

CDC director warns of dire winter ahead for COVID hospitalizations, deaths

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The head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned Wednesday that the coming winter months might be the darkest period yet in the coronavirus pandemic.

"I actually believe they're going to be the most difficult time in the public health history of this nation," CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield told the Chamber of Commerce Foundation on Wednesday morning, adding that perhaps 450,000 Americans might be dead from COVID-19 by February. Right now, that number now is about 273,000, *The New York Times* reported.

Another record-breaking day of COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths underscored Redfield's grim warning.

The number of people hospitalized for COVID-19 on Wednesday passed 100,000, nearly double the highest point seen last spring. The daily death toll hit 2,760, surpassing the previous record set in April, the *Times* reported. With hospitals filling up in multiple states, the days ahead do appear bleak.

Still, Redfield offered some hope. Americans, he said, could cut their losses with simple measures like wearing a mask.

"It's not a fait accompli," he said. "We're not defenseless. The truth is that mitigation works. But it's not going to work if half of us do what we need to do. Probably not even if three-quarters do."

As staggering as it is, the death toll reported Wednesday will likely worsen as the delayed effects of Thanksgiving travel start to surface, experts say.

"This is a much worse situation [than the spring]," Dr. Ashish Jha, dean of Brown University's School of Public Health, told the *Times*. "Summer

is not going to bail us out. Things are not shut down."

One positive? Though coronavirus cases have exploded recently, with new infections topping 1 million a week, a far smaller proportion of people who get the virus now are dying from it. CDC data shows that the share of cases resulting in death dropped from 6.7 percent in April to 1.9 percent in September, the *Times* reported.

But deaths in the United States are still climbing.

"It's terrible, because it was avoidable," said Dr. Leora Horwitz, an associate professor of population health and medicine at the N.Y.U. Grossman School of Medicine, told the *Times*. "We are a world outlier in this regard."

Britain first to approve emergency use of Pfizer's covid vaccine

Britain became the first Western country to allow emergency use of a coronavirus vaccine on Wednesday, approving Pfizer's candidate in the race to inoculate millions of people around the globe.

Having beat the United States to emergency authorization may pressure American regulators, who are already taking heat for not moving faster to get doses to people, the *Times* reported. And it has stirred up a global debate about how to balance the dire need for a vaccine against the importance of looking for clear signs that a vaccine is safe.

"Help is on its way with this vaccine—and we can now say that with certainty, rather than with all the caveats," British health secretary Matt Hancock said Wednesday.

Though Britain has an early jump on distribution of the Pfizer vaccine, it will have no effect on the distribution of the hundreds of millions of doses that other wealthy countries like the United States have bought in prepaid contracts, the *Times* said.

But there are daunting obstacles to the vaccine's delivery to the masses.

The Pfizer vaccine, developed with BioNTech, a smaller German firm, must be kept at the unspeakably cold temperature of minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit until shortly before shots are given. However, Pfizer said in a statement released Wednesday that it has developed shipping containers that use dry ice to keep the vaccine cold. GPS sensors will allow the company to track each shipment and ensure they stay cold, the company added.

"Pfizer has vast experience and expertise in cold-chain shipping and has an established infrastructure to supply the vaccine worldwide, including distribution hubs that can store vaccine doses for up to six months," the company said.

Still, the temperature requirement could dictate who will be vaccinated first in Britain: While nursing home residents were supposed to be the top priority under an advisory committee's plans, efforts to limit transportation of the vaccine to ensure it remains cold may mean that National Health Service staff will receive the shots first, the *Times* reported. The British government said Wednesday that 800,000 doses would be available by next week for health workers to begin administering.

In the United States, an [advisory panel](#) on Tuesday approved a vaccine distribution plan that recommends health care workers and nursing home residents and staff be the first to receive any approved coronavirus vaccine. The recommendation from the Advisory Committee on

Immunization Practice (ACIP), if heeded, will steer the initial short supply of vaccines to about 21 million health care personnel and 3 million Americans working or living in long-term care facilities.

An FDA advisory panel is set to meet on Dec. 10 to decide whether the agency should grant emergency authorization to the Pfizer vaccine, the *Times* reported.

The global race to develop a [vaccine](#) is poised to shatter records for time to market. Around the world, researchers are testing 57 vaccines in clinical trials, and nearly 100 others are being tested in animals or cell, the *Times* reported. China and Russia have both approved vaccines without waiting for the results of late-stage trials, which experts say raises safety concerns.

A global scourge

By Thursday, the U.S. coronavirus case count passed 13.9 million while the death toll passed 273,500, according to a *Times* tally. According to the same tally, the top five states in coronavirus cases as of Thursday were: Texas and California with nearly 1.2 million cases each; Florida with just over 1 million cases; Illinois with more than 750,000; and New York with over 669,000.

Curbing the spread of the coronavirus in the rest of the world remains challenging.

Many European countries are tightening restrictions, the *Associated Press* reported. France has entered a nationwide lockdown, and Germany and Austria have started partial lockdowns as government officials across the continent scramble to slow a sharp rise in infections that threatens to overwhelm their health care systems.

England has followed suit, while Italy, Greece and Kosovo also announced new measures, the *AP* reported.

Things are no better in India, where the coronavirus case count has passed 9.5 million on Thursday, a Johns Hopkins University tally showed. More than 138,600 coronavirus patients have died in India, according to the Hopkins tally, but when measured as a proportion of the population, the country has had far fewer deaths than many others. Doctors say this reflects India's younger and leaner population. Still, the country's public health system is severely strained, and some sick patients cannot find hospital beds, the *Times* said. Only the United States has more [coronavirus](#) cases.

Meanwhile, Brazil passed 6.4 million cases and had over 174,500 deaths as of Thursday, the Hopkins tally showed.

Worldwide, the number of reported infections passed 64.6 million on Thursday, with nearly 1.5 million deaths recorded, according to the Hopkins tally.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on the new [coronavirus](#).

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