

# U.S. COVID vaccination rates climb in August

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(HealthDay)—Nearly 14 million Americans got their first dose of a

coronavirus vaccine in August, a steep rise from July, White House officials said Tuesday.

The statistic is a sign that vaccine skepticism may be waning, as the highly contagious Delta variant continues to fuel case surges across the United States.

"We've accelerated the pace of first shots. In August, we got over 14 million. That's almost 4 million more first shots in August compared to the prior month, July," White House COVID-19 response coordinator Jeff Zients said during a [news conference](#).

"Back in mid-July, we were averaging 500,000 vaccinations per day. Today, we're averaging 900,000," Zients added. "That's an 80 percent increase in the number of shots we're getting into arms each and every day."

"We remain laser-focused on getting more shots in arms, and we continue to build momentum," he stressed.

One important tool in that mission? Zients said vaccine mandates are helping drive immunization numbers up, and he championed those already in place for federal workers, and at some colleges and companies.

"Tens of millions of Americans are now covered by vaccination requirements. And these requirements are already working to get more people vaccinated," he said.

A new [poll](#) suggests Zients is right: It showed that a stubborn core of vaccine-hesitant Americans is slowly warming to the vaccines.

Only 20 percent of American adults now say they won't get immunized,

the lowest number ever, the Axios/IPSO poll found, and there has been a sharp increase in past two weeks of the number of parents who plan to get their younger kids vaccinated as soon as it's allowed.

68% of parents said they either have already vaccinated their children or are likely to do so as soon as the vaccines are approved for their child's age group. That's the highest share ever seen in the survey, and a 12-point spike from 56% just two weeks ago.

One in three unvaccinated Americans in the survey said full approval of the vaccines would make them likely to get shots. But 43% said employer vaccine mandates would make them likely to do so, up from 33% a month ago.

"Schools, organizations, companies, governments implementing mandates are forcing people to deal with them," Cliff Young, president of Ipsos U.S. Public Affairs, said in a news release on the poll. "That's what going on."

Nearly 62 percent of people in the United States aged 12 and older have had at least one dose of coronavirus vaccine, according to [data](#) from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But other developed nations such as Canada, Germany and the United Kingdom still have higher vaccination rates, according to recent data from Johns Hopkins University, the *Post* reported.

Meanwhile, about 70 percent of all adults in the European Union are now fully vaccinated, the bloc announced on Tuesday, reaching a target it set at the start of the year, the *Post* reported.

## **Battle over school mask mandates heats up**

The debate over masks in schools intensified this week, as the U.S.

Education Department launched a [civil rights](#) investigation into mask mandate bans in five states while Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis made good on his promise to slash funds to [school districts](#) that have defied his ban.

Why a federal investigation? Such bans may restrict access to classrooms for disabled students who are at high risk for severe COVID-19, the U.S. Education Department's Office for Civil Rights stated in a letter notifying education leaders in Iowa, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee and Utah of the investigation.

"The Department has heard from parents from across the country—particularly parents of students with disabilities and with underlying medical conditions—about how state bans on universal indoor masking are putting their children at risk and preventing them from accessing in-person learning equally," U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona said in a [statement](#) announcing the investigation.

"It's simply unacceptable that state leaders are putting politics over the health and education of the students they took an oath to serve," Cardona added. "The Department will fight to protect every student's right to access in-person learning safely and the rights of local educators to put in place policies that allow all students to return to the classroom full-time in-person safely this fall."

Letters were not sent to Florida, Texas, Arkansas or Arizona, all of which have tried to ban mask mandates, because the policies in those states are already being challenged by court orders or other state actions, according to the *Washington Post*.

That did not stop Florida's Education Department from making good on financially punishing local school boards that defy the state's mask mandate ban.

Now experiencing the worst outbreak of coronavirus in the nation, Florida is seeing higher cases counts and hospitalizations than ever before in the pandemic: Over the last seven days, an average of more than 16,000 people have been hospitalized each day, more than has been seen during any other period in the pandemic, *The New York Times* reported.

Still, Florida Education Commissioner Richard Corcoran said in a [statement](#) on Monday that his department would "fight" to protect the rights of parents to make health care decisions. "They know what is best for their children," he wrote.

The financial penalty applies to two Florida school districts—Alachua County and Broward County—that went ahead with mask mandates. In response to the withholding of funds, Broward County interim superintendent Vickie Cartwright said in a statement that "the health and safety of our students, teachers and staff continue to be our main priorities. As such, [the Broward County school system] will continue to mandate masks."

Exactly how much the two school boards will be affected is unclear, because the Biden administration has advised that any school district stripped of state funding over pandemic precautions could use federal stimulus funds to make up the difference, the *Times* reported.

The civil rights investigation follows the Biden administration's promise to use legal action to intervene in states where mask mandates are prohibited in public schools.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [COVID-19](#).

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