

States race to vaccinate their residents

March 26 2021, by Ernie Mundell and Robin Foster



States are scrambling to vaccinate as many people as they can while the rate of new U.S. coronavirus infections stays steady, but still high, for a third week.

At more than 55,000 new COVID-19 cases a day, public health experts believe that is a level that could rapidly become yet another surge, *The New York Times* reported.

A sense of urgency is being felt keenly by [state officials](#): At least 31 have pledged to make vaccines available to all adults by mid-April, and many more have announced plans to expand eligibility on or before May 1, a goal set by President Joe Biden.

Alaska, Mississippi, Utah and West Virginia have already made all adults eligible to receive shots, and some local jurisdictions have also begun vaccinating all adults, the *Times* reported.

On Thursday, California opened up [vaccine](#) eligibility to any resident 50 or older and will expand that to residents 16 or older on April 15. And Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said that any state resident aged 40 or older would be eligible starting on Monday, and that the minimum age would drop to 18 on April 5, the *Times* reported.

In Connecticut, which is one of the most-vaccinated states in the country, Gov. Ned Lamont said that all residents 16 and above would be eligible beginning on Thursday. New Hampshire will make shots available to all residents 16 and older starting on April 2, and North Carolina plans to do so on April 7. In Rhode Island, Gov. Dan McKee said the state was on track to make vaccines available to all residents over 16 by April 19, the *Times* reported.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said the state would open vaccinations to those 40 and older starting on Monday. And in Minnesota, Gov. Tim Walz is expected to announce on Friday that all residents over the age of 16 will be eligible starting next Tuesday.

The moves all come at a tenuous point in the pandemic, with 25 states

reporting persistently high infections, according to a *Times* database. Over the past week, there has been a daily average of 58,579 new cases, about the same as the average two weeks earlier.

The number of deaths continues to decline, averaging about 1,000 a day, down from the more than 2,000 daily deaths seen just a month ago. But eight states are seeing rising deaths: Kentucky, Maryland, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Ohio, Utah and West Virginia, the *Times* reported.

Biden sets new goal of 200 million shots by 100th day in office

President Joe Biden said Thursday that the country will put 200 million [coronavirus vaccine doses](#) into the arms of Americans by his 100th day in office, doubling the goal he first set when he was inaugurated.

"We will, by my 100th day in office, have administered 200 million shots in people's arms," Mr. Biden said, announcing his new goal at the start of his first news conference. "That's right—200 million shots in 100 days. I know it's ambitious, twice our original goal, but no other country in the world has even come close."

The goal appears attainable: As of Friday, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that over 133 million shots had been administered, and that just over 14 percent of the American population was fully vaccinated.

The United States is averaging about 2.5 million vaccine doses a day. If that pace continues, about half of the nation's population will be at least partly vaccinated by mid-May, the *Times* said.

Vaccine makers are now hitting their stride, and Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson have promised enough doses to inoculate all 260 million adult Americans by May. In June, the first vaccine producers, Pfizer and Moderna, are expected to deliver another 100 million doses—enough to vaccinate 50 million more people, *The New York Times* reported.

Officials say the nation will soon reach a point where the supply of vaccine outpaces demand. At that point, the biggest challenge will be convincing still skeptical Americans to get the shots, and deciding what to do with a growing stockpile, the *Times* reported.

Vaccine hesitancy is particularly prominent among minorities and Republicans, the *Times* said.

Earlier Thursday, White House officials said the administration would spend \$10 billion on congressionally-appropriated money to expand access to COVID-19 vaccines and build vaccine confidence in the hardest-hit and highest-risk communities.

AstraZeneca lowers efficacy rate of its COVID vaccine

Following a sharp rebuke from an independent oversight board over potentially misleading information on the effectiveness of its coronavirus vaccine, AstraZeneca released new data late Wednesday that showed the vaccine is slightly less effective than the company claimed on Monday.

After saying that the vaccine was 79 percent effective on Monday, the company said Wednesday that the vaccine was 76 percent effective at preventing COVID-19.

"The [latest] primary analysis is consistent with our previously released interim analysis, and confirms that our COVID-19 vaccine is highly effective in adults, including those aged 65 years and over," Mene Pangalos, executive vice president of BioPharmaceuticals R&D at AstraZeneca, said in a company news release. "We look forward to filing our regulatory submission for Emergency Use Authorization in the U.S. and preparing for the rollout of millions of doses across America."

The latest results do strengthen the case for the vaccine's efficacy, but they may not restore AstraZeneca's credibility with U.S. health officials, *The New York Times* said.

When it released its interim trial results on Monday, AstraZeneca ignored dozens of recently confirmed COVID-19 cases that had cropped up in trial volunteers before mid-February, the *Times* reported.

In a letter to the company and federal health officials later that day, the independent board that was overseeing the clinical trial issued a highly unusual reprimand to AstraZeneca for appearing to cherry-pick data to make its vaccine appear more effective, the *Times* reported.

"Decisions like this are what erode public trust in the scientific process," the oversight board's letter said. The members of the monitoring board wrote that their statistical modeling had found that the vaccine might have a lower efficacy rate—between 69 and 74 percent—if the COVID-19 cases in question were included in the analysis, the *Times* reported.

It was not clear on Wednesday why the oversight board's projection turned out to be lower than the figure in AstraZeneca's latest results. Those statistics could still change because there are still 14 possible COVID-19 cases that AstraZeneca officials have not yet classified as actual cases, according to the company's statement.

The dispute over AstraZeneca's U.S. trial results follows a safety scare in Europe that prompted more than a dozen countries to temporarily suspend use of the vaccine. European regulators said last week that a review had found the shot to be safe, after a small number of people who had been vaccinated developed blood clots and abnormal bleeding. The U.S. trial did not turn up any signs of such safety problems, the *Times* said.

AstraZeneca's latest efforts might not make much difference in the United States, where the vaccine is not yet authorized and is unlikely to become available before May, the *Times* said. By then, there will be enough vaccine doses for all of the nation's adults from the three vaccines that have already been authorized: Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson.

A global scourge

By Friday, the U.S. coronavirus case count passed 30.3 million while the death toll passed 546,000, according to a *Times* tally. On Friday, the top five states for coronavirus infections were: California with over 3.6 million cases; Texas with nearly 2.8 million cases; Florida with over 2 million cases; New York with nearly 1.8 million cases; and Illinois with over 1.2 million cases.

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

In Brazil, the coronavirus case count was over 12.3 million by Friday, with more than 303,000 deaths, a Johns Hopkins University tally showed. India had over 11.8 million cases and nearly 161,000 deaths as of Friday, the Hopkins tally showed.

Worldwide, the number of reported infections neared 125.6 million on

Friday, with over 2.7 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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