



COVID-19 UPDATE February 22, 2021

Global

Total cases- 112,100,066

Total deaths- 2,480,652

United States

Total cases- 28,770,979

Total deaths- 511,338

Total vaccines doses administered- 64,177,474

The U.S. is nearing 30 million COVID cases and passed the 500,000 death mark at the end of last week. The U.S. has administered over 63 million vaccine doses, although issues due to the recent cold weather and logistics with the second dose have led to some delays. Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease doctor, recently warned of the possibility that Americans might need to wear masks for another year, and mentioned in an interview he has been pushing studies on the effects of vaccines on those under 18 years of age.

Biden Administration

- The **Biden administration** continues to call for **K-8 public schools** to reopen for in-person learning by the end of April and said the provision of additional funds will be key.
 - White House press secretary Jen Psaki on Sunday drew a direct line from the timetable for classrooms to be back in action to the \$1.9 trillion Biden-backed stimulus plan now moving through Congress.
- The **Biden administration** envisions a nationwide network of **Covid-19 testing hubs** to boost capacity and enable K-8 schools to reopen, a public notice released Thursday shows.
 - The effort by the **Army** and the **Department of Health and Human Services** would create four centers to organize laboratory networks and prioritize schoolchildren. Each hub location could report as many as 25 million test results per month.
 - Biden's administration will allocate roughly \$1.6 billion to expand production of coronavirus tests and coordinate testing in the nation's schools. The White House announced the **Department of Health and Human Services** and the **Department of Defense** will spend \$650 million to "expand testing opportunities for K-8 schools" and other facilities, such as homeless shelters. It will also spend \$815 million to increase production of testing supplies.
- **The White House** also announced that it will spend nearly \$200 million to identify and track new emerging variants of the virus. **Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**, said the U.S. found the first case of a new version of the U.K. virus strain that's more easily transmitted.
- **White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki** says the **Biden administration's** focus is on **Moderna** and **Pfizer** coronavirus vaccines when asked about fewer **Johnson & Johnson** doses available than expected.

- The U.S. government expects to initially receive only a “few million” doses of Johnson & Johnson’s Covid-19 vaccine if it is authorized -- well short of what was initially promised -- and is working with the company to prepare to scale up production, White House Covid-19 Response Coordinator Jeff Zients said Wednesday.
- The **Biden administration** intends to go further than it or the Trump administration has in its use of the **Defense Production Act** to look beyond filling immediate needs and comprehensively improve the medical supply chain so it can weather future disasters and coronavirus-like pandemics.
- **Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen** defended the need for \$1.9 trillion in pandemic-aid spending, the second-largest emergency relief bill on record, even with recent strength in retail sales and U.S. stock values. “It’s very important to have a big package that addresses the pain this has caused,” Yellen told CNBC last week.
- **The White House** acknowledged that **Biden’s proposed minimum-wage hike** may not make it through Congress as he framed it, following objections from key moderate Democrats.
 - “It’s important, it’s a priority,” for Biden, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said at a briefing today of the president’s proposed phase-in of a \$15 an hour minimum wage. Even so, Biden recognizes that the economic rescue bill that includes the wage increase “may not look exactly the same on the other end when it comes out” of Congress, she said.
- **The Biden administration** has ordered enough **Moderna** and **Pfizer** vaccines to vaccinate the entire public, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said in a press conference Friday.
- The **Biden administration** will give exclusive access to the **Paycheck Protection Program** to the nation’s smallest businesses for two weeks as part of a broader effort to steer federal aid to the most vulnerable parts of the economy. From Feb. 24 through March 9, only businesses with fewer than 20 employees will be able to apply for relief through the program, a senior administration official said

Congress

- **House Democrats** plan to pass their \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package this week, though work could spill over into the weekend due to the busy schedule in Washington.
 - The **House Budget Committee** is set to vote today (Monday) on a large portion of the legislative package. No substantive changes are allowed in the markup, which is meant to stitch together various measures advanced earlier this month by 12 authorizing committees.
 - After the **Budget Committee**, the **Rules Committee** will meet to approve a rule for consideration of the package, and then members will vote on the floor. **Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.)** has warned members work could spill over into the weekend.
 - Only nine of the 12 measures advanced by authorizing panels appear in the Budget Committee print. Three committees—Foreign Affairs, Natural Resources, and Science, Space, and Technology—didn’t hold markups on the smallest portions of the package, so those three titles will be added by the Rules Committee before the floor vote, a House Democratic aide said Friday.
 - If the House passes the bill, it’ll go to the **Senate**. If senators make any changes to the bill and then pass it, House members will have to vote again. Even if that’s the case, congressional leaders expect to get the package signed into law in the next three weeks.
 - The package is about \$30 billion over the limit set by the reconciliation instructions adopted by both chambers, according to a **Congressional Budget Office [estimate](#)** released Saturday.
 - The finding will force lawmakers to change the measure sometime before senators hold a vote. CBO estimated the package would add \$1.92 trillion to the deficit from fiscal 2021 to 2030, while the reconciliation instructions allowed for a \$1.89 trillion increase.
- **Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer** (D-N.Y.) and **Sen. Elizabeth Warren** (D-Mass.) said they’ll keep pressuring Biden to wipe out up to \$50,000 per borrower in student loan debt, after he shot down

such a proposal at a town hall event yesterday. Schumer and Warren for months have been pushing Biden to be bolder with executive action to cancel debt, and they said they won't give up. "It's time to act. We will keep fighting," they said in a statement

- The **House Energy and Commerce Committee** is scheduled to hold a hearing of Covid-19 vaccine manufacturers, including Moderna, Pfizer Inc., Johnson & Johnson, AstraZeneca Plc and Novavax Inc., to discuss expanding the availability of shots.

Vaccines and Treatment

- A month of safety monitoring indicated "reassuring safety profiles" for the two coronavirus vaccines cleared in the U.S., according to a new **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** report. The analysis follows 13.8 million doses administered through Jan. 13
 - One CDC monitoring system recorded fewer than 7,000 reports of adverse events, and of those, 90% were not serious, with known side effects like headache, fatigue and dizziness among the most common. The severe allergic reaction known as anaphylaxis occurred in 4.5 cases for each million doses administered, similar to levels associated with other widely used vaccines.
 - The CDC received reports of 113 deaths through Jan. 13, largely among the 1 million long-term care residents vaccinated in that period. The causes and rates of deaths were consistent with the overall level of mortality, and "did not indicate any unexpected pattern that might suggest a causal relationship with vaccination," the CDC said.
- **Pfizer Chief Executive Officer Albert Bourla** said Friday that the company will expand manufacturing and work with new suppliers to ramp up production of the Covid-19 vaccine it developed with BioNTech SE.
 - Appearing at a Pfizer plant in Michigan with President Joe Biden, Bourla said the company will employ additional capacity at its Kalamazoo site to produce the shot's formulation as well as a component of the vaccine, known as lipids, which help deliver the genetic material into the body. The drug giant also will increase lipid production capabilities at its plant in Groton, Connecticut, and add on so-called fill-finish capacity at its site in McPherson, Kansas. He said he expects the number of doses, which average 5 million a week, "to more than double."
- The U.S. will contribute up to \$4 billion to **Covax**, the global campaign to fund vaccinations in poorer countries, but doesn't plan on shipping any of its own vaccines to those places until America's own demands have been met.
- The [Pfizer Inc.](#) and [BioNTech SE](#) **Covid-19 vaccine** appeared to stop the vast majority of recipients in **Israel** becoming infected, providing the first real-world indication that the immunization will curb transmission of the coronavirus.
 - The vaccine, which was rolled out in a national immunization program that began Dec. 20, was 89.4% effective at preventing laboratory-confirmed infections, according to a copy of a draft publication that was posted on Twitter.
- **The U.K.** will significantly accelerate its vaccination program, offering shots to all adults by the end of July and everyone over 50 by mid-April as the government beefs up efforts to contain one of the world's worst outbreaks of the coronavirus.
 - **Prime Minister Boris Johnson** will set out the new targets on Monday when he reveals his "roadmap" to easing lockdown restrictions. It is the first time the government has given a firm target for when it expects to offer all adults their initial dose, having previously said it hoped to do so by autumn. The previous target set for over-50s was the end of May.

- **Novavax Inc.** will supply 1.1 billion doses of its experimental Covid-19 vaccine to **Covax**, a global alliance many low and middle-income countries are relying on to protect their populations from the virus.
 - The **Covax** Facility is an effort led by the World Health Organization, The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovations, and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. Novavax, along with its manufacturing and distribution partner the Serum Institute of India, announced the commitment in a statement on Thursday, sending shares of the U.S. drugmaker up 7% in post-market trading. Novavax and Gavi haven't yet finalized the advanced purchase agreement for supply of the two-shot regimen.
- **California** will set aside 10% of vaccination first doses for teachers and child-care workers in an effort to speed up the reopening of schools, **Governor Gavin Newsom** said.
 - The decision means that starting March 1, at least 75,000 doses per week will be reserved for educators, whose unions have largely opposed in-person classes until their members are vaccinated. Newsom, who faces the threat of a recall election over his handling of the pandemic, is pushing to reopen schools soon, with the youngest grades starting first.
- **Pfizer and BioNTech** asked the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to allow their vaccine to be stored for two weeks at temperatures found in normal pharmaceutical freezers, a change that could simplify distribution for the shot.
 - The partners submitted new data showing stability when the vaccine is stored at minus 25-to-minus 15 degrees Celsius (-13°F to 5°F), they said in a statement on Friday. Current protocol is for storage for up to six months in an ultra-cold freezer at temperatures of -80°C to -60°C and shipping in a special thermal container.

Other

- **Democratic leaders of the NY State Senate** are moving to strip **Governor Andrew Cuomo** of unilateral emergency powers granted during the pandemic, and Senate measures could be voted on as soon as next week.
- The **FBI** and **U.S. attorney's office** in the Eastern District of New York launched an investigation into **Governor Andrew Cuomo's** handling of long-term care facilities like nursing homes.
- **Business groups** and **lenders** are urging **Congress**, the **Small Business Administration**, and **Treasury** to fix a problem that is unexpectedly blocking some small businesses from taking full advantage of the **Paycheck Protection Program**.
 - The problem facing sole proprietors and independent contractors, among others, is that they have to use a dollar figure from their income tax form—the money a business makes after expenses—to calculate how much money they could get in forgivable loans from the SBA. But that dollar figure is lower than the amount a business could qualify for if they used the amount made before expenses. The change was part of the December relief law's alterations to PPP. The SBA has acknowledged it, but hasn't said whether they plan to fix it, which business advocates say they could do without action from Congress.
- **U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson** will announce that all **schools** in England will reopen from March 8, as he outlines how the national coronavirus lockdown will be lifted over the coming months.
 - Alongside the reopening of schools, people will be allowed to meet one-on-one to sit down for a coffee or picnic outdoors, and after-school activities outside can restart from the same date, according to a person familiar with the plans.
 - In a statement to Parliament on Monday, Johnson is also expected to allow more social contact from March 29 when outdoor gatherings of either six people or two households can take place, and outdoor sports such as tennis and football can resume.

MONUMENT ADVOCACY

- **Major U.S. carriers** will collect personal information on a voluntary basis from passengers flying into the U.S. as part of stepped-up efforts to trace people who may have been exposed to Covid-19, the **Airlines for America** trade group says.
 - Name, two phone numbers, email address and a physical address for where traveler will be staying or resides will be collected and transmitted to the Centers for Disease Control. Airlines hope data gathering plus existing coronavirus testing requirements for passengers flying into U.S. will lead Biden administration to lift travel restrictions.

