



COVID-19 UPDATE February 8, 2021

Global

Total cases- 106,821,217

Total deaths- 2,330,285

United States

Total cases- 27,616,951

Total deaths- 475,015

The U.S. is closing in on 30 million COVID-19 cases as vaccine rollout gains traction. In the U.S, more than 41 million vaccine doses have been administered, and countrywide daily vaccinations are reaching 1.5 million, increasing by about 100,000 every day. Despite case numbers dipping, experts caution that the Super Bowl, in conjunction with relaxed state restrictions, could potentially lead to an uptick in infections. Progress is being made towards a COVID relief plan, although there is opposition from the GOP on certain areas within the plan.

Biden Administration

- **President Joe Biden** said it's unlikely the U.S. will reach herd immunity for the coronavirus before the end of the summer due to a shortfall in vaccine availability.
 - "The idea that this can be done and we can get to herd immunity much before the end of this summer is very difficult," Biden said in an interview with CBS News that aired on Sunday. Logistical delays and vaccine shortages have meant only a small fraction of the U.S. population has received shots since two different vaccines became available in December.
- The **Department of Education** [said Friday](#) it will launch a survey on how Covid-19 is affecting K-8 schools, including collecting data on the share of schools open full-time and student attendance by race and ethnicity.
 - The Education Department said not enough data is available to assess school reopening amid coronavirus pandemic, despite President Joe Biden's pledge to have majority of schools open within 100 days of taking office.
- **President Joe Biden** appeared to give Democrats in Congress an implicit endorsement to bypass Republicans and clear his \$1.9 trillion coronavirus aid measure without GOP support, saying a disappointing jobs report today underscores the need for fast action. The House passed this afternoon a budget resolution outlining stimulus provisions after the Senate early this morning approved it on a 51-50 vote.
- The **Biden administration** announced plans to use the **Defense Production Act** to increase supplies for manufacturing of **Pfizer's** coronavirus vaccine and to ramp up availability of at-home virus tests. Priority ratings will give Pfizer first access to raw materials, allowing the company to

boost manufacturing and meet its delivery targets, Tim Manning, Covid-19 supply czar, said at a White House briefing

- **Biden** will send approximately more than 1,000 troops across the country to assist states with mass vaccination sites, Andy Slavitt, a senior adviser to the White House Covid-19 response team told reporters at briefing. The first deployment will head to California in the coming week.
- **Biden** virtually toured a vaccination center today (Monday) and will meet with **Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin** at the Pentagon on Wednesday, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said at a separate White House briefing. Biden will also visit the National Institutes of Health on Thursday, Psaki says
- **U.S. President Joe Biden** will order a government-wide review of critical supply chains in an effort to reduce U.S. reliance on countries such as China for essential medical supplies and minerals.
 - The administration's goal is to protect government and private sector supply chains to prevent future shortages and limit other countries' ability to exert leverage over the U.S.
- **President Joe Biden's** administration will begin Tuesday to test a program to provide coronavirus vaccines directly to pharmacies, as they try to ratchet up the pace of U.S. inoculations.
 - Biden's team will announce Tuesday that they'll ship roughly 1 million doses per week directly to pharmacies as a trial run. The program will expand as vaccine supply allows. It's distinct from a planned 5% increase in shipments that the Biden administration revealed to states in a call with governors Tuesday morning.
- **The director of the Centers of 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 Monday 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."

Congress

- **Congressional Democrats** are finished with the budget portion of their push to pass a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief measure and will spend this week marking up the legislation itself.
 - House members voted 219-209 on Friday to adopt the same budget resolution senators had approved early that morning. The resolution serves as an outline for President Joe Biden's coronavirus relief plan, providing reconciliation instructions that could allow senators to pass the final bill with a simple majority rather than 60 votes.
 - Now that the budgetary outline is in place, lawmakers will need to agree to the details. Twelve House authorizing committees are directed to draft their portions of the bill and send it to the Budget Committee by Feb. 16, though Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) told reporters Friday it will be done "by the end of the week, no later."
 - **House Democrats** on Monday released the first draft text for key pieces of legislation that will comprise President Joe Biden's Covid-19 relief bill.
 - The legislative language released by the **Education and Labor Committee and Committee on Financial Services** shows Democrats are forging ahead with plans

to increase the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2025, and have earmarked \$15 billion for airline-worker payroll assistance.

- These and 10 other committees are meeting in the coming days to assemble the stimulus bill for a House floor vote the week of Feb. 22. Once the bill goes to the Senate, it is designed to be passed with just 50 members plus the tie-breaking vote of Vice President Kamala Harris using a special budget fast-track procedure.
- House Democrats are showing with Monday's bill text that they will try to increase the minimum wage despite a raging debate over whether Senate rules permit them to do so through the so-called reconciliation procedure.
- **House Speaker Nancy Pelosi** is under pressure from moderate Democrats, whose votes will be needed to pass any stimulus bill along party lines, to split a vaccination-funding package from President Joe Biden's broader Covid-19 relief bill.
 - **The Blue Dog Coalition of Democrats** wrote in a letter to Pelosi released Thursday that the current plan to pass the administration's \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill through a special budget process could take "months." But funding for the patchy U.S. vaccination effort is needed right away, **Representative Stephanie Murphy of Florida**, one of the Blue Dog co-chairs, said in an interview.
 - The letter was signed by **Murphy** and her fellow co-chairs **Ed Case of Hawaii, Kurt Schrader of Oregon and Tom O'Halleran of Arizona**.
- **Democratic Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester of Delaware and Republican Rep. David McKinley of West Virginia** [introduced](#) relief legislation calling for direct payments of \$1,400 to adults and an additional \$1,400 to any dependents, including the elderly or those with disabilities.
 - Under the plan, a cap would be set for individuals making \$75,000 a year and joint filers making \$150,000, decreasing the payment by \$5 for every \$100 above those levels. Couples filing joint tax returns would be eligible to receive \$2,800.
- **House lawmakers** introduced a bill that would provide \$30 billion to the Small Business Administration to disburse to eligible fitness businesses struggling as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - The Gym Mitigation and Survival (GYMS) Act was introduced by **Democratic Rep. Mike Quigley and Republican Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick**
 - Facilities would be required to certify economic need, and recipients could use funds for expenses such as payroll, rent and mortgage obligations.
- **House Transportation and Infrastructure Chair Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.)** said in an interview that he warned Biden at the White House today that requiring Covid-19 tests for domestic air travel would ground the airline industry. **Rep. Rick Larsen (D-Wash.)**, chair of the panel's aviation subcommittee, said testing domestic passengers "isn't the best use of our resources,"
- **Republican Senator Mitt Romney** has announced a plan to give families a monthly cash benefit tied to the number of children in a household, with the goal of addressing financial strain worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - Romney's Family Security Act would provide a cash benefit of \$350 a month for each young child and \$250 a month for each school-aged child.
- **House and Senate Democrats** introduced a bill that seeks to ensure consumers' privacy is protected as part of Covid-19 contact tracing efforts
 - [The bill](#) introduced in the House and Senate would provide grant funding for states to develop digital contact tracing technologies that include privacy protections

- Data collection would have to be voluntary and minimized, with information deleted by 30 days after the end of Covid-19 emergency declaration. Information would have to be anonymized and used for public health functions authorized by states, not for punitive purposes like criminal prosecution or immigration enforcement
- The bill is sponsored by **House Reps. Jackie Speier of California, Diana DeGette of Colorado, Debbie Dingell of Michigan, and Sens. Brian Schatz of Hawaii and Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin**
- **Democrats on the House Energy and Commerce Committee**, charged with overseeing technology companies, are investigating **Facebook, Twitter** and **Alphabet's Google** over their handling of Covid-19 vaccine misinformation and disinformation.
 - **House Energy and Commerce Chairman Frank Pallone** (D-N.J.) and the panel's subcommittee leaders yesterday requested the chief executives of [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Google](#) provide the actions, policy changes, and enforcement efforts each company has taken to prevent or limit false and misleading Covid-19 vaccine misinformation and disinformation on their sites.
- **House Financial Services Committee Democrats** are proposing that airlines get \$14 billion and their contractors get \$1 billion as a part of President Biden's \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 stimulus package.
 - Measure would extend the Payroll Support Program for airline employees; PSP aid is set to expire on March 31
 - Committee is set to consider the proposal on Wednesday
- **Top House Democrats** are preparing to unveil legislation that would send up to \$3,600 per child to millions of Americans, as lawmakers aim to change the tax code to target child poverty rates as part of President Biden's sweeping \$1.9 trillion stimulus package.
 - The proposal would expand the child tax credit to provide \$3,600 per child younger than 6 and \$3,000 per child up to 17 over the course of a year, phasing out the payments for Americans who make more than \$75,000 and couples who make more than \$150,000.

Vaccines and Treatment

- **Dr. Anthony Fauci** warned Americans not to delay their second dose of the coronavirus vaccine, after other health experts suggested recently there may be a benefit to pushing more people to get a first shot and possible delaying the follow-ups a bit.
 - "We must go with the scientific data that we've accumulated, and it's really very solid," Fauci, the top U.S. infectious diseases specialist, said on NBC's "Meet the Press." "You can get as many people in their first dose at the same time as adhering, within reason, to the timetable of the second dose."
- **AstraZeneca Plc's Covid vaccine** showed 82.4% effectiveness with a three-month gap between two shots, according to a new study that bolsters the U.K.'s controversial decision to adopt the extended dosing interval.
 - The vaccine also may significantly reduce transmission of the virus, according to analysis of trial data by the University of Oxford, which developed the vaccine with the U.K. drug maker. Swabs taken from volunteers in the U.K. arm of the trial showed a 67% reduction in transmission after the first dose, the report showed.
- **AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine** is about as effective against the new strain of the virus that emerged in the U.K. as against the initial version, a study by the shot's co-developer, the

University of Oxford, found. Protection against symptomatic infection was comparable for the variant as well as the previous strain, according to the study.

- **Johnson & Johnson** asked U.S. drug regulators to clear its experimental Covid-19 vaccine for emergency use, setting up what is likely to be a fast-moving review process that could lead to millions more doses becoming available to step up a stumbling immunization drive.
- Regulators in the U.S. have begun to review certain data required for clearance of **Novavax Inc.'s** Covid-19 vaccine while final-phase clinical trials are still underway, the company said in a statement.
 - The process, called a rolling submission, has also begun in the U.K. and Canada, **Novavax** said. On Wednesday, the company said European regulators were doing a similar review.
- **South Africa** [has halted use of the AstraZeneca-Oxford coronavirus vaccine](#) after evidence emerged that the vaccine did not protect clinical-trial participants from mild or moderate illness caused by the more contagious virus variant that was first seen in the country.

Other

- **Chicago Public Schools** reached a “tentative agreement” with its teachers to resume in-person learning later this week, but union members still need to review its framework to make a deal final.
 - Progress toward the resumption of in-person classes after more than 10 months of remote learning in the third-largest U.S. district comes as tensions escalate coast to coast between unions fearing the spread of Covid-19, and local officials under pressure to get teachers back into the classroom.
- **NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell** has informed President Biden that the league is offering the 30 stadiums not already being used as mass vaccination sites to help with the effort.
 - The seven clubs already using their stadiums as vaccine sites are Arizona, Atlanta, Baltimore, Carolina, Houston, Miami and New England.
- Around the U.S., restrictions are relaxing as the outbreak eases:
 - **Massachusetts** will increase the capacity on business like restaurants and gyms to 40% from 25%
 - **Rhode Island** is allowing weddings to have as many as 50 guests, and indoor dining now can include two households
 - **Arkansas** said it would not extend a directive requiring bars and restaurants selling alcohol to close at 11 p.m.
 - **Michigan** will allow high school sports leagues to restart practices and competitions. Masks will be required
- **Sweden** plans to roll out a “digital vaccination certificate” and has asked three government agencies to develop the infrastructure to handle the relevant personal data.
 - The new certificate should be ready for use “before the summer,” Health Minister Lena Hallengren and Minister of Digitalization Anders Ygeman said at a press conference on Thursday.

