

First federal COVID vaccination sites to open in California

February 4 2021, by Ernie Mundell and Robin Foster



The first COVID-19 vaccination sites run by the federal government will

be opened in California as the Biden administration employs yet another tool to try to tame the coronavirus pandemic.

One center will be housed in the Oakland Coliseum where the Oakland Athletics baseball team plays and the other will be on the campus of California State University, Los Angeles, *NBC News* reported. Both will be near communities hit hardest by the pandemic, according to Jeffrey Zients, the White House COVID-19 response coordinator. The facilities will be staffed mostly with [federal employees](#).

"These sites in California are just the beginning," Zients said during a media briefing on Wednesday. "We are working with, in partnership, in states across the country to stand up new sites and will have more to say on that in the coming weeks."

The initiative is a significant policy departure from the Trump administration, which left actual vaccinations largely to the states and focused instead on the logistics of shipping vaccine doses across the country. But after states became overwhelmed trying to meet the demand from people seeking the vaccine, Biden's advisers urged him to take a more hands-on approach, *NBC News* reported.

The federal vaccination centers—which will be housed in stadiums, school gyms and parking lots—will be staffed by workers from FEMA, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Biden administration has been increasing the number of federal employees working on the effort and has directed 600 FEMA employees to work on the vaccination program, including 350 at vaccination sites, in addition to thousands of National Guard members in 39 states, *NBC News* reported.

Zients said that FEMA has provided \$1.7 billion to 27 states to help pay for transportation, storage, and supplies for their vaccination programs.

Even though [coronavirus](#) hospitalizations and deaths begin to drop around the country, U.S. health officials say they are in a race against time to increase the number of Americans vaccinated as more contagious variants of the virus spread across America. In the meantime, they urged the public to double down on mask-wearing and avoid large gatherings, like Super Bowl parties.

During television interviews on Wednesday, Dr. Anthony Fauci said that now isn't the time to invite people over for watch parties. Big events like Sunday's game between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers are always a cause for concern over the potential for virus spread, Fauci said.

"You don't want parties with people that you haven't had much contact with," he told the *Today* show. "You just don't know if they're infected, so, as difficult as that is, at least this time around, just lay low and cool it."

COVID vaccines to be shipped directly to U.S. pharmacies

The Biden administration said Tuesday that it will begin to deliver much needed coronavirus vaccines directly to retail pharmacies across the country.

The partnership includes 21 national pharmacies and will eventually include 40,000 locations across the country. The first shipment of 1 million vaccine doses will go out Feb. 11, the *Washington Post* reported.

"This will provide more sites for people to get vaccinated in their communities, and it's an important component to delivering vaccines equitably," Zients said during a media briefing Tuesday. "This pharmacy

program will expand access in neighborhoods across the country so you can make an appointment and get your shot conveniently and quickly."

The direct shipment will begin with a group of 6,500 stores. The initial locations will be in communities whose residents have disproportionately borne the burden of severe COVID-19, the *Post* reported.

The decision to send vaccine doses straight to pharmacies is based on the premise that they may be more familiar and easier to navigate than websites run by public health departments, the newspaper said.

Zients tried to temper expectations for how much this first effort would help Americans frustrated by the difficulty of getting vaccine appointments.

"Many pharmacies across the country will not have vaccines or will have very limited supply," he said, without predicting a time frame for widening the use of retail locations.

He also announced that, starting this week, states are receiving 5 percent more [vaccine doses](#), in addition to an already-announced increase of 16 percent, bringing the total to 10.5 million doses a week, the *Post* reported.

AstraZeneca vaccine guards against severe COVID *and* slows virus' spread

In more good news on Tuesday, new data shows that the vaccine developed by the University of Oxford and AstraZeneca not only protects people from serious illness and death, but it has the potential to reduce transmission of the virus.

The Oxford researchers say their findings offer the first evidence that

any coronavirus vaccine can reduce transmission of the virus, *The New York Times* reported.

Researchers measured the impact on transmission by swabbing participants every week to spot signs of the virus. If there is no virus present, even if someone is infected, it cannot be spread, they explained.

They found a 67 percent reduction in positive swabs among those who got the AstraZeneca shot.

The results have not been peer-reviewed but are awaiting publication in *The Lancet* medical journal, the university said in a statement.

British Health Secretary Matt Hancock said Wednesday that the results were "absolutely superb."

"We now know that the Oxford vaccine also reduces transmission, and that will help us all get out of this pandemic," Hancock told the *BBC* on Wednesday morning.

But some scientists looking at the limited information released said more analysis of the data was needed.

"While this would be extremely welcome news, we do need more data before this can be confirmed and so it's important that we all still continue to follow social distancing guidance after we have been vaccinated," said Dr. Doug Brown, chief executive of the British Society for Immunology.

In addition to reduced transmission, the researchers also found that a single dose of the vaccine was 76 percent effective at preventing COVID-19.

In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration is waiting on data from a clinical trial on the AstraZeneca vaccine that enrolled about 30,000 participants, mostly Americans. Results from that study are expected later this month. The study is expected to arm AstraZeneca with enough safety data to seek emergency use authorization by early March. The United States has agreed to buy 300 million doses of AstraZeneca's vaccine, but neither the company nor the [federal government](#) has said when and in what quantities those doses will be available once the [vaccine](#) is approved, the *Times* reported.

A global scourge

By Thursday, the U.S. coronavirus case count passed 26.5 million while the death toll passed 450,600, according to a *Times* tally. On Thursday, the top five states for coronavirus infections were: California with more than 3.3 million cases; Texas with more than 2.4 million cases; Florida with over 1.7 million cases; New York with more than 1.4 million cases; and Illinois with over 1.1 million cases.

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

In India, the coronavirus case count was nearly 10.8 million by Thursday, a Johns Hopkins University tally showed. Brazil had more than 9.3 million cases and more than 227,500 deaths as of Thursday, the Hopkins tally showed.

Worldwide, the number of reported infections passed 104.4 million on Thursday, with nearly 2.3 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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