

COVID-19 Daily Update

September 8, 2020

Summary

The United States has 6,301,649 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 189,226 reported related deaths. Nine drug manufacturers issued a public letter, pledging not to submit vaccine candidates for FDA review until their safety and efficacy is shown in phase three clinical trials; the manufacturers include AstraZeneca, Moderna, Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline, Johnson & Johnson, and Sanofi. The letter follows CDC's announcement late last week urging state and local health officials to prepare to distribute a COVID-19 vaccine as early as late October. President Trump recently urged Congress to redirect \$300 million in unused COVID-19 relief funds to fund a second stimulus check. Commentators suggested that Trump may be referencing funds originally appropriated for small business loans under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Congress previously approved \$454 billion to cover losses on lending programs, and \$259 billion remains uncommitted.

Classes started in some of the nation's largest school districts on Tuesday, September 8, including Chicago, Houston, Dallas, and Baltimore; almost all began the year remotely, with some still hoping to hold in-person classes several weeks from now. The New York Times reported that multiple COVID-19 testing sites have adopted age policies and either do not test any children, or set age minimums that exclude young children. Experts warned that limited testing for children hampers schools' ability to quickly isolate and trace COVID-19 cases among students. It could also create a new burden on working parents, with some schools requiring symptomatic children to test negative before returning to class.

New York reported five deaths, 445 hospitalizations, and 114 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Monday, September 7. New York added four states to its COVID-19 travel advisory: Delaware, Maryland, Ohio, and West Virginia. Individuals traveling to New York from the listed states must quarantine for 14 days. Governor Cuomo signed legislation requiring all public employers to create plans to protect workers in the event of another public health emergency. Cuomo issued an executive order delaying New York City's annual sale of residents' property tax and water debts to private collectors until September 24. Governor Cuomo announced a new publicly-accessible tracker for each of State University of New York's (SUNY) 64 colleges and universities with information on testing, hospitalization rates, and isolation spaces on SUNY campuses. The City reported that 96% of all 64,550 classrooms passed inspection for COVID-19 safety measures. Inspectors flagged 21 schools housed in ten buildings for poor ventilation; repairs will be completed before in-person learning begins on September 21.

Presidential updates

- [*President Trump Pushes for Second Round of Stimulus Checks*](#), September 7
 - President Trump recently [urged](#) Congress to redirect \$300 million in unused COVID-19 relief funds to fund a second stimulus check.
 - Trump commented that “we have \$300 billion sitting in [a relief fund] account, that we didn’t need because things are going so well with the economy.”
 - Commentators suggested that Trump may be referring to funds originally appropriated for small business loans under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Congress previously approved \$454 billion to cover losses on lending programs, and \$259 billion remains uncommitted.
 - The Senate resumed session on September 8. Both parties agree in principle on a second \$1,200 stimulus check for individuals and \$2,400 for families, but are divided as to the amount allocated for dependents. Republicans have suggested \$500 per dependent, while Democrats have suggested \$1,200 per dependent.
 - Senate Republicans are [expected](#) to propose a scaled-back stimulus bill that includes roughly \$500 billion for areas with bipartisan support, including enhanced unemployment benefits, school funding, small business loans, and COVID-19 testing.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [*WHO COVID-19 Updates*](#), September 7
 - WHO Director-General Tedros [announced](#) that Germany, Japan, Norway, and the European Commission joined COVAX, WHO’s global initiative to develop and distribute a COVID-19 vaccine. There are now more than 78 countries and economies participating in COVAX.
 - Tedros highlighted that non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as obesity and diabetes, increase patients’ risk of developing severe COVID-19. According to WHO, patients with diabetes are two to four times more likely to develop severe infection and patients with obesity may be seven times more likely to do so.
 - Tedros expressed support for re-opening societies, economies, and borders using a mix of targeted infection-control measures. Tedros explained that “[l]ockdowns are a blunt instrument that have taken a heavy toll in many countries” and with appropriate measures “further national lockdowns can be avoided.”

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

- [*COVIDView Weekly Surveillance Summary of U.S. COVID-19 Activity*](#), September 4
 - CDC summarized key COVID-19 disease indicators for the week ending August 29.
 - The national average of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 increased slightly from 5.4% to 5.5% from August 23 to August 29.
 - Regionally, the percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 increased in seven out of ten regions, but decreased in the southeast, southwest, and pacific northwest. The highest percentage of positive specimens were recorded in the south central (10.6%), central (10.4%) and southeast (8.8%).
 - The overall cumulative hospitalization rate is 161.0 per 100,000, up from 156.8 per 100,000 in the previous week. The highest rates were in people 65 years and older at 436.6 per 100,000, up from 425.7 per 100,000.

- Based on death certificate data, the percentage of total deaths attributed to pneumonia, influenza, or COVID-19 decreased 1.3% from August 22 (7.9%) to August 29 (6.6%). 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 8
 - New York reported five deaths, 445 hospitalizations, and 114 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Monday, September 7.
 - Approximately 557, or 0.96%, of the 57,826 tests administered in New York on September 7 were positive for COVID-19. New York State’s COVID-19 infection rate has remained below one percent for 32 straight days.
 - Governor Cuomo added four states to the New York’s COVID-19 travel advisory: Delaware, Maryland, Ohio, and West Virginia. Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands were removed from the list. Individuals traveling to New York from the listed states must quarantine for 14 days.
 - Governor Cuomo [signed](#) legislation requiring all public employers to create contingency plans to protect workers in the event of another global health crisis. The legislation applies to both state and local government agencies, including school districts. Plans must be submitted to public unions for review within 150 days.
- [New York State Creates New Education Trackers](#), September 8
 - Governor Cuomo and State University of New York (SUNY) President Jim Malatras [announced](#) the launch of a COVID-19 case [tracker](#) for the SUNY system. The publicly-accessible tracker will be updated daily with case counts for each of SUNY’s 64 colleges and universities. The tracker will also contain information regarding testing, hospitalization rates, and isolation spaces on SUNY campuses.
 - Governor Cuomo [provided](#) updated information on the launch of “The COVID-19 Report Card,” an online [dashboard](#) tracking COVID-19 cases in K-12 schools. The publicly-accessible dashboard will be updated daily with case counts for each school district and individual school. The dashboard will also contain information regarding testing and whether schools are operating remotely, in-person, or using a hybrid model.

New York City

- [New York City COVID-19 Updates](#), September 8
 - Governor Cuomo [issued](#) an executive order delaying New York City’s annual sale of residents’ property tax and water debts to private collectors to help alleviate the economic burden imposed by the pandemic. Mayor De Blasio [announced](#) that the sale will occur on September 25 “to give New Yorkers additional time to pay debt or enter into payment plans.”
 - Mayor de Blasio [announced](#) that sheriff deputies will begin stopping buses traveling to Port Authority from states on New York’s COVID-19 travel advisory list. Bus passengers will be required to fill out forms with their contact information and details regarding their quarantine plans.
 - City inspectors [reported](#) that 21 schools housed in ten buildings are unfit for teachers to return to due to poor ventilation. New York City Department of Education noted that

repairs will be completed before in-person learning begins on September 21. 96% of all 64,550 classrooms passed inspection and all 1,485 buildings have now been inspected.

- New York University [suspended](#) more than 20 students for violating social distancing rules after less than one week of in-person instruction. The University urged students to “avoid parties and bars,” “wear a mask,” and “keep [their] distance.”
- [*Mayor De Blasio Criticizes FEMA for Reducing Pandemic Aid to States*](#), September 4
 - Mayor De Blasio [criticized](#) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for [reducing](#) state funding for personal protective equipment (PPE).
 - FEMA recently issued updated [guidance](#), effective September 15, narrowing what constitutes an “emergency protective measure” eligible for FEMA’s public assistance program.
 - Under the updated guidance, FEMA will only reimburse states for PPE costs that are directly related to emergency work and will not reimburse states for PPE used in non-emergency settings such as schools, courthouses, and public housing facilities.
 - Mayor de Blasio noted that this loss of FEMA funding for non-emergency PPE could cost New York City between \$350 million to \$1 billion.
 - De Blasio vowed to fight FEMA’s new guidance, explaining that “this is not just some bureaucratic adjustment, this will fundamentally undermine New York City’s recovery and our fight against COVID-19.”

Other Related Updates

- [*Nine Drugmakers Sign Safety Pledge on COVID-19 Vaccine Development*](#), September 8
 - Several drug manufacturers issued a public [letter](#) pledging that they will not submit vaccine candidates for FDA review until their safety and efficacy is shown in phase three clinical trials.
 - Nine pharmaceutical CEOs signed the pledge to “follow high ethical standards and sound scientific principles” including AstraZeneca, Moderna, Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline, Johnson & Johnson, and Sanofi.
 - The signatories promised to follow “guidance from expert regulatory authorities such as FDA” and to “ensure a sufficient supply and range of vaccine options, including those suitable for global access.”
 - The signatories hope this pledge will “help ensure public confidence in the rigorous scientific and regulatory process by which COVID-19 vaccines are evaluated and may ultimately be approved.”
- [*Department of Labor Summarizes Recent Actions on COVID-19*](#), September 6
 - Department of Labor (DOL) summarized recent agency actions on COVID-19.
 - DOL [announced](#) \$100 million in funding to support state efforts to combat fraud and recover improper payments in the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program, including those programs created under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.
 - DOL [awarded](#) another \$13.5 million in dislocated worker grants (DWGs) under the CARES Act to support disaster-relief employment and training activities related to COVID-19 in New York and West Virginia.

- [Health Department Announces Additional Funding for Nursing Homes](#), September 3
 - Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) [announced](#) a \$2 billion distribution of performance-based incentive payments for nursing homes through the Provider Relief Fund.
 - To qualify, a facility must have an active state certification as a nursing home, pass an HHS quality check for certification status, and report to at least one of three data sources. Eligible nursing homes will receive payments over four performance periods from September to December.

- [New England Journal of Medicine Article on COVID-19 Testing Strategies](#), September 7
 - A recent article published in the New England Journal of Medicine proposed separating asymptomatic testing from symptomatic testing to relieve overburdened COVID-19 diagnostic laboratories.
 - The author highlighted that “essentially everyone with a viral respiratory tract infection is eligible for – and arguably needs – COVID-19 testing” since “there is no single clinical sign or symptom that would reliably separate one from the other.” The demand for testing is likely to increase as the country enters flu season.
 - The author recommends providing the faster but less accurate antigen test for asymptomatic patients, and the slower but more accurate PCR test for symptomatic patients.
 - The author argues that even if an antigen test has only an 80% sensitivity to positive cases, in states with a low positive rate, this will be sufficient for routine use in asymptomatic individuals.
 - The author’s recommendation that the country deploy “good enough” testing for screening low-risk individuals could relieve the testing logjam for higher priority symptomatic patients as the cold and flu season approaches.

- [Difficulties Getting Coronavirus Tests for Children](#), September 8
 - An article in the New York Times reported the lack of availability for COVID-19 tests for children. Multiple sites reportedly have adopted age policies and do not test any children, or set age minimums that exclude young children.
 - Age limits vary widely based on jurisdiction. Los Angeles offers public testing without any age minimum, while San Francisco offers tests to children 13 and older. Dallas tests children five and older. The District of Columbia does not test young children at public sites because children have nearly universal health coverage in the city, meaning they could be tested at a pediatrician’s office.
 - The age policies at testing sites reflect a range of concerns, including differences in health insurance, medical privacy rules, and gaps in test approval. Parents report having to drive long distances and call multiple centers to find one that accepts children.
 - Limited testing hampers schools’ ability to quickly isolate and trace COVID-19 cases among students. It could also create a new burden on working parents, with some schools requiring symptomatic children to test negative before returning to class.

- [FDA COVID-19 Updates](#), September 3
 - FDA [issued](#) an emergency use authorization (EUA) for a device developed by Roche that tests for COVID-19 and influenza A and B simultaneously.
 - FDA will [host](#) a series of virtual town halls for clinical laboratories and commercial manufacturers to answer technical questions about the development and validation of COVID-19 tests.
 - FDA will [host](#) an address by Principal Deputy FDA Commissioner Abernethy on September 10, regarding the use of real world data, such as electronic health records and patient registries, to inform the government's response to the pandemic.

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

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