

One year into pandemic, Biden promises vaccines for all U.S. adults by May 1

March 12 2021, by Ernie Mundell and Robin Foster



During a speech reassuring Americans that the pandemic could be

nearing its end in this country, President Joe Biden on Thursday promised that all U.S. adults will be eligible for a coronavirus vaccine by May 1.

His remarks came on the one-year anniversary of the World Health Organization declaring COVID-19 to be a pandemic. Biden said his administration's \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill is about to shore up the U.S. economy, the pace of vaccinations is rapidly accelerating, and COVID-19 death rates are dropping nationwide.

Americans are on track to return to some sort of normalcy by July 4 as long as they get vaccinated and do not prematurely abandon mask wearing, social distancing and other measures to contain the spread of the virus, he predicted.

"July 4th with your loved ones is the goal," he said.

But, "just as we were emerging from a dark winter into a hopeful spring and summer is not the time to not stick with the rules," Biden noted.

"This is not the time to let up."

To back up his promise, Biden started with a requirement that all states act by May 1 to make all adults eligible to be vaccinated. The administration had already announced last week that it would have enough doses for every adult by the end of May. Biden said Thursday that Americans should expect to get in line for a vaccine by May 1.

He said the federal government would also create a website that would allow Americans to search for available vaccines, make the [vaccine](#) available at more pharmacies, double the number of mass vaccination sites and certify more people—including dentists, paramedics, veterinarians and physician assistants—to deliver shots into arms, *The New York Times* reported.

"I'm using every power I have as president of the United States to put us on a war footing to get the job done," Biden said.

The speech followed Biden's signing of the stimulus package, known as the American Rescue Plan, into law, the *Times* reported. The legislation will send federal funds to individuals, states and struggling businesses. Among its many other provisions, the plan provides some \$130 billion to assist in reopening schools.

Nursing home residents can hug their loved ones again

After nearly a year of painful isolation, the U.S. government said Wednesday that vaccinated nursing home residents can hug their loved ones again and enjoy more indoor visits.

The new guidance, issued by the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), comes after coronavirus cases and deaths among nursing home residents have plummeted in recent weeks as the country's vaccination rollout accelerated.

"Now that millions of vaccines have been administered to nursing home residents and staff, and the number of COVID cases in nursing homes has dropped significantly, CMS is updating its visitation guidance to bring more families together safely," Dr. Lee Fleisher, chief medical officer at the CMS, said in a statement.

Nursing homes have borne the brunt of the pandemic's pain, representing about 1% of the U.S. population but accounting for 1 in 3 deaths, according to the COVID Tracking Project.

But coronavirus hasn't been the only thing this vulnerable population has

suffered through: Loneliness and isolation have contributed to physical and mental declines, officials say.

"There is no substitute for physical contact, such as the warm embrace between a resident and their loved one," the CMS stated in its new guidance, "Therefore, if the resident is fully vaccinated, they can choose to have close contact [including touch] with their visitor while wearing a well-fitting face mask and performing hand hygiene before and after."

The CMS also said that maintaining 6 feet of separation is still the safest policy, and outdoor visits are preferable even when residents and visitors have been vaccinated.

"All of us feel enormous relief that we are at this next juncture and feel confident that reopening visitation can be achieved safely, given all we have learned during the pandemic," Terry Fulmer, president of the John A. Hartford Foundation, which works to improve care for older adults, told the *Associated Press*. "A great deal more has been learned about infection control, and families and facilities are ready."

Under the new guidance, homes in counties with high rates of COVID-19 can still have indoor visits, provided they take precautions. When an outbreak occurs at a facility, it doesn't have to go on lockdown for 14 days. Visits can still happen as long as the outbreak is isolated to an area or unit of the facility. Compassionate care visits should be allowed at all times, the guidance said, even if there's an outbreak or a resident is unvaccinated.

The nursing home industry said it is ready for the change.

"This is the right thing to do," said Katie Smith Sloan, president of LeadingAge, which represents nonprofit facilities, told the *AP*. "Federal policy now reflects the real progress that has been made in vaccinating

nursing home residents and staff."

New guidance gives vaccinated Americans more freedom

New social distancing guidance released by the federal government on Monday gives fully vaccinated Americans more freedom to socialize and move through their communities.

As of Friday, more than 64 million Americans had received their first shot, while over 33.8 million had gotten their second jab, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The CDC said people who are two weeks past their final shot can safely visit indoors with unvaccinated members of a single household at low risk of severe disease without wearing masks or social distancing. That recommendation would free many vaccinated grandparents who live near their unvaccinated children and grandchildren to gather for the first time since the pandemic began a year ago.

The CDC also said fully vaccinated people can gather indoors with those who are also fully vaccinated, and they do not need to be quarantined or tested after exposure to COVID-19.

"We know that people want to get vaccinated so they can get back to doing the things they enjoy with the people they love," CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said in an agency news release. "There are some activities that fully vaccinated people can begin to resume now in their own homes. Everyone—even those who are vaccinated—should continue with all mitigation strategies when in public settings."

Some restrictions were still advised, even for the vaccinated. For

example, if a vaccinated person lives in a group setting and is around someone with COVID-19, he or she should still stay away from others for 14 days and get tested, even without symptoms.

Peter Hotez, co-director of the Texas Children's Center for Vaccine Development, welcomed the new guidelines, but added they have been too long in coming.

"The sooner we move to telling people if you're fully vaccinated, you don't have to wear masks—that will be an incentive for people to get vaccinated," Hotez told the *Washington Post*.

The level of caution people need to exercise should be determined by the characteristics of those who are unvaccinated in a social setting, the CDC said. For instance, if a fully vaccinated person visits an unvaccinated friend who is 70, and therefore at risk of severe disease, the visit should take place outdoors, with masks and physical distancing, the guidance says.

A global scourge

By Friday, the U.S. coronavirus case count passed 29.3 million while the death toll passed 530,000, according to a *Times* tally. On Friday, the top five states for coronavirus infections were: California with over 3.6 million cases; Texas with more than 2.7 million cases; Florida with over 1.9 million cases; New York with more than 1.7 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 India, the [coronavirus](#) case count was over 11.3 million by Friday, a Johns Hopkins University tally showed. Brazil had nearly 11.3 million

cases and nearly 273,000 deaths as of Friday, the Hopkins tally showed.

Worldwide, the number of reported infections passed 118.6 million on Friday, with more than 2.6 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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