national average of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 decreased from 5.3% to 5.7% from October 3 to October 10.
 - Regionally, the percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 declined or remained the same in six of ten regions, but increased in the Midwest, South Central, Central, and Pacific Northwest regions. The highest percentages of

positive specimens were seen in the Southeast (6.5%), South Central (8.0%), Central (10.1%), and Mountain (7.0%) regions.

- The overall cumulative hospitalization rate was 188.2 per 100,000, up from 183.2 per 100,000 during the previous week.
- Based on death certificate data, the percentage of total deaths attributed to pneumonia, influenza, or COVID-19 increased 0.2% from October 3 (7.0%) to October 10 (7.2%). The percentage remains above the epidemic threshold and will likely increase as more death certificates are processed.

- [CDC Publishes Results of Study Regarding Mental Health Effects of COVID-19 Lockdowns](#), October 16

- CDC summarized the results of a [study](#) published in Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Internal Medicine regarding the mental health consequences of COVID-19 lockdowns.
- To understand the mental health effects of the lockdowns, researchers observed trends in the volume of internet searches regarding certain mental health topics, including “anxiety,” “panic attack,” “insomnia,” “suicide,” and “depression” among individuals located in New York during a statewide lockdown that began March 22, 2020.
- Researchers found that searches for “anxiety” increased following March 22, 2020 and remained significantly higher than expected for three consecutive weeks. Searches for “panic attack” soared during the first week of the lockdown, increasing 56%, and remained higher than expected for five consecutive weeks. During the entire lockdown, searches for “insomnia” were on average 21% higher than expected.
- Searches for “suicide” and “depression” did not increase significantly.
- Researchers concluded that these results “suggest the need to provide focused competent online and telemedicine services during quarantines.”

New York State

- [New York State COVID-19 Updates](#), October 19
 - New York reported 14 deaths, 934 hospitalizations, and 198 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on October 18, 2020.
 - Approximately 998, or 1.2% of the 82,009 tests administered in New York on October 18 were positive for COVID-19
 - On October 19, Governor Cuomo [announced](#) that he would realign the cluster-zone restrictions later this week, noting that the “block-by-block” restrictions have effectively reversed positivity rate growth over the past few weeks. New York, however, is concerned that a recent surge in New Jersey will cause a corresponding increase in Greater New York.
 - On October 18, Governor Cuomo [announced](#) that NYSDOH released a draft COVID-19 Vaccination Administration Program that would serve as an initial framework for ensuring the safe and effective distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine in New York. The plan denotes six priority groups, which rise in vaccination priority based on risk of infection. Currently, the plan contemplates distributing vaccines in five phases: (1) medical professionals, workers at long-term care facilities, and at-risk long-term care facility patients; (2) first responders, teachers and school staff, other essential frontline workers (e.g., grocery store workers), and other at-risk long-term care

patients; (3) Individuals older than 65, or individuals younger than 65 who are at high-risk; (4) all other essential workers, and (5) healthy adults and children.

- On October 17, Governor Cuomo [announced](#) that most movie theaters outside of New York City could reopen at 25% capacity on October 23. Theaters will be permitted to remain open in counties that do not have any cluster zones and where positivity rates are less than 2% over a 14-day average.

New York City

- [New York City COVID-19 Updates](#), October 19
 - New York City health officials [traced](#) the recent coronavirus outbreak in Brooklyn and Queens to a vacation community in the Jersey Shore town of Deal, New Jersey. Brooklyn residents vacationing in the area typically reside a few miles north of Coney Island. New Jersey officials said that the outbreak was not identified in Deal, N.J. because their system would have identified positive cases to a person's home address rather than their vacation home.
- [Business Group Urges Changes to New York City's Health System](#), October 19
 - The Partnership for New York City, a group representing some of New York's largest private-sector employers like Bank of America Corp., Goldman Sachs Group, Inc., and JetBlue Airways Corp., is calling for reforms to the City's health care programs and policies. Generally, the Partnership is calling for a system to set health standards for indoor spaces and better integrate health care with social and economic initiatives for vulnerable New Yorkers.
 - The group has recommended that the City develop group purchasing, local-sourcing or manufacturing of hospital supplies designed to combat the City's massive shortage of personal protective equipment for health care workers.
 - The partnership also recommends installing a government-accredited rating system that would restore public confidence in health and safety practice in public spaces, similar to the City's restaurant-grading system, for example.

Other Related Updates

- [House Speaker Pelosi Imposes Deadline for Reaching Stimulus Deal](#), October 18
 - House Speaker Pelosi and White House representative Treasury Secretary Mnuchin have been negotiating a second round of stimulus spending to address the economic damage caused by the pandemic.
 - On October 17, Pelosi said that she and Mnuchin must reach a deal by October 20 in order for Congress to pass stimulus legislation before the November elections.
 - Pelosi and the White House seem to be at odds more over the substance of the stimulus package than the dollar amount.
 - In a media interview on October 17, President Trump said he would approve a package even larger than the \$2.2 trillion House Democrats have sought.
 - However, Pelosi and Mnuchin remain at odds over the specific terms of any stimulus legislation. On October 15 Mnuchin said the White House was willing to accept a national testing plan included in Pelosi's proposed package with only "minor edits." But on October 18, Pelosi said that the White House's edits were not minor; they included replacing language requiring the executive branch to implement the testing program with language authorizing them to do so.

- Pelosi and Mnuchin also have yet to agree on terms regarding funding for cities and states, child care, tax credits for lower-income Americans, liability protections sought by Republicans and more.
- Even if Pelosi and Mnuchin reach an agreement, Republicans in Congress have indicated strong opposition to another trillion dollar spending bill; on October 21, the Senate will vote on a narrow \$500 billion stimulus bill similar to a bill the House failed to pass in September.
- [*FDA Officials Explain Requiring Two-Month Median Follow-up Requirement for Vaccine Trials*](#), October 16
 - After Food and Drug Administration (FDA) provided [guidance](#) in early October that any vaccine trials must establish median of two months follow-up for safety and efficacy data for all participants to receive an emergency use authorization (EUA), FDA officials wrote to explain the reasoning behind the two-month requirement in New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM).
 - In order to issue an EUA, FDA must determine that the known and potential benefits of a product outweigh its known and potential risks in preventing, diagnosing, or treating serious or life-threatening diseases.
 - While most vaccine clinical trials include a substantially longer follow-up of trial participants to track safety and efficacy (e.g. clinical trials for follow-up of two shingles vaccines included follow-up at 3.1 years and 3.9 years), FDA hopes to balance the need for rigorous investigation with the importance of making a vaccine for the current pandemic available as soon as possible.
 - Adverse events to vaccination typically start within six weeks of vaccine receipt. Similarly, if vaccine efficacy wanes over time, substantial waning would typically become apparent in the second month after receipt.
 - Because any adverse events or reductions in efficacy are likely to appear within two months after receipt, FDA officials believe that a median two-month follow-up requirement properly balances the need for rigorous testing against the need for a publicly available vaccine.
 - By contrast, WHO recently drafted guidelines requiring three months of efficacy follow-up before a vaccine could be considered for its emergency use listing.
- [*FDA COVID-19 Updates*](#), October 19
 - FDA [announced](#) it will host a Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee meeting on October 22, 2020, from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM ET. The Committee will meet in open session to discuss the development, authorization, and licensure of vaccines to prevent COVID-19. No specific application will be discussed at the meeting.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [*HHS Provider Relief Fund Opens Portal for Phase Three General Distribution*](#), October 8
- [*House Funding Bill Proposes Repayment Relief for Medicare Accelerated and Advance Payment Programs Participants*](#), October 1

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