



# MARKET MATTERS

WEEKLY INVESTOR UPDATE

May 20, 2020

## Executive Summary

- Moderna led equities up on Monday after releasing positive early COVID-19 vaccine test results, then down on Tuesday after some skepticism. Such reactions are expected given such preliminary results.
- More states are lifting restrictions while maintaining social distancing guidelines.
- Economic indicators continue to point to bad second quarter, but we could be reaching a bottom.
- With the blend of positive and negative news, expect volatility to continue.

## COVID-19 Update: Guarded Hopes of a Vaccine

As the count of worldwide coronavirus infections continues to increase to close to 5 million confirmed cases,<sup>1</sup> some potential good news was reported on Monday when pharmaceutical firm Moderna, Inc. announced that initial COVID-19 vaccine results induced immune responses (antibodies) in volunteers, raising hopes of a vaccine or medical treatment to prevent or slow the spread of the virus.<sup>2</sup> While some hope for a vaccine by year-end, many experts caution that a more realistic time frame would be 12-18-months, which in historical terms would still be considered extraordinarily fast.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Moderna's results were questioned on Tuesday.<sup>4</sup> Due to the urgent need for a treatment, COVID-19 studies, including Moderna's, tend to be released early without complete information and prior to being peer-reviewed, so concurrent excitement and skepticism is to be expected.

As more states lift restrictions that were put in place to help curb the spread of the coronavirus, many businesses are reopening under limitations and social distancing guidelines, creating some sense of normality. Many Americans are venturing out from self-isolation and returning cautiously back into businesses.<sup>5</sup> Some governors, even in the hardest-hit states, are now welcoming major sports teams back to start playing their seasons, albeit without fans in the stands.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "COVID-19 Dashboard," John Hopkins University & Medicine Coronavirus Resource Center. Visited May 18, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> "Moderna Says Initial Covid-19 Vaccine Results Are Positive," *Wall Street Journal*. May 18, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> "Vaccine Could Potentially Be Available Later This Year, Coalition Says," *Bloomberg*. April 27, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> "Scientists Raise Questions About Moderna Vaccine In Market-Shaking Report," *Forbes*. May 19, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> "Social Distancing Eases as Some States Lift Restrictions," Gallup. May 15, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> "Sports teams should play: NY governor," *Reuters*. May 18, 2020.

The economic pain caused by COVID-19 remains a top issue on the minds of most Americans. As unemployment hits new heights each passing week, a new bill known as the HEROES Act calls for additional stimulus payments to Americans making under a certain amount of yearly income. Additional benefits of the proposed bill that was passed by the House of Representatives would look to extend unemployment benefits and provide aid to states and local governments. The bill is still in the early stages, so if it survives and becomes law, there are likely to be significant changes as it moves through the legislative process.<sup>7</sup>

## Economic Update: Signs of Nearing the Bottom

Over the past week, readings for economic indicators continued to show that the U.S. economy was likely in a deep recession during the month of April. Retail sales in April fell by their largest percentage on record. The declines in retail sales were widespread and pronounced due to the majority of the country having shelter-in-place orders during the month of April. The largest declines were in clothing stores and furniture stores, while a bright spot was found in online retailers. Interestingly, grocery store sales fell in April as stockpiling of goods began to decline, although sales still remained higher than a year earlier.

In the housing market, April housing starts fell by a record 30% on a month-over-month basis, although homebuilders felt a little more optimistic than they did in March. Meanwhile, the number of individuals seeking unemployment claims remained elevated at 2.98 million, although the number of claims has slowly fallen each week since reaching a peak of nearly seven million claims six weeks ago.

Members of the Federal Reserve (the “Fed”) actively discussed their views on the economy and monetary policy last week. In a *60 Minutes* interview, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said that the Fed has plenty of ammunition to help support the economy and that there is “no limit to what we can do with these lending programs.” At the same time, Mr. Powell warned that the economy will not be able to fully recover until the virus is controlled.<sup>8</sup> In a separate speech, Mr. Powell commented that the Fed is not considering negative interest rates. He also provided some optimism that unemployment is likely to peak in the next month, although it will likely remain elevated for a significant period of time. Boston Fed Chief Eric Rosengren also provided commentary, saying that “now is the time for both monetary and fiscal policy to act boldly to limit economic pain from the pandemic.” Mr. Rosengren said that he anticipates

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<sup>7</sup> “5 HEROES Act Provisions with a Good Chance of Becoming Law,” *Kiplinger*. May 16, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> “Fed chair: ‘There’s no limit’ to coronavirus stimulus response,” *Axios*. May 18, 2020.

unemployment will peak around 20% and may remain in double digits at year-end. He also said he does not anticipate a “V-shaped” recovery for the U.S. economy.<sup>9</sup>

Updated GDP projections continue to point to a severe recession in the second quarter, but also a recovery in the third quarter even if it does not get us to pre-pandemic levels by year-end.

| Market Index Trailing Total Returns |        |         |         |        |
|-------------------------------------|--------|---------|---------|--------|
| as of 5/19/2020                     | MTD    | YTD     | 1 Year  | 3 Year |
| <b>S&amp;P 500</b>                  | 0.51%  | -8.83%  | 4.26%   | 9.20%  |
| <b>Russell 2000</b>                 | -0.13% | -21.19% | -13.56% | -0.10% |
| <b>MSCI EAFE USD</b>                | 0.04%  | -17.81% | -9.04%  | -1.60% |
| <b>MSCI Emerging Markets USD</b>    | 0.11%  | -16.51% | -4.67%  | -0.03% |
| <b>Barclays U.S. Aggregate Bond</b> | -0.19% | 4.78%   | 10.00%  | 4.95%  |
| <b>Barclays High Yield Corp</b>     | 1.30%  | -7.57%  | -2.32%  | 2.15%  |
| <b>Barclays Global Agg Bond USD</b> | -0.97% | -1.66%  | 2.21%   | 1.94%  |

Periods longer than a year are annualized. Returns include dividends or interest. Source: Morningstar.

## Market Update: Still Following the Daily News

Markets continue to react to daily developments related to a potential economic recovery and the potential development of a vaccine for COVID-19. Last week, U.S. equities ended on a down note as Fed Chair Powell warned about “lasting damage” to the economy, Congress disagreed on a stimulus package, government officials threatened a resumption in the U.S.-China trade war, and economic indicators had poor readings.<sup>10</sup> The S&P 500 rose 3.2% on Monday, May 18 on news of Moderna’s positive early test results, but dropped 1.1% the following day on skepticism of Moderna’s test results. With the blend of positive and negative news, expect volatility to continue.

In this time of great uncertainty, it is important that you are invested in a diversified portfolio. At the same time, those with intermediate and long-term investment horizons may find very attractive opportunities that have presented themselves in financial markets.

We are here to support you and navigate these times of uncertainty together. Knowledge is power, and we’re committed to equipping you and your financial professional with the tools and information you need to weather this storm. We are continuing to watch market developments and are here to assist you with evaluating and understanding these economic changes. Please contact your financial professional to discuss your portfolio or should you have any questions/concerns.

<sup>9</sup> “The Main Street Lending Program and Other Federal Reserve Actions,” Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. May 19, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> “Global Markets Weekly Update,” T. Rowe Price. May 15, 2020.

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