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Oil in the age of coronavirus: a U.S. shale bust like no other



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Southern DAILY

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G20 officials pledge to keep cooperating to bolster global economy



RIYADH/WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Finance officials from the Group of 20 major economies vowed on Saturday to continue using "all available policy tools" to fight the coronavirus pandemic and bolster the global economy, warning that the outlook remains highly uncertain.

Saudi Minister of Finance Mohammed al-Jadaan wears a protective mask as he attends a virtual meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bank governors in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia July 18, 2020. G20 Saudi Arabia/Handout via REUTERS

G20 finance ministers and central bankers, in a communique issued after a virtual meeting on Saturday, said the global economy would recover as economies gradually reopen, but said further actions were needed to ensure growth.

"We are determined to continue to use all available policy tools to safeguard people's lives, jobs and incomes, support global economic recovery, and enhance the resilience of the financial system, while safeguarding against downside risks," they said in statement after the meeting ended.

COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, has infected more than 14.14 million people and killed 596,576, according to a Reuters tally. The United States, the world's largest economy, tops the list of deaths.

Sweeping shutdowns aimed at halting the spread of the disease have caused massive disruption to the global economy, and are hitting the world's poorest countries hardest.

G20 finance officials said 42 of the world's 73 poorest countries had requested a freeze in official bilateral debt payments through the end of the year, amounting to about \$5.3 billion in deferred payments.

Reflecting concerns raised by the World Bank that China, a G20 member and the largest creditor to developing countries, was not participating fully, the officials urged all official bilateral creditors to implement the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) fully and transparently.

They also "strongly encouraged" private creditors to participate on comparable terms, and said they would consider extending the debt standstill in the second half of 2020.

Private creditors had not received any formal requests from countries for debt service suspension under the G20 initiative, the Institute for International Finance (IIF) said on Wednesday, ahead of Saturday's meeting.

"We encourage the private sector investors to participate in this, but we need to be very careful not to interfere on private agreements," Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed al-Jadaan said in a press conference at the end of the meeting.

Saudi Minister of Finance Mohammed al-Jadaan wears a protective mask as he attends a virtual meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bank governors in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia July 18, 2020. G20 Saudi Arabia/Handout via REUTERS

Saudi Arabia is the current G20 chair.

The officials also reaffirmed their commitment to resolving differences over how to tax digital services and reaching a broad, consensus-based solution this year.

They said they expected to see proposals on international tax reform by October, when they meet again.

"Fair taxation of international companies and large digital groups is more urgent than ever," German Finance Minister Olaf Scholz said after the meeting.



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U.S. divided over masks, schools as coronavirus cases rise by over 70,000

(Reuters) - Americans debated mask mandates and the reopening of schools during the coronavirus pandemic on Friday as state and local officials imposed conflicting orders and cases rose by more than 70,000 across the nation for the second day in a row.

The United States recorded a total of at least 70,674 new COVID-19 infections on Friday after climbing by a record 77,499 a day earlier, the largest increase posted by any country since the pandemic started, according to a Reuters tally.

U.S. deaths on Friday rose by at least 912, the fourth day in a row that fatalities have exceeded 900 a day.

RELATED COVERAGE

Trump says he will not consider a national mask mandate
In the state of Georgia, Governor Brian Kemp sued Atlanta's mayor to prevent her from mandating masks.

Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot announced a plan to offer both in-person and remote instruction at the nation's third-largest school district, over the objection of the teachers' union, which wants remote learning only.

Americans have become divided along political lines over mask orders, with conservatives more likely than liberals to call the rules a violation of their Constitutional rights.

"Everybody saying that (wearing a mask) is a violation of their freedom - no, it's not. Because a seatbelt is mandated and that's to save your life," said Sharon Taylor, 48, a cardiothoracic nurse in Atlanta.

With school set to resume in a few weeks, local officials across the country have announced a variety of plans to resume teaching.



TRUMP SAYS WON'T ORDER MASKS
California Governor Gavin Newsom, who until now has allowed school districts in the nation's most populous state to set their own policies, said on Friday schools could reopen only in counties that for 14 days have stayed off a worsening trends watch list.

FILE PHOTO: U.S. President Donald Trump is greeted by Georgia Governor Brian Kemp as he arrives at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S., July 15, 2020. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst

As of Friday, 30 of the state's 58 counties were on the list and schools there must remain closed. Among them are Los Angeles, Sacramento and San Diego counties, accounting for nearly 40% of the state's population.

The United States has been averaging about 60,000 cases a day in July with cases rising in 41 states on Friday, based on a Reuters analysis. Texas and Arkansas reported a record number of deaths on Friday, while Kansas, Ohio, North Dakota and Puerto Rico reported record

numbers of infections.

President Donald Trump has urged a return to normal, stressing the importance of reigniting the economy. The Trump administration and some health experts argue children are better off in classrooms for their development, and also to allow parents to return to work.

Trump told Fox News on Friday he did not believe in implementing a national mask mandate.

Stay Home!

BUSINESS

Wear Mask!

Nation's First Experimental Plasma Treatment Against COVID-19 Is Currently Being Tested At Houston Methodist **COVID-19 Blood-Transfusion Therapy Finding Success**



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

When facing a pandemic, every second is critical. And since the outbreak, Houston Methodist's physician-scientists have been readying the nation's first experimental COVID-19 plasma treatment.

The experimental treatment transfuses vital antibodies found in the plasma of recovered COVID-19 patients into a critically ill patient, in the hopes of providing that patient with life-saving treatment. One of the major advantages of this treatment approach is that it can be tested and used right now, while vaccines and antiviral drugs can take from months to years to develop.

From Bench to Bedside — Fast

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) classifies this experimental treatment as an emergency investigational new drug protocol (eIND) that requires FDA approval for each patient infused with donated convalescent serum. Houston Methodist physician-scientists began recruiting blood plasma donors from across the Greater Houston area who have recovered after testing positive for the COVID-19 virus. We immediately identified willing donors, who each give a quart of blood plasma in a procedure much like donating whole blood.



The physician-scientists at Methodist are seeking additional FDA approval for follow-up experimental studies, and possibly a multicenter national trial on the effectiveness of convalescent serum therapy against the COVID-19 virus.

Beating COVID-19 — Using Antibodies Made to Fight It

Plasma from someone who has recovered from COVID-19 contains antibodies made by the immune system that potentially could be used to destroy the virus. Transfusing this antibody-rich plasma into a COVID-19 patient — a patient still fighting the virus — may transfer the benefits of the antibodies into a healing, possibly life-saving therapy.

What Is Donating Plasma Like?

The process for donating plasma is similar to donating blood and takes about an hour. Plasma donors are hooked up to a small device that removes plasma while simultaneously returning red blood cells to their bodies. Unlike regular blood donation in which donors have to wait for red blood cells to replenish between donations, plasma can be donated more frequently, as often as twice a week.

Your Plasma Donation Is Vital

We are hoping that this can be a viable, scalable treatment that helps in this crisis. If you have had COVID-19 and are interested in helping others by donating your plasma, please call 346.238.4360. Please note: You do not have to be a Houston Methodist patient to donate, but you must have a verified, positive COVID-19

test.



Related

FDA APPROVES FIRST PLASMA THERAPY FOR HOUSTON METHODIST COVID-19 PATIENT

Houston Methodist has received FDA approval to become the first academic medical center in the nation to transfuse donated plasma from a recovered COVID-19 patient into a critically ill patient. This treatment was fast-tracked to the bedside over the weekend as the death toll in the COVID-19 pandemic soared to more than 2,000 people across the United States, with more than 100,000 Americans sick from the virus.

Houston Methodist physician scientists have begun recruiting blood plasma donors from among the approximately 250 patients who have tested positive for the COVID-19 virus at Houston Methodist hospitals. Willing donors were immediately identified, who each give a quart of blood plasma in a procedure much like donating whole blood. Plasma from someone who has recovered from COVID-19 contains antibodies made by the immune system and used to kill the virus. Transfusing this antibody-rich plasma into a COVID-19 patient — a patient still fighting the virus — may transfer the power of the antibodies into a healing, possibly life-saving therapy.



Dr. Eric Salazar

The first recovered COVID-19 patient to donate plasma was an individual from the Houston metropolitan area who has been in good health for more than two weeks. The plasma was transfused into a COVID-19 patient on Saturday evening at Houston Methodist Hospital.

Known as convalescent serum therapy, the con-

cept dates back more than a century, when similar treatments were used during the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, a diphtheria outbreak in the 1920s, a flesh-eating bacteria epidemic in the 1930s, and during other outbreaks of infectious diseases. While literature abounds on the theory that immunity can be transferred from a healthy individual to a sick individual using convalescent plasma, results have varied. A description of the treatment of five patients in China was published this week in the Journal of the American Medical Association, suggesting that the treatment was beneficial.

"Here at Houston Methodist, we have the capability, the expertise and the patient base from our health care system, and we feel obligated to try this therapy," said Houston Methodist President and CEO Marc Boom.

"There is so much to be learned about this disease while it's occurring," he said. "If an infusion of convalescent serum can help save the life of a critically ill patient, then applying the full resources of our blood bank, our expert faculty, and our academic medical center is incredibly worthwhile and important to do."

Houston Methodist recruitment began as soon as the FDA issued regulatory guidelines for the study earlier last week. Physician scientists at



Houston Methodist already had designed and validated a COVID-19 molecular test two months ago and were prepared to begin collecting data when COVID-19 patients started arriving. The Houston Methodist IRB and regulatory affairs experts reviewed the treatment protocol rapidly and secured the FDA approval this weekend.

In New York City earlier this week, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced that patient recruitment for plasma donations would begin in a matter of days and initially would focus on the heavily hit New York City suburb of New Rochelle, NY.

Eric Salazar, M.D., Ph.D., principal investigator and a physician scientist in the Department of Pathology and Genomic Medicine at

the Houston Methodist Hospital and Research Institute, said a review of COVID-19 patients' charts indicates that nearly two-thirds of the patients may meet the criteria to donate plasma. Patients with critical underlying conditions and advanced age will not be eligible to donate.

Under FDA guidelines, Houston Methodist's convalescent serum therapy treatment is classified as an emergency investigational new drug protocol (eIND) that requires FDA approval for each patient infused with donated convalescent serum. Houston Methodist physician scientists will seek additional FDA approval for follow-up studies, possibly a multicenter national trial on the effectiveness of convalescent serum therapy against the COVID-19 virus.

The process for donating plasma is similar to donating blood and takes about an hour. Plasma donors are hooked up to a small device that removes plasma while simultaneously returning red blood cells to their bodies. Unlike regular blood donation in which donors have to wait for red blood cells to replenish between donations, plasma can be donated more frequently, as often as twice a week.

"Convalescent serum therapy could be a vital treatment route, because unfortunately there is relatively little to offer many patients except supportive care, and the ongoing clinical trials are going to take a while. We don't have that much time," Salazar said. (Courtesy <https://www.houstonmethodist.org/>)



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Editor's Choice



With the dome of the U.S. Capitol in the background, a homeless man named Damu stretches on the National Mall in Washington. REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque



Rep. John Lewis speaks at a news conference held by Democrats on the state of voting rights in America at the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, June 25, 2019. REUTERS/Leah Millis



Deer are seen around the grounds of Raby Castle, Britain. REUTERS/Lee Smith



Civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr. (3rd from R front row) and John Lewis (4th from L front row), talk with reporters after meeting with President John F. Kennedy after the March on Washington in Washington, August 28, 1963...



Demonstrators confront with riot police as they try to cross barricades on a road leading to the UNESCO Palace where Lebanon's parliament is holding a legislative session, during a protest against a controversial amnesty draft law, in Beirut



Rep. John Lewis (D-GA) and other members of the Congressional Black Caucus wait in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda to enter memorial services for Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD) as a group at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, October 24, 2019.

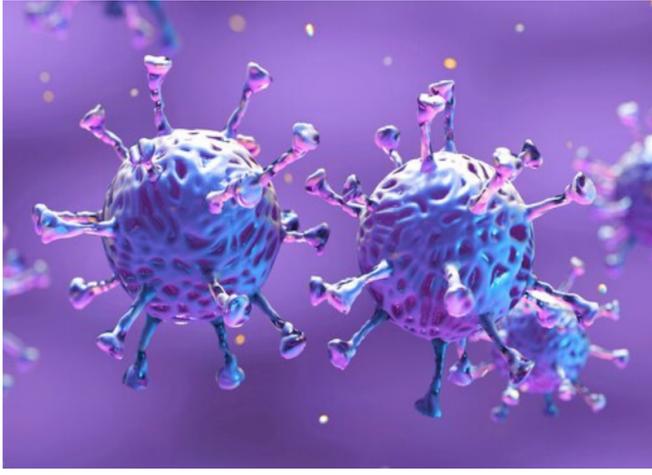


President Barack Obama and first lady Michelle Obama (2nd L) hold hands with former President George W. Bush (R) and former first lady Laura Bush (L) and Rep. John Lewis (D-GA) during commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the 'Bloody Sunday'.



People wearing protective masks make their way during rush hour at Shinjuku station on the first day after the Japanese government lifted the state of emergency in Tokyo, Japan. REUTERS/Kim Kyung-Hoon

Why Obesity May Increase The Risk For COVID-19 Risk



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Stephen O’Rahilly recently spent a week in a hospital, sick with COVID-19 and struggling to breathe.

“My lungs were quite badly affected,” says O’Rahilly, 62, who spent almost a week getting extra oxygen in what’s known as a high-intensity care unit in the U.K.

The experience got him thinking: While about 80% of cases of COVID-19 can be treated at home, why do some people, including him, wind up with more severe infections?

Besides his age, O’Rahilly knew he had another strike against him when it comes to COVID-19 infection: his weight. His BMI, or body mass index, is over 30.

O’Rahilly, who directs the MRC Metabolic Diseases Unit at Cambridge University, is considered one of the world’s leading obesity researchers. He was knighted in 2013 by Queen Elizabeth II for his work, which includes the discovery of a genetic condition that robs the body of the hormone leptin, which controls appetite and weight.

And so after his brush with the coronavirus, he started digging into exactly what it is about obesity that makes it so risky for

a COVID-19 infection.

Obesity a Known COVID Risk

It has become clearer that people who are obese are one of the groups at highest risk from the disease, regardless of their age. The CDC recently refined its risk categories for COVID-19, stating that obesity was as big a risk for COVID as having a suppressed immune system or chronic lung or kidney disease. The agency also lowered the bar for where that risk starts -- from a BMI of 40 to a BMI of 30. Roughly 40% of Americans have a BMI over 30.

The CDC’s change in BMI risk comes after a British study of more than 17 million people found that people living with severe obesity were about twice as likely to die from COVID-19 as people who were not obese. That was true even after other things like their age and sex were taken into account. The study also found that risk rises with the degree of obesity. The bigger a person, the higher their risk of a COVID-19 death.

During the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, there was a strong link between obesity and bad outcomes for patients. People with obesity were at a higher risk of dying

during flu pandemics in the 1950s and 1960s, too.

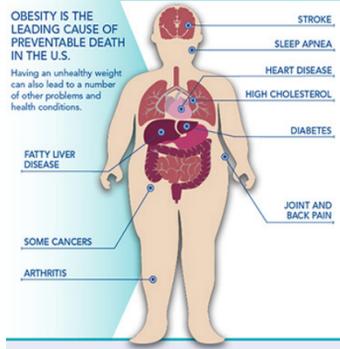
Markers Hint to Reason

So why is that? Some people say that being heavier just makes it harder to breathe, especially when you’re sick.

Economic Cost of Obesity



HOW OBESITY AFFECTS YOUR BODY



A Mixture of Problems

So if the insides of your blood vessels are sticky, and a virus causes your immune system to go haywire and create more blood clots, that sets the stage for blockages. These blockages can cause heart attacks, strokes, and lung damage -- all problems seen in COVID-19 patients.

To compound the problem, people with obesity appear to have more ACE2 receptors on their cells than others. ACE2 receptors are the doors the virus uses to infect cells and then make more copies of itself.

A recent study found that fat tissue has more ACE2 receptors than lung cells do. More ACE2 may mean more virus in the body, says Carl Lavie, MD, medical director of cardiac rehabilitation and prevention at Ochsner Health in New Orleans.

Lavie recently published a paper on obesity and COVID-19 in Mayo Clinic Proceedings.

On top of all that, there’s insulin resistance, which is more common in people who are obese and may turn up the ACE2 receptors even further.

Insulin is a hormone that’s critical for maintaining blood sugar levels. In obesity and some other conditions, cells of the body stop responding as well to insulin’s message to use sugar as energy and take it out of the blood and instead it stores it as fat. In response, the pancreas tries to turn up the volume by cranking out more insulin. The problem is that insulin doesn’t just impact blood sugar levels.

“One of the things it affects is the ACE2 receptor that this virus binds to,” says Francis Finucane, MD a consultant endocrinologist

at Galway University Hospital in Galway, Ireland.

“If you’re insulin-resistant, you’ve got more receptors for those spike proteins on your cell surfaces, say, for example on your lung cells,” he says.

“We think that would make it easier for viruses to get into those lung cells, and that more viruses would get in, and that would create a worse COVID infection, and that would account for at least some of the variation in the severity of the disease,” Finucane says.

He says researchers are planning studies that will try to prove some of these theories.



Role of Insulin

His team is going to try to measure insulin resistance in COVID-19 patients through blood tests, then look at how sick they are. Finucane admits that may not show anything. Illness can make people insulin-resistant. So they might be measuring an effect of the infection, and not a cause.

A different team of researchers in the U.K. is taking a different approach. They’re going to mine data on tens of thousands of patients to see if genes for insulin resistance are tied to COVID-19 severity or survival. Learning the root causes can help doctors develop strategies to help protect obese patients. For example, there are ways to improve insulin sensitivity relatively quickly through diet, physical activity, and drugs.

“I’m being facetious here, but we may need to outlaw chocolate and sugar-sweetened beverage to reduce the population risk from COVID-19,” Finucane says. (Courtesy <https://www.webmd.com/>)

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