

## Health News

- A University of Pennsylvania study found that office visits for **long-term use of muscle relaxants** (drugs like **Xanax, Valium, diazepam**) **tripled** between 2005 and 2016. In 2016, almost 70% of patients prescribed muscle relaxants were also prescribed an **opioid pain drug**, a combination that the FDA now warns against. (In 2016, boxed warnings about the dangers of concomitant use of benzodiazepines and opioids were added to drug labels.) Alarming, many of the prescriptions for muscle relaxants were for **older adults** (22.2% of the visits). The authors caution that older adults should avoid using these drugs because of side effects and increased risk of falls while using them.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/06/200626092721.htm>

Also see AskaPatient article on the risk of **serotonin syndrome** associated with muscle relaxants and antidepressants:

<https://www.askapatient.com/news/muscle-relaxants-serotonin-syndrome.asp>

- A review of scientific studies between 2003 and 2019 found evidence that **probiotics** either taken by themselves or with **prebiotics**, may help to **ease depression**. The researchers also looked for a beneficial connection between probiotics and **anxiety**, but did not find a clear link. Probiotics are live microorganisms considered to be "good bacteria" in your gut and are contained in yogurt, fermented foods and drinks, and dietary supplements. Prebiotics are foods that help the good bacteria flourish by acting as food for microflora. Examples are grains, legumes, broccoli, onions, cabbage, cauliflower, and kale. The paper was published in **BMJ Nutrition**.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/07/200706203820.htm>

- The U.S. FDA granted tobacco company **Philip Morris authorization to market its IQOS heated cigarette product as a "modified risk tobacco product."** **Marlboro Heatsticks** (plain and menthol flavors) are tobacco products that are heated, not burned. While the product has been available for sale since April 2019, now the company can claim that "heating significantly reduces the production of harmful and potentially harmful chemicals; scientific studies have shown that switching completely from conventional cigarettes to the IQOS system significantly reduces your body's exposure to harmful or potentially harmful chemicals." The FDA points out that despite these permitted claims, the products are not safe and are not FDA approved. In January 2018, the FDA advisory panel initially voted **against** allowing sale of the product.

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-authorizes-marketing-iqos-tobacco-heating-system-reduced-exposure-information>

- The United Nations issued a new report that predicts that as **wild animals continue to lose their habitats** and increase their contact with humans, **diseases that pass from animals to humans are likely to increase**. In addition to COVID-19, recent examples include Ebola, MERS, HIV/AIDS, and West Nile Virus.

<https://www.kff.org/news-summary/increased-contact-between-humans-wild-animals-could-contribute-to-more-disease-outbreaks-some-experts-say/>

- When it comes to pricing, it has been shown that consumers are more likely to purchase a product with a price that ends in "9." A Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute consumer psychology study suggests that **people prefer rounded numbers over non-rounded numbers, even when the more specific number is "better news."** An example: people are likely to say that a vaccine presented as 91.27% effective is less effective than a vaccine that is presented as 90% effective.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/07/200706140841.htm>

- Three small U.S. pharmaceutical companies researching promising new antibiotics treatments have gone bankrupt this year, setting back progress in the quest to discover novel antibiotics for drug-resistant infections. An industry trade group announced the creation of a \$1 billion fund, called the **AMR Action Fund, to support companies working on the creation of novel antibiotics**. The goal is for two to four new antibiotics to be available within a decade. Recipients of the funding have not yet been announced.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/09/health/antibiotics-pharma-drug-resistance.html>

- The FDA announced plans to **resume on-site inspections of FDA-regulated facilities** located in the U.S. during the week of July 20. However, for safety reasons, prioritized domestic inspections (except for retail tobacco inspections) will be pre-announced. Inspections will depend on the data about the virus' trajectory in a locality and rules and guidelines that are put in place by state and local governments.

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-update-fda-prepares-resumption-domestic-inspections-new-risk-assessment-system>

## COVID-19 News

- **Cases of COVID-19 are rising** in many states, and at least twelve state governors are considering **reinstating shutdowns** or at least a pause in reopening. Six states have rolled back previously announced re-openings.

<https://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/article/Growing-chorus-pushes-for-renewed-shutdown-orders-15398322.php>

- Researchers at University of Texas compared the **lung physiology of a pediatric lung with an adult lung** and found differences that may account for why children are more often spared from severe illness associated with COVID-19 than adults. Children under 18 make up 22% of the US population, but had only 1.7% of the first 149,000 cases and a statistically insignificant number of deaths as of April 2020. (Article includes diagram comparing adult with pediatric lung.)

<https://med.uth.edu/blog/2020/07/09/lung-physiology-and-immune-function-in-children-could-be-protecting-them-from-severe-covid-19/>

- Texas has more than 1,200 nursing homes, more than any other state. Experts fear that the rise in number of cases in **Texas** will cause an increase in deaths from COVID-19 at that states' **nursing homes**. **Connecticut** has better news: case and death counts are decreasing daily at long-term care facilities.

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/experts-fear-for-elderly-amid-virus-surge-in-state-with-most-nursing-homes/ar-BB16BH6P>

- Beginning August 1, **Hawaii** will allow travelers into the state without a self-quarantine if they provide evidence of a **negative COVID-19 nucleic acid amplification test (NAAT)** for COVID-19. The test must be confirmed prior to arrival and received within **72 hours prior to boarding their flight to Hawaii**. Currently, travelers must self-quarantine for two weeks once they arrive in Hawaii.

<https://www.gohawaii.com/special-alerts-information>

- **Alaska, Vermont, and Maine** also have travel rules for out-of-state visitors. Read all state-specific information at each state's health department web sites, including reopening phases and schedules and the latest testing and case data are available by state.

**State Health Department links:**

<https://www.cdc.gov/publichealthgateway/healthdirectories/healthdepartments.html>

## Coronavirus Testing News & Useful Sites for Testing Information:

- The FDA authorized a test produced by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) that **combines a flu diagnostic test and a COVID-19 test** in one product. BioFire Diagnostics, and Quiagen have also produced authorized combination tests.

<https://www.fda.gov/news-event/press-announcements/coronavirus-covid-19-update-fda-authorizes-additional-covid-19-combination-diagnostic-test-ahead-flu>

- As demand for **coronavirus tests** have increased, so have **wait times** for the results. **Quest Diagnostics** says it has conducted **7 million** COVID tests this year and that the average wait time went from 3-5 days to 4-6 days in the past two weeks. However, tests for "Priority 1" patients like hospital patients and healthcare workers with symptoms can still be turned around in one day. Quest said that the surge in tests began on June 29. Quest has also conducted 2.4 million antibody tests; those tests have faster turnaround time.

<https://khn.org/news/as-covid-testing-soars-wait-times-for-results-jump-to-a-week-or-more/>

<https://www.clickorlando.com/news/local/2020/07/08/private-lab-says-huge-demand-is-delaying-covid-19-testing-turnaround-time/>

- According to **Statista**, the **U.S.** has conducted the **second-highest number of tests** worldwide, with **40 million tests** completed as of July 10. **China** reports having done the most testing, with **90 million tests** taken.

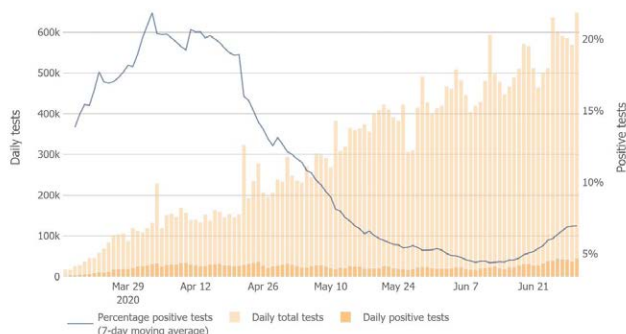
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1104645/covid19-testing-rate-select-countries-worldwide/>

- **Covid-19 Tracking Site:** This site was put together by *Atlantic Monthly*. It provides data on tests, cases, hospitalizations, hospital bed capacity, racial and other demographic breakdowns, and deaths. The number of diagnostic tests taken each day in the U.S. are now well over a half million; positivity rates over time are also provided. The goal is for 5% or less of the test results to be negative (also referred to as the "positivity rate"). The site gives a "grade" for each U.S. state and territory for the quality and quantity of statistics provided by health departments. Only 3 states receive less than a "C" grade: Hawaii, Northern Mariana Islands, and North Dakota.

<https://covidtracking.com/>

The spreadsheet with a state-by-state list of data that is available, along with the state's grade:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/u/1/d/e/2PA>



Positive Test Results Over Time (Source: COVID-19 Tracking Site)

### - CDC Testing Data Page

Current CDC data now appears to be in sync with state sources. As of Friday, July 10, the site reported 40,787,857 tests taken in the U.S., with 3,663,490 positive results (9%). About six weeks ago, the data was criticized for its inaccuracy. While the CDC and at least eleven states were combining diagnostic test data with

antibody testing data, most states now have "cleaned up" their data so that testing data only includes **diagnostic test results**.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/testing-in-us.html>

- **Nationwide Testing Sites Locator** will help you find locations that offer coronavirus testing in the U.S. The interactive map has yellow dots for antibody testing sites, blue for diagnostic testing sites, and green if the site offers both kinds of tests. For the most up-to-date information, check with your local or state health department (links to state health departments above).

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2ec47819f57c40598a4eaf45bf9e0d16>

- **Directory of Approved FDA Tests - All Kinds**

This FDA page lists 144 authorized molecular diagnostic tests (for testing if you have an active infection), 2 antigen tests, and 27 authorized antibody tests.

<https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-emergency-use-authorizations-medical-devices/vitro-diagnostics-euas#individual-molecular>

- **List of Authorized Antibody Tests**

The above FDA page is not handy for quick viewing or printing. One-page list of approved antibody tests with manufacturer and product name:

<https://www.askapatient.com/news/fda-authorized-antibody-tests-EUA-current-July112020.pdf>

**Updated stats for Sunday, July 12, 2020:** **Worldwide:** 12.77 million cases and over 566,000 deaths. **United States:** 3.27 million cases and more than 134,000 deaths. Brazil has the second-highest number of cases globally with over 1.8 million cases.

Source: Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Dashboard

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/opstdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

**Please click "Vote" to answer our latest survey, which aims to find out how consumers feel about antibody testing:**

**Are you going to get a coronavirus antibody test?**

No; no past symptoms/not interested

No; the results aren't reliable enough

Yes; had past symptoms

Yes; no past symptoms but am curious

Yes; as part of community study

Other; list below

**VOTE!**

**Coming soon: Feature Article on Generic Drugs and Drug Safety**

*Ask a Patient Weekly Healthcare Newsletter: July 12, 2020*

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[admin@askapatient.com](mailto:admin@askapatient.com)

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