

White House unveils new COVID-19 response strategy

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Accelerated research into new vaccines that could be ready within 100

days of the emergence of a new variant is one of the key features of a [new COVID-19 response strategy](#) released by the White House on Wednesday.

The strategy has four main objectives: protecting against and treating COVID-19; preparing for new variants; avoiding [shutdowns](#); and fighting the virus in other nations. It also includes a new "test to treat" initiative to enable Americans to get tested at a pharmacy and to "receive antiviral pills on the spot at no cost" if they are infected, President Joe Biden said in his State of the Union address on Tuesday. Another pledge in the plan is to "give schools and businesses guidance, tests, and supplies to stay open, including tools to improve ventilation and air filtration."

Much of the new strategy requires funding from Congress, and it may require about \$100 billion over the next year to be fully prepared, and billions more after that, said Ezekiel Emanuel, M.D., who headed a group of experts in creating an extensive plan provided to the White House. "Congress has to think of this as an investment in biosecurity for the country," Emanuel told The New York Times.

Also at Wednesday's announcement, a program to boost research into "long COVID" was announced by U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra. Becerra promised to open "new centers of excellence" to provide high-quality care for those with long COVID, The Times reported.

Even as cases drop and new federal guidelines suggest 70% of Americans can stop wearing masks for now, large groups of people remain at risk. Children younger than 5 years are not yet eligible for vaccination. Meanwhile, roughly 7 million Americans have weak immune systems, illnesses, or other disabilities that make them more vulnerable to severe COVID-19. The White House [announced](#) last week that it will make masks and tests more accessible to those groups.

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