

October 23, 2020

Summary

The United States has 8,472,847 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 223,752 reported related deaths. The United States recorded 73,000 new coronavirus infections on October 22, the highest daily total since July. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the antiviral drug Veklury (remdesivir) for the treatment of hospitalized COVID-19 patients. Remdesivir is the first COVID-19 treatment to receive FDA approval. AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson announced that they are resuming clinical trials of their COVID-19 vaccine candidates in the United States; the trials were previously paused due to safety concerns. CDC revised its guidance regarding quarantining after exposure to the virus. CDC recommends that individuals quarantine if they have been in “close contact” with an infected person; CDC revised its definition of “close contact” from spending 15 consecutive minutes within six feet of an infected person to spending 15 *cumulative* minutes within six feet of an infected person during a 24-hour period.

Boston, Massachusetts public schools superintendent Brenda Cassellius suspended in-person learning for all students on October 22 in response to rising COVID-19 numbers in the district. All students will learn remotely until there are two full weeks of falling infection rates. Teachers in Houston, Texas staged a “sickout” protest - dozens of teachers called in sick - against lax COVID-19 safety procedures just three days after classrooms reopened for in-person learning. Hospitals across the Midwest, including in Idaho, Missouri, and North Dakota, report they are running out of intensive care beds as U.S. hospitalizations have risen 40% in the past month. North Carolina governor Roy Cooper announced the state will remain in Phase 3 of re-opening for another three weeks, maintaining limits on large gatherings, indoor bars, and mask mandates in public.

New York reported 7 deaths, 950 hospitalizations, and 201 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Thursday, October 22. Approximately 1,637, or 1.16% of the 141,508 tests administered in New York on October 22 were positive for COVID-19. Two New York prisons, Elmira Correctional Facility and Green Correctional Facility, are experiencing coronavirus outbreaks this week. On October 20, Governor Cuomo extended the states’ commercial eviction moratorium through January 1, 2021. The moratorium has been in place since March 20. Although Wall Street’s first- and second-quarter profits are up 82% this year over last, Wall Street expects to lose 7,300 jobs by the end of the year. A study released by New York University’s Grossman School of Medicine found that the mortality rate for New Yorkers hospitalized with COVID-19 has decreased from roughly 25% in March to 7% in August.

Presidential updates

- [President Trump Discusses Pandemic Response During Second Presidential Debate](#), October 22
 - During the second presidential debate, former vice president and Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden and President Trump sparred over President Trump's response to the pandemic.
 - Former Vice President Biden accused President Trump of lacking a plan to stop the spread of COVID-19, warning of a "dark winter" ahead.
 - President Trump said that the United States is "rounding a corner" in the pandemic and noted that a vaccine could be ready this year.
 - President Trump also [expressed](#) his view that the United States must keep its economy open, in spite of the pandemic, opining that the "the cure cannot be worse than the problem itself."
 - Former Vice President Biden said that he would not rule out the possibility of additional shut downs but said he would "shut down the virus, not the country."

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [WHO COVID-19 Updates](#), October 23
 - WHO [launched](#) a Laboratory Assessment Tool (LAT) specifically designed to assess capacities of existing laboratories which have implemented or aim to implement COVID-19 testing. The tool addresses both core capacities of a lab and specificities related to COVID-19 testing. The tool is an excel [file](#), and WHO also provides a user [guide](#).

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

- [CDC Revises Definition of "Close Contact"](#), October 21
 - CDC guidance [advises](#) individuals that have been in close contact with someone infected with COVID-19 to quarantine for two weeks.
 - CDC revised its definition of "close contact." Previously, CDC defined "close contact" to mean spending a consecutive 15 minutes standing within six feet of someone infected with the virus. CDC's revised [guidance](#) defines "close contact" to mean spending a *cumulative* 15 minutes within six feet of an infected person within a 24-hour period.
 - CDC updated its guidance around the same time it published a [report](#) documenting a case in which a prison guard contracted COVID-19 after interacting with infected prisoners for 17 non-consecutive minutes over eight hours. CDC [noted](#) that the case "adds to the scientific knowledge of the risks to contacts of those with COVID-19 and highlights again the importance of wearing face masks to prevent transmission."
- [CDC Interpretation of Forecasts of New Deaths and Hospitalizations](#), October 23
 - CDC [consolidated](#) data from 45 models projecting the COVID-19 death rate. Predicted rates of increase differ among the forecasts, depending on assumptions about the prevalence and rigor of social distancing behaviors.
 - CDC's national ensemble forecast indicates an uncertain trend in new COVID-19 deaths over the next four weeks. CDC predicts that the number of cumulative COVID-19 deaths will be between 235,000 and 247,000 by November 14.

- CDC [consolidated](#) data from ten models projecting the number of daily COVID-19 hospitalizations. Four models predict an increase in daily hospitalizations over the next four weeks, one models predict a decrease, and three models are uncertain about the direction of the trend. The forecasts estimate 2,600 to 6,200 new COVID-19 hospitalizations per day by November 16.

New York State

- [New York State COVID-19 Updates](#), October 23
 - New York reported 7 deaths, 950 hospitalizations, and 201 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Thursday, October 22.
 - Approximately 1,637, or 1.16% of the 141,508 tests administered in New York on October 22 were positive for COVID-19.
 - Between September 30, 2020 and October 21, 2020, the State Liquor Authority [suspended](#) licenses for 21 additional bars and restaurants based on egregious violations of pandemic-related executive orders. In total, 238 restaurants and bars have had their licenses suspended during the pandemic, and 1,362 charges have been filed against restaurants and bars. Charges carry a potential \$10,000 fine.
 - Two New York prisons are [experiencing](#) COVID-19 outbreaks in recent weeks. Elmira Correctional Facility has had 278 inmates test positive as of Wednesday, with 475 tests pending. Two weeks ago, eight inmates had tested positive. Green Correctional Facility, in Coxsackie, had 80 positive tests on Wednesday, up from two positive cases on October 1. Twenty-six prison employees have also tested positive. Coxsackie County officials have called for Governor Cuomo to declare Green Correctional Facility a hot spot.
 - On October 20, Governor Cuomo [extended](#) the state’s moratorium on COVID-related commercial evictions and foreclosures through January 1, 2021. The measure extends protections that were first put in place on March 20, and which have since been extended on August 20 and September 20. In a previous call with reporters, Governor Cuomo [said](#) that he plans to protect businesses from evictions “[u]ntil I say COVID is over.”

New York City

- [New York City COVID-19 Updates](#), October 23
 - Wall Street’s profits [increased](#) 82% this year compared to the first half of last year, totaling \$27.6 billion in pretax profits. State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli associated the increased profits to the \$2.4 trillion stimulus that the federal government has provided to avoid economic fallout due to COVID-19. Despite Wall Street’s profits, the sector is expected to lose 7,300 jobs this year as firms make cuts due to economic uncertainty. Wall Street’s unemployment level is the highest since the 2008 financial crisis.
 - According to a study [released](#) by New York University Grossman School of Medicine, New York City resident’s mortality rate from COVID-19 has dropped compared to the height of the pandemic. In March, New York City patients hospitalized for COVID-19 had a 25.6% mortality rate; in August, that mortality rate was 7.6%. Doctors cannot explain the drop, but note that patients are presenting with less severe symptoms, and doctors have better medical treatments and a better understanding of the disease now.

They also suspect that widespread mask wearing has reduced the virus load within the patient, which may be associated with the severity of symptoms.

Other Related Updates

- [Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance Weekly Claims Report](#), October 22
 - Department of Labor (DOL) [reports](#) that another 787,000 workers filed initial claims for unemployment benefits last week, down 55,000 from the week ending October 10.
 - The number of new claims has been trending downward since March, when nearly seven million people filed for unemployment insurance in a single week.
 - 345,440 new claims were filed for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, the federal program intended to help freelancers, gig workers, the self-employed, and others not normally eligible for state jobless benefits.

- [FDA Approves Remdesivir - First Treatment Approved for COVID-19](#), October 22
 - Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [approved](#) the antiviral drug Veklury (remdesivir) for use in adult and pediatric patients 12 years and older who weigh at least 40 kilograms (~88 lbs.) for the treatment of COVID-19 requiring hospitalization.
 - Remdesivir is the first treatment for COVID-19 to receive FDA approval.
 - Remdesivir should only be administered in a hospital or in a healthcare setting capable of providing acute care comparable to inpatient hospital care.
 - The approval includes less than the entire population that was authorized to use remdesivir under an emergency use authorization (EUA) originally issued on May 1. Clinical trials assessing the safety and efficacy in pediatric patients weighing less than 40kg are ongoing.
 - The approval was supported by FDA's [analysis](#) of data from three randomized, controlled clinical trials that included patients hospitalized with mild-to-severe COVID-19.
 - However, the approval also comes one week after WHO announced interim [results](#) of a large study indicating that remdesivir does not reduce mortality rates in COVID-19 patients. That study has not yet been peer reviewed, and critics argue that because the study took place across a variety of countries and health systems, the disparities in treatment make it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from the data.

- [AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson Re-Start COVID-19 Vaccine Trials](#), October 23
 - AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson announced that they are re-starting clinical trials of their COVID-19 vaccine candidates in the United States.
 - The companies' trials were previously paused due to safety concerns. The AstraZeneca trials were paused for six weeks after two participants developed severe neurological symptoms. Johnson & Johnson's trials were paused for 11 days after a participant suffered a "serious medical event."
 - The companies' independent safety review boards determined, in consultation with federal regulators, that the trials were safe to resume.
 - Reviewers found no evidence that either AstraZeneca or Johnson & Johnson's vaccine candidate caused the trial participants' illnesses.

- In its announcement, AstraZeneca [said](#) that it still expects to have results from its trials later this year; Johnson & Johnson did not [comment](#) on the expected timeline for its newly-resumed trials.
- [Study Identifies Accurate Antibody “Fingerprint” for COVID-19](#), October 22
 - Researchers [identified](#) antibodies that uniquely react to SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, antibodies that react to other individual human coronaviruses, and antibodies that cross react to several coronaviruses.
 - Based on three unique SARS-CoV-2 specific antibodies, researchers developed a simple and relatively inexpensive antigen test for COVID-19 that accurately identified infection, with a 10% false-negative and 5% false-positive rate.
 - The study analyzed 232 U.S. COVID-19 patients and blood samples obtained from 190 people before the emergence of COVID-19 symptoms. Researchers then applied artificial intelligence techniques to determine which antibodies reacted solely to COVID-19.
 - Researchers hoped to address the high incidence of false-negatives and false-positive results that plague existing serum antibody tests.
 - The study also revealed that patients with more severe COVID-19 mount stronger antibody responses to SARS-CoV-2 and weaker antibody responses to other common respiratory viruses and are more likely to harbor cytomegalovirus and herpes simplex virus 1; men also had higher antibody responses than did women.
- [FDA COVID-19 Updates](#), October 23
 - FDA held a much-anticipated public [meeting](#) on October 22 to permit public experts to weigh in on how FDA should vet vaccine candidates. Vaccine experts pushed the FDA to wait longer and collect more safety data, noting that an emergency approval could jeopardize the outcome of broader vaccine trials and reduce the confidence of an increasingly skeptical public.

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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