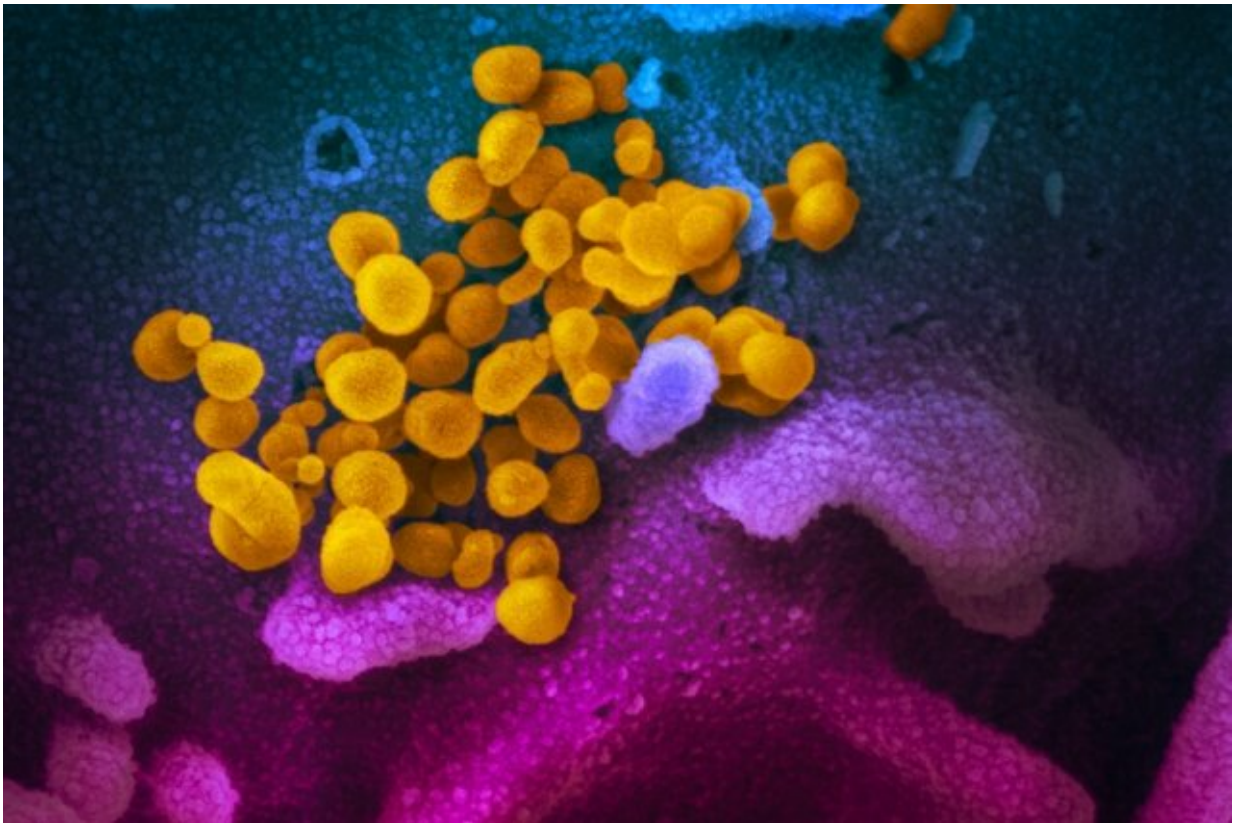


Key COVID-19 metrics decline, but experts say it's far from over

March 1 2022, by Doug Donovan



This scanning electron microscope image shows SARS-CoV-2 (yellow)—also known as 2019-nCoV, the virus that causes COVID-19—isolated from a patient, emerging from the surface of cells (blue/pink) cultured in the lab. Credit: NIAID-RML

COVID-19 cases, deaths, and hospitalizations across the United States

continued to decline this week, spurring roll backs of protective measures such as masking and prompting discussion about when the pandemic will end.

The United States reported nearly 533,300 cases for the week ending Feb. 24, a 36% decline over the previous week that has cascaded through every state in the nation, according to an analysis by Emily Pond, a research data analyst for the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center and Center for Health Security.

The nation reported 12,194 deaths over the same time period, a 22% decline nationally, according to Pond's analysis. Yet a dozen states still experienced an increase in fatalities, pushing the cumulative number of U.S. deaths to more than 945,000.

"This is a very much welcomed trend," said Jennifer Nuzzo, epidemiology lead for the Coronavirus Resource Center, during the CRC's Friday expert briefing. "But we still have a way to go to get back to where we were in June 2021 with 11,000 cases per day."

Hospitalizations have also been trending lower to 53,000 over the past week, a 22% decline. Although there were far fewer cases at the same time last year, hospitalizations were higher, closer to 57,000.

"Even if we shift away from mask mandates, we can still focus on encouraging mask usage in areas where it is most needed," said Nuzzo, a senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security.

Vaccinations in the United States remain stagnant, said William Moss, the CRC vaccinology lead and executive director of the International Vaccine Access Center. Slightly more than [215 million people in the United States](#) have been fully vaccinated, just below 66% of the total population.

"We're not seeing a sustained increase in vaccinations," Moss said Friday. "Even with booster doses—fewer than half of adults in the United States have received boosters."

Many viewers of the CRC Friday Live Briefing asked the experts when the pandemic will become an endemic, or regularly recurring, virus like a seasonal influenza.

"We know that the SARS-CoV-2 virus is not going to disappear, that we are going to continue to encounter it in our lives," Nuzzo said. "That's why it's important to get vaccinated. It's not yet endemic. We're still at very high levels of case numbers even though they're falling."

The [scientific community](#) does not yet know what an endemic level of infections for COVID-19 looks like, she added.

"We don't know if it will fall on a seasonal pattern, although there is increasing belief that it will," she said. "But we don't know what that season will look like and when it will start and when it will end. We're not there. But we are having a conversation given that this virus is not going away."

Provided by Johns Hopkins University

Citation: Key COVID-19 metrics decline, but experts say it's far from over (2022, March 1) retrieved 24 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-03-key-covid-metrics-decline-experts.html>

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