

New policy paper says the US needs immediate action to prepare for future pandemics

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The United States has significant gaps in its pandemic and public health emergency response system leaving it unprepared for future

emergencies, says the American College of Physicians (ACP) in a new policy paper. In the paper, ACP makes recommendations about what needs to be done to ensure the U.S. is in a strong position to mitigate the consequences of future pandemics. The paper is published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

ACP calls for a federal pandemic preparedness plan that is adequately funded and prioritizes [health equity](#). They also ask that federal and state agencies provide consistent and timely communications about risk and strategies to combat risk in order to build trust and combat misinformation.

They call for a national [public health](#) data infrastructure capable of real-time bidirectional data sharing among public and private public health stakeholders. The paper recommends securing and bolstering the health care supply chain. They also call for improved support for a health care workforce that is sufficient to provide surge capacity in emergencies, including the development of a reserve of physicians and other health care professionals. ACP affirms the importance of safety and well-being during emergencies, this must include safety for the public, patients and physicians and other professionals.

The paper also calls attention to the need for support for [medical practices](#) during emergencies, measures to reduce infections in workplaces, and universal sick leave policies. Finally, ACP calls for expedited and equitable vaccine development and distribution, vaccine use in accordance with scientific recommendations, and ACP calls on physicians to promote vaccine uptake among their patients.

The recommendations need to be built on a strong public health sector, as outlined in an ACP paper recently published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*. Modernizing the United States' Public Health Infrastructure: A Position Paper from the American College of Physicians, updates

recommendations ACP made in 2012 for the U.S. public health infrastructure with new policies on establishing federal public health leadership, protecting public health workers, reversing workforce shortages, and the need to integrate primary care and public health.

An accompanying editorial by Ashish K. Jha, MD, MPH, former White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator, suggests that there are significant gaps to address in the American public health response to COVID-19 and future pandemics, but there are several key areas where there were successes to be improved upon for the future.

Dr. Jha highlights the success of scaled and sustained pandemic-era innovations, including rapid testing and treatment mobile units and Operation Warp Speed. He also emphasizes the role of physicians and [health care professionals](#) as trusted sources of information to patients and the importance of professional organizations like ACP to lead physicians in speaking to patients exposed to medical misinformation.

Finally, he argues for greater partnership between health care institutions and public health agencies, particularly focusing on greater data integration and the use of health care workers as a reserve for public health crises.

More information: Josh Serchen et al, Preparing for Future Pandemics and Public Health Emergencies: An American College of Physicians Policy Position Paper, *Annals of Internal Medicine* (2023). [DOI: 10.7326/M23-0768](https://doi.org/10.7326/M23-0768)

Ashish K. Jha, Preparing the United States for the Next Pandemic, *Annals of Internal Medicine* (2023). [DOI: 10.7326/M23-1894](https://doi.org/10.7326/M23-1894)

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