

September 15, 2020

### Summary

The United States has 6,563,903 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 194,836 reported related deaths. CDC published data indicating that children play a role in transmitting COVID-19. AstraZeneca resumed clinical trials of its COVID-19 vaccine candidate in England and Brazil, just a few days after it paused all trials because a participant developed severe neurological symptoms. AstraZeneca's clinical trial in the United States remains paused, pending the outcome of a review by FDA. Pfizer CEO Bourla said that Pfizer could know by the end of October if its vaccine candidate will be effective. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) announced that the pandemic has inflicted six times more damage to the world's largest economies than did the 2009 financial crisis. A bipartisan group of 50 lawmakers in the House of Representatives proposed a \$1.5 trillion stimulus package to address the economic effects of the pandemic; the package represents a compromise between proposals advanced by Republicans and Democrats. House Speaker Pelosi said that the House will not recess for the November elections until it acts on a second round of stimulus spending.

In Pennsylvania, a federal judge ruled that Governor Wolf's ban on indoor gatherings larger than 25 and outdoor gatherings larger than 250 is unconstitutional; the court also ruled that a now-expired rule closing nonessential businesses was unconstitutional. The state government will appeal. There are now more than 45,000 COVID-19 cases on college and university campuses in the United States. In New York, students are suing the University of Rochester for failing to offer discounted tuition for online classes. Amazon, which has seen a surge in demand during the pandemic, announced that it will hire 100,000 new workers. Smithsonian will re-open four museums on September 18.

New York reported 11 deaths, 481 hospitalizations, and 144 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Monday, September 14. Approximately 766, or 1.0%, of the 73,678 tests administered in New York on September 14 were positive for COVID-19. California, Hawaii, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, and Ohio were removed from the tri-state quarantine list, while Puerto Rico was added back onto the list. Governor Cuomo extended the state of emergency, in place since March 7, through October 11. The State awarded \$9 million in federally funded grants as part of the State's Workforce Development Initiative. The money will go primarily to job training for 3,600 New Yorkers adapting to the post-pandemic economy. New York City launched a COVID-19 Situation Room, partnering Department of Education, Department of Health, and Test and Trace Corps to facilitate a rapid response to positive COVID-19 cases in public schools. 55 City school workers tested positive for COVID-19 out of 16,982 tested, leading the mayor to comment that

city and state initiatives are working well. COVID-19 priority testing will be available for all public school staff and students. Governor Cuomo will not ban trick-or-treaters.

### **Presidential updates**

- [\*President Trump Signs Executive Order Regarding Prescription Drug Prices\*](#), September 13
  - President Trump issued an executive [order](#) to lower the cost of prescription drugs in the United States, citing the economic effects of the pandemic as a motivating factor.
  - President Trump wrote that, “the need for affordable Medicare Part B drugs is particularly acute now, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to historic levels of unemployment in the United States, including the loss of 1.2 million jobs among Americans age 65 or older between March and April of 2020.”
  - The Order instructs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to implement a rulemaking plan prohibiting Medicare from paying for certain high-cost prescription drugs more than the “most favored nation” price. A drug’s “most favored nation” price is the lowest price at which the manufacturer sells that drug in an OECD member country with a per capita GDP that is comparable to that of the United States.

### **World Health Organization (WHO)**

- [\*WHO COVID-19 Updates\*](#), September 11
  - WHO and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) updated technical [guidance](#) for school-related public health measures during the pandemic. Topics include recommendations sorted by local community transmission rate, and specific measures such as social distancing inside classrooms, mask use, ventilation, hygiene practices, and screening students and staff.
  - WHO Director-General Tedros gave introductory [remarks](#) at the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (GPMB) annual report. He emphasized that countries have traditionally merely reacted to major disease outbreaks, but that moving forward the world must make proactive investments in pandemic prevention and mitigation.

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

- [\*CDC Issues Report Regarding COVID-19 Transmission by Children\*](#), September 11
  - CDC [published](#) the results of a study examining COVID-19 transmission by children.
  - CDC researchers examined contact-tracing data from three childcare facilities in Salt Lake County, Utah that experienced COVID-19 outbreaks between April and July 2020.
  - Of the 184 people that worked at or attended one of the three facilities, at least 31 contracted COVID-19, including 12 children. The infected children had mild or no symptoms.
  - Collectively, individuals that worked at or attended one of the three facilities transmitted COVID-19 to at least 46 non-facility contacts.
  - At least 12 (26%) of the 46 the non-facility contacts contracted it from one of the 12 infected children. Six of these cases occurred in parents and three in siblings of the infected children. One parent was hospitalized.
  - CDC’s report concluded that, “COVID-19 is less severe in children than it is in adults but children can still play a role in transmission.” The report recommended timely

testing, including testing of asymptomatic individuals, face masks, and proper hygiene to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in child care facilities.

- [COVIDView Weekly Surveillance Summary of U.S. COVID-19 Activity](#), September 11
  - CDC summarized key COVID-19 disease indicators for the week ending September 5.
  - The national average of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 decreased from 5.8% to 5.2% from August 29 to September 5.
  - Regionally, the percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 declined or remained the same in seven of nine regions, but increased slightly in the New England and Mid-Atlantic regions. The highest percentages of positive specimens were seen in the southeast (8.1%), south central (9.3%), and central (9.5%) regions.
  - The overall cumulative hospitalization rate is 166.9 per 100,000, up from 161.0 per 100,000 during the previous week. The highest rates were in people 65 years and older, at 451.2 per 100,000, up from 436.6 per 100,000.
  - Based on death certificate data, the percentage of total deaths attributed to pneumonia, influenza, or COVID-19 decreased 4.4% from August 29 (9.5%) to September 5 (6.3%). The percentage remains above the epidemic threshold and will likely increase as more death certificates are processed.

### **New York State**

- [New York State COVID-19 Updates](#), September 15
  - New York reported 11 deaths, 481 hospitalizations, and 144 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Monday, September 14.
  - Approximately 766, or 1.0%, of the 73,678 tests administered in New York on September 14 were positive for COVID-19.
  - State Liquor Authority officials conducted 1,109 compliance checks at bars and restaurants in New York on September 14, observing five social distancing violations.
  - California, Hawaii, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, and Ohio were [removed](#) from the tri-state quarantine list, while Puerto Rico was added back onto the list. Travelers from states on the list must quarantine for 14 days upon arrival to the tri-state area.
  - Governor Cuomo [extended](#) the state of emergency for New York an additional 30 days, to October 11. The state of emergency began on March 7.
  - Governor Cuomo [stated](#) in an interview that he will not ban trick-or-treaters from going door to door on Halloween.
  - Governor Cuomo [announced](#) that New York State performed a record 102,925 tests on Friday, September 11.
- [\\$9 Million Awarded as Part of State's Workforce Development Initiative](#), September 14
  - Governor Cuomo [announced](#) that 66 business, schools, and community-based organizations across the state were awarded \$9 million in federally funded grants as part of the State's historic Workforce Development Initiative.
  - The money will support job training opportunities for more than 3,600 New Yorkers adapting to the post-COVID-19 economy.
  - The grant money is "helping to meet businesses' short-term needs, improve regional talent pipelines, and address long-term job training needs of growing industries," according to Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul.

- The New York State Department of Labor is working to connect every job seeker in the state with job [opportunities](#). There are over 100,000 job openings across the state from businesses looking to hire immediately.

### **New York City**

- [New York City COVID-19 Updates](#), September 15
  - Mayor de Blasio [announced](#) a Department of Education (DOE) COVID-19 Situation Room. Multiple agencies will partner to “facilitate a rapid response to positive COVID-19 cases in public schools,” and “provide a single-point-of-contact between schools and agency partners responsible for . . . testing, contact tracing, and ensuring appropriate interventions are taken by school communities.”
  - 55 NYC school staff members [tested](#) positive for coronavirus out of 16,982 tested, for a positive rate of .32%. Mayor de Blasio said “that tells us how much all the efforts to fight back the disease are working.” Free priority testing for students and staff is a cornerstone of the city’s plan to reopen schools.
  - Metropolitan Transit Authority [announced](#) that a \$50 fine for riders who refuse to wear masks took effect on Monday, September 14.

### **Other Related Updates**

- [COVID-19 Vaccine Updates](#), September 12
  - AstraZeneca [resumed](#) clinical trials of its COVID-19 vaccine candidate in Britain and Brazil, just a few days after pausing all trials because a participant developed severe neurological symptoms.
  - AstraZeneca’s clinical trial in the United States remains paused pending the outcome of a review by Food and Drug Administration (FDA).
  - National Institutes of Health (NIH) is conducting an investigation regarding the participant’s symptoms. Leader of Viral Research for National Institute for Neurological Disorders and Stroke Dr. Avindra Nath [said](#) that NIH is very concerned and expressed frustration that AstraZeneca has not been more forthcoming regarding the participant’s condition.
  - Pfizer [announced](#) that it requested FDA approval to expand clinical trials of its COVID-19 vaccine candidate from 30,000 to 44,000 participants to increase participant diversity. If FDA approves the expansion, Pfizer will include participants as young as 16 years old and people with certain chronic illnesses, including HIV and Hepatitis, in its pool of participants.
  - Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla [said](#) that there is a “good chance” Pfizer will know by the end of October whether its vaccine candidate will be effective.
- [HHS Spokesperson Responds to Claims Regarding Political Interference at CDC](#), September 12
  - Anonymous health officials told news outlets that Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) pressured CDC scientists to delay or alter the contents of CDC’s Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports (MMWRs) because they contained information that was inconsistent with White House messaging regarding the pandemic.

- HHS spokesperson Caputo [responded](#) that Assistant Professor of Health Research Methods at McMaster University Paul Alexander, who was hired by Caputo as a scientific advisor, reviews the MMWRs.
  - Caputo said that Alexander, “digs into these MMWRs and makes his position known, and his position isn’t popular with the career scientists sometimes. That’s called science. Disagreement is science. Nobody has been ordered to do anything. Some changes have been accepted, most have been rejected.”
  - House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis is [investigating](#); the subcommittee sent a letter to HHS Secretary Azar and CDC Director Redfield requesting interviews with agency officials and documents regarding the MMWRs.
- [Indoor Dining Poses Major COVID-19 Risks](#), September 13
    - New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) contributor Paul Sax [writes](#) that the latest studies show indoor dining poses significant infection risk even as cities continue to reduce dining restrictions.
    - A recent CDC [study](#) found that among 314 people tested for COVID, people with a positive test result were “more than twice as likely to have reported dining at a restaurant than were those who tested negative.”
    - Sax writes that patrons should avoid dining indoors, but can continue to support restaurants by dining outdoors, ordering takeout, tipping well, and buying merchandise.
- [Substance Use Disorders Linked to COVID-19 Susceptibility](#), September 15
    - A National Institute of Health (NIH) funded study [found](#) that people with substance use disorders (SUDs) are more susceptible to COVID-19 and its complications.
    - Researchers analyzed the non-identifiable electronic health records (EHR) of over 73 million patients in the United States. Over 7.5 million of those patients had been diagnosed with an SUD at some point in their lives. The SUDs investigated were tobacco, alcohol, opioid, cannabis, and cocaine.
    - Analysis revealed that “while individuals with an SUD constituted 10.3% of the total study population, they represented 15.6% of the COVID-19 cases.” The affect was strongest for opioid use disorder, followed by tobacco use disorder.
    - Individuals with an SUD were also more likely to “experience worse COVID-19 outcomes than people without an SUD.” Hospitalization rates (41.0% vs. 30.1%) and death rates (9.6% vs. 6.6%) were significantly worse for COVID-19 patients with an SUD compared to those without.
    - The study also revealed African Americans with a recent opioid use disorder diagnosis were four times more likely to develop COVID-19 compared to white Americans with a recent diagnosis.
- [FDA COVID-19 Updates](#), September 15
    - FDA [awarded](#) a research contract to University of Liverpool and global partners to sequence and analyze samples from humans and animals to create profiles of various coronaviruses, including COVID-19. The research hopes to inform development of medical countermeasures for COVID-19.
    - FDA provided temporary [guidance](#) to help drug and biological product manufacturers “transition from operations impacted by the COVID-19 public health emergency to

normal manufacturing operations.” The guidance provides “recommendations to help manufacturers prioritize products and activities.”

- FDA will host virtual town hall [meetings](#) for clinical laboratories and commercial manufacturers that have developed or are developing diagnostic tests for COVID-19 on September 16, September 23, and September 30, all from 12:15-1:15PM EST.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [\*Turning Over a New Lease? Are Turnover-Based Leases the Answer for Tenants Facing COVID-19 Related Business Disruption?\*](#), August 27
- [\*HHS Prohibits FDA from Requiring Premarket Review of LDTs, Including During the COVID-19 Emergency\*](#), August 25

Send questions to:

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