



COVID-19 UPDATE February 16, 2021

Global

Total cases- 109,829,908

Total deaths- 2,422,761

United States

Total cases- 28,321,840

Total deaths- 498,261

Covid-19 cases and hospitalizations are dropping dramatically across the US, suggesting that measures to interrupt transmission are working, at least for now. A rising number of Americans -- 11.8% of the population -- has now received at least one dose of a vaccine. In addition, the White House announced today that the US vaccine supply is increasing to 13.5 million doses per week, up from 11 million, and the number of shots distributed through pharmacies will double.

Biden Administration

- **President Joe Biden** has ruled out requiring coronavirus tests for all passengers on **domestic flights** as of now, saying the scientific evidence doesn't support implementing the measure.
- **President Joe Biden** announced that the U.S. has finished deals for 100 million additional vaccine doses each from Pfizer Inc. and Moderna Inc., and that the companies would deliver new and existing orders quicker than projected.
 - While the orders had been previously announced, the delivery dates for the additional vaccine doses were moved up to the end of July, Biden said in remarks Thursday at the National Institutes of Health. Delivery of a previously ordered batch was also sped up, to the end of May from the end of June.
- **President Joe Biden's administration** will boost weekly vaccine shipments to states to 11 million from 10.5 million and launch a vaccination program through community health centers in every state and territory, White House adviser Jeff Zients said last week.
 - The administration will begin shipping doses to the centers as soon as next week. That will include a total of one million doses -- enough for 500,000 full vaccinations -- as the program ramps up in coming weeks, Zients said at a briefing. The timeline for those shipments wasn't immediately clear. The program will begin with 250 health centers, and as vaccines become more available, shipments will go to all 1,400 centers nationwide.
- **The director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** suggested that testing people for the coronavirus before U.S. domestic flights could help reduce transmission, as she urged state and local leaders to maintain steps to limit Covid-19's spread.
 - Requiring travelers to receive a negative coronavirus test before boarding domestic flights could be "another mitigation measure," CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said last

week during a press briefing. She didn't say whether the CDC will move forward with the policy, which the Biden administration is actively considering. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg told Axios the discussion is ongoing, and the decision will be "guided by data, by science, by medicine, and by the input of the people who are actually going to have to carry this out."

- Wearing a cloth mask over a medical mask can boost protection from aerosolized particles and slow the spread of Covid-19, a new study from the **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** found.
 - The finding, part of the agency's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, also examined the efficacy of modifications made to improve the fit of a medical mask. The study is likely to provide the basis for new mask guidance from the CDC. The agency hasn't yet recommended double-masking because it was waiting to gather evidence on the practice.
- Schools should use masks and social distancing to safely resume in-person learning as soon as possible, the **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** recommended Friday.
- The U.S. government needs to better coordinate its federally run vaccine programs with state officials and differentiate how many doses are being deployed by the programs when it reports on the results, the **National Governors Association** urged Monday.
 - In an open letter to **President Joe Biden**, the governors said the federal government administers three separate programs that the states have no control over and little visibility on. Meanwhile, some states are allocating vaccine doses to the same pharmacies as well as the Federally Qualified Health Centers, the letter said.
 - That can be confusing to the general public and, potentially, cause redundancy and inefficiency, the letter said. "As usual, some pharmacies and FQHCs are better suited for the task than others," the governors wrote in the letter. "Following the performance data on these entities is essential."
- **U.S. public health advisers** are weighing recommendations for extending the interval between the first and second doses of Covid-19 vaccines, a potential strategy for quickly getting protection to more people amid the spread of new virus variants.
- **The Biden administration** extended Covid-19 forbearance and foreclosure protections for homeowners to June 30, according to a White House statement. This would:
 - Extend the foreclosure moratorium for homeowners to June 30
 - Extend the mortgage payment forbearance enrollment window to June 30 for borrowers who want to request forbearance
 - Give up to six months of additional mortgage payment forbearance, in three-month increments, for borrowers who entered forbearance on or before June 30 last year

Congress

- **The House** is aiming to vote Feb. 26 on President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion stimulus plan.
 - **Speaker Nancy Pelosi** (D-Calif.) has said she'll send the bill to the Senate as soon as it passes the House.
- **House committees** have sent their coronavirus relief measures to the **Budget Committee** as they prepare to move ahead with a bill that largely matches President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion proposal.
 - The **House Budget Committee** has yet to schedule a markup, which would mostly be a formality.

- The **Senate Budget Committee** doesn't plan to hold a markup of the bill, instead sending it straight to the floor.
- The **House Energy and Commerce Committee** approved more than \$46 billion for Covid-19 testing and \$20 billion to expand vaccine distribution as part of House Democrats' \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package.
- The **House Education and Labor Committee** approved increasing the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour, part of the first piece of legislation to advance out of committee in President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 relief plan.
 - The panel voted 27-21 along party lines early Wednesday for [legislation](#) that also includes billions of dollars to reopen schools, bolster childcare centers and expand access to health insurance.
 - Democrats defeated dozens of Republican amendments, including those aimed at reopening schools more quickly or stopping the wage increase, during an all-night hearing that ran for more than 13 hours. Republicans cited a Congressional Budget Office report from Monday that estimated more than doubling the minimum wage by 2025 would result in 1.4 million fewer jobs. It remains unclear if the minimum wage will be permitted to stay in the fast-track budget process that Democrats are using to pass the bill in the Senate with just a simple majority, rather than the usual 60 votes needed to end a filibuster.
- The **House Ways and Means Committee** on Wednesday advanced a key portion of President Joe Biden's Covid-19 relief package -- a \$400 weekly supplement to unemployment benefits through the end of August.
 - The measure passed on a 24-18 vote. The legislation cleared by the panel would also expand benefits for self-employed and gig workers and extend the number of weeks that long-term jobless individuals can qualify for payments.
- The **House Ways and Means Committee** also advanced legislation that would infuse households with hundreds of billions of dollars of cash through direct payments and tax credits, a key plank of President Joe Biden's Covid-19 relief package.
 - The panel on Thursday approved measures providing \$593.5 billion in [benefits](#), most of which is made up of \$1,400 stimulus payments, along with advance tax credits for children that will be sent to households on a monthly basis. The measures passed on a 24-18 party-line vote.
- The **House Transportation and Infrastructure, Agriculture and Small Business committees** late Wednesday advanced their components of President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 relief proposal.
 - The **Transportation panel** voted 39-25 in favor of more than \$40 billion in aid. The measures would provide \$30 billion for transit, \$8 billion for U.S. airports, \$3 billion for aviation manufacturing jobs and \$1.5 billion for Amtrak.
 - The **Small Business Committee** approved \$50 billion in emergency pandemic aid for small businesses.
 - The **Agriculture Committee** approved by a vote of 25-23 a \$16 billion measure focused on food purchases, nutrition aid, and supply chain assistance.
 - The **House Energy and Commerce Committee** on Thursday considered \$5 billion in assistance for utility payments for needy ratepayers. The provision would direct \$4.5 billion for home energy help and \$500 million for aid related to drinking water payments and wastewater expenses.

- **Senate Republican leaders** late Friday urged Senate leadership, especially Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), to allow the chamber to amend President Joe Biden's Covid relief plan.
 - Bypassing a chance for committees to amend the legislation, "would make Senate Democrats' first legislative act of the 117th Congress the outsourcing of their own committee gavels to the House," senior Republicans of each Senate committee wrote in a [letter](#).

Vaccines and Treatment

- Only about half of U.S. adults surveyed late last year said they were certain or very likely to get a Covid-19 vaccine, according to a new report from by the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**.
 - The study, released Tuesday in the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, surveyed 3,541 people in September and 2,033 individuals in December. A greater proportion of people indicated that they planned to get a vaccine in December than in September. But the finding showed that more work needed to be done to address concerns about the vaccines after they were cleared for use, said agency researchers who co-wrote the report.
- **World Health Organization** panel recommended **AstraZeneca Plc's** Covid-19 vaccine for all adults over 18, paving the way to speed up inoculations in developing countries.
 - The recommendation may encourage more countries to use the vaccine broadly, after some European Union members advised against giving it to the elderly, citing insufficient trial data. The shot's effect in older people is expected to be the same as for younger recipients, said Alejandro Cravioto, chairman of the WHO expert panel, in a briefing.
- **AstraZeneca Plc's Covid-19** vaccine is worth using in areas hit by mutated strains of the virus, World Health Organization officials and partners said, countering concerns about reduced effectiveness that arose in a recent test.
 - AstraZeneca Plc's vaccine should protect people against severe disease from the South Africa strain of the virus, according to the company's chief executive officer. Speaking at a World Health Organization meeting Tuesday, Pascal Soriot said that while a recent study showing the vaccine may not prevent mild disease was concerning, that didn't mean more serious illness wouldn't be stopped.
- **CanSino Biologics Inc.'s** experimental shot is the latest candidate to show some protection against Covid-19.
- The **federal government** will cooperate with **New York** to deliver vaccines to socially vulnerable communities, Governor Andrew Cuomo said Wednesday.
 - Two mass-vaccination sites in Queens and central Brooklyn will open the week of Feb. 24, each capable of administering 3,000 doses a day, Cuomo said Wednesday. They will be staffed jointly by state and federal officials and will administer a special allocation of doses reserved for such purposes.
- **Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd.** is in talks with Covid-19 vaccine makers about helping to produce and distribute shots as demand rises for immunizations.
 - The generic drug giant is offering to dedicate its manufacturing capacity in the U.S., Europe and beyond to aid with mass-immunization efforts geared at combating the pandemic, Chief Executive Officer Kare Schultz said Wednesday.

- Most Americans will have access to a Covid-19 vaccine by mid- to late May or early June, **White House chief medical advisor Dr. Anthony Fauci** said on Tuesday, a slight delay compared with earlier predictions.
 - The infectious disease expert had previously forecast the lifesaving drugs would be widely available to the general public by late March or early April. So far, distribution of the vaccines has been limited to workers in essential industries, those age 65 and older and those with underlying health conditions, depending on the state.
 - However, Fauci said the federal government was expecting “considerably more” initial doses from Johnson & Johnson, which has applied for an emergency authorization in the U.S. The New Jersey-based company has previously said it will provide the U.S. with 100 million doses by the end of June.
- About 1 million shots are available at nearly **two dozen pharmacy chains** across the country through a federal program that started Thursday. **CVS, Walgreens Boots Alliance Inc., Rite Aid Corp.** are among participating companies. The initiative will boost the number of doses that are available to the general public.
 - **CVS** [will receive](#) about 250,000 doses divided across 11 states, the company said. In New Jersey, that means 19,900 are available at CVS stores throughout the state. Each participating Rite Aid store will initially receive 100 doses of Moderna Inc.’s Covid-19 vaccine, the company said. Rite Aid will administer shots in five states and two cities.
- **Sanofi’s** two Covid-19 vaccines are entering new phases of trials in coming weeks and both could be available by the end of the year, said Thomas Triomphe, head of Sanofi Pasteur.
 - Sanofi’s more advanced vaccine candidate, being jointly developed with GlaxoSmithKline Plc, will enter another Phase II trial later this month, and there have been no problems with getting the right formulations, Triomphe said in a phone interview.
- **The European Union** may secure an extra 150 million doses of the Covid-19 vaccine produced by **Moderna** Inc. as the bloc seeks to accelerate inoculations.
- **European Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides** announced fast-track approval procedures for coronavirus vaccines that need to be adapted to protect against Covid-19 mutations, Germany’s Augsburger Allgemeine newspaper reported Sunday, citing an interview.

