

February 22, 2021

### Summary

The United States has 28,184,218 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 500,172 reported related deaths. On Tuesday, President Biden's administration announced changes to the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) that will make larger loans available to the smallest businesses and make it more difficult for companies with over 20 employees to access the loans. After last week's winter storms halted the delivery of 6 million vaccine doses to states, the White House said it expects this "backlog" to be addressed as quickly as the beginning of this week. Biden has announced the United States will contribute \$4 billion to COVAX, an international program that supports access to vaccines for 92 low- and middle-income economies.

CDC has released its findings from the first month of vaccine safety monitoring. The results reflect that severe adverse reactions to the vaccine are rare and comparable to safety data from vaccines used to prevent other illnesses. Pfizer and BioNTech have announced that they are seeking authorization from FDA to store their vaccine at temperatures that are more common in ordinary pharmaceutical freezers and refrigerators.

In the United States, positive COVID-19 cases have fallen by more than 40% over the last two weeks, and more than 70% since January. The country's deaths per day remain high with more than 1,200 COVID-19 deaths reported on February 21, and a seven-day rolling average of 1,928 deaths. About 12% of people in the United States have received the first dose of the vaccines, and about 5% of people have received a second dose. As of February 21, 42 states have reported cases of the U.K. COVID variant, 8 states have reported cases of the South Africa COVID variant, and 4 states have reported cases of the Brazil COVID variant. As of February 19, the 10 states with the highest COVID-19 positivity rates are all on the East Coast; with New Jersey and New York reporting positive cases at higher rates than every state except South Carolina.

New York reported 89 deaths, 5,804 hospitalizations, and 1,148 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Monday, February 21. Approximately 6,146, or 4.33% of the 142,019 tests administered in New York on February 21 were positive for COVID-19. As of February 21, New York has received 2,406,535 first doses of the vaccines and administered 2,228,283 first doses to patients. New York State has received 1,337,275 second doses of the vaccines and administered 1,155,870 second doses to patients. Beginning February 26, New York City will expand indoor dining to 35% capacity. On February 19, Governor Cuomo announced opening dates and scheduling information for six community-based vaccination sites and introduced a proposal for nursing home reform legislation and updated State guidance for testing protocols and infection rates on college campuses.

## **U.S. Government Updates**

- [\*Biden Adjusts the Loan Rules for the Smallest Companies\*](#), February 22
  - The Biden Administration announced changes to the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) aimed at helping small business receive more and bigger loans. The new formula will instead focus on gross income, rather than profits, which will increase the number of businesses eligible for the loans and the size of the loans.
  - Furthermore, the administration announced a 14-day freeze on PPP loans to companies with 20 or more employees. The freeze will begin on Tuesday.
  - In his [remarks](#) earlier today, Biden explained the rationale for the changes: “[W]hen the Paycheck Protection Program was passed, a lot of these mom-and-pop business just got muscled out of the way by bigger companies who jumped in front of the line. . . . I’m announcing additional changes to the PPP program that will make sure we look out for the mom-and-pop business even more than we already have.”
  - The program is set to expire at the end of March.
  - In December, Congress allocated [\\$284 billion](#) to restart PPP. Since lending resumed last month, government-backed lenders have disbursed \$134 billion to 1.8 million businesses. If recipients comply with the program’s rules, their loans will be forgiven.
- [\*White House Confirms Backlog of 6 Million Vaccines Doses because of Winter Storms\*](#), February 19
  - On Friday, the White House confirmed that last week’s winter storms prevented the delivery of 6 million doses to vaccines distribution centers across all 50 states.
  - Andy Slavitt, a senior adviser on the White House COVID-19 Response Team, said the number represents three days’ worth of shipment delays. However, Slavitt also said the administration expects most of the backlogged doses will be delivered early this week.
  - In addition to the vaccine shortages, the winter storms caused dangerous driving conditions and widespread power outages, which forced vaccines centers to cancel appointments.
  - As the administration races to distribute vaccines, Dr. Fauci admits Americans may have to wear masks into [2022](#).
- [\*Biden to Provide Financial Support to COVAX Initiative\*](#), February 18
  - Biden announced the United States will immediately contribute \$2 billion to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment, which “supports access to safe and effective vaccines for 92 low- and middle-income economies.” Congress appropriated money for this purpose in December.
  - Biden also pledged that the United States will contribute an additional \$2 billion to COVAX throughout 2021 and 2022.
  - At a meeting tomorrow, Biden plans to call on other G7 members to follow the United States’ lead.

## **U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

- [\*COVID Data Tracker Weekly Review\*](#), February 19
  - CDC summarized key COVID-19 disease indicators for the previous week.

- The number of new daily cases reported on February 17 was 69,165. The seven-day average number of new daily cases reported was 77,385. This is a 24.5% decrease compared to the previous week's average.
- As of February 18, 57.7 million vaccine doses have been administered in the United States. Overall, approximately 41 million people have received at least one dose of a vaccine, which is 12.4% of the population. 16.2 million people have received two doses, which is 4.9% of the population. The seven-day average number of reported vaccine dose administrations was 1.6 million, a 1.4% acceleration compared to the previous week.
- The number of new hospital admissions on February 16 was 6,841, a 62% decrease compared the national peak on January 5, 2021. The current seven-day average of new hospitalizations is 7,229 per day, a decrease of 21.8% compared to the prior week's average.
- The number of new deaths reported on February 17 was 2,601. The current seven-day average of reported deaths is 2,708 per day, a 9% decrease compared to the prior week's average.
- [Vaccine Safety Monitoring](#), February 19
  - After the first month of vaccination distribution in the U.S., CDC [summarized](#) findings from its safety monitoring program, “the most intense and comprehensive in U.S. history,” for the period between December 14, 2020 and January 13, 2021, during which 13,794,904 doses of vaccine were administered.
  - CDC received 6,994 reports of adverse events after vaccination. 90.8% of these events were classified as non-serious, while 9.2% were classified as serious. The most frequent symptoms reported were headache, fatigue, and dizziness. CDC reports that, for the Pfizer vaccine, symptoms were more frequent after the second dose than after the first. (Earlier reporting on the Moderna vaccine [indicated](#) a similar pattern.)
  - Rare cases of anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction) were reported, with 4.5 cases per one million doses administered. This is within the range reported after receipt of vaccines for influenza, pneumococcal polysaccharide, and herpes zoster.

### **New York State**

- [New York State COVID-19 Updates](#), February 22
  - New York reported 89 deaths, 5,804 hospitalizations, and 1,148 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Monday, February 22, 2021.
  - Approximately 6,146, or 4.33% of the 142,019 tests administered in New York on February 17 were positive for COVID-19.
  - As of February 22, New York has received 2,406,535 first doses of the vaccines and administered 2,228,283 first doses to patients. As of February 22, New York has received 1,337,275 second doses of the vaccines and administered 1,155,870 second doses to patients.
  - On February 19, Governor Cuomo [introduced](#) a proposal for nursing home reform legislation. The reform seeks to hold nursing home operators accountable for misconduct, increase transparency, and ensure that facilities are prioritizing patient care over profits. The governor hopes that the proposed reforms would memorialize the

- lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, improve the health and safety of nursing home residents, and increase the quality of services in nursing home facilities.
- On February 19, New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) indicated that it will soon [permit](#) visitation at nursing home facilities in accordance with guidance from Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Formal guidance regarding visitation will be available on February 22. In addition to such guidance, NYSDOH will provide rapid tests to nursing homes at no cost—allowing all facilities to administer a test before entry.
  - On February 19, Governor Cuomo [released](#) updated State guidance for testing protocols and infection rates on college campuses. Specifically, colleges and universities that test at least 25% of total on-campus students, faculty, and staff weekly will not be required to go on pause unless their positivity rate exceeds 5% during a rolling, 14-day period. Colleges and Universities that do not test at least 25% of their population weekly must go on pause if they have 100 individuals test positive, or their positivity rate exceeds 5%—whichever is less—during a rolling, 14-day period.
- [\*Governor Cuomo Announces Opening Dates and Scheduling Information for State-FEMA Vaccination Sites Statewide\*](#), February 19
    - On February 19, Governor Cuomo announced opening dates and scheduling information for six community-based vaccination sites, which were made possible by New York State’s partnership with Federal Emergency Management Agency.
    - Vaccination sites will open in Brooklyn (Medgar Evers College), Queens (York College), Buffalo (Delavan Grider Community Center), Rochester (Former Kodak Hawkeye Parking Lot), Yonkers (New York National Guard Armory), and Albany (Washington Avenue Armory).
    - The Brooklyn and Queens sites will begin administering vaccinations on February 24, while the Buffalo, Rochester, Albany, and Yonkers sites will begin on March 3. The Brooklyn and Queens sites each have the capacity to administer 3,000 doses per day, and the Buffalo, Rochester, Albany and Yonkers sites have the capacity to administer 1,000 doses per day.
    - During the first week of scheduling at each site, appointments will be reserved for vaccine-eligible residents in counties and boroughs with low vaccination rates. After one week, appointments at each site will be made available to all vaccine-eligible residents of the site's host county, borough, or specified target region.

### **New York City**

- [\*New York City COVID-19 Updates\*](#), February 22
  - Beginning February 26, New York City will [expand](#) indoor dining to 35% capacity. This increase remains subject to restaurants’ compliance with State guidance, and aligns New York City with New Jersey’s current indoor dining capacity regulations.
  - On February 19, Governor Andrew Cuomo [announced](#) the launch of the New York Forward Rapid Test Program. This program aims to help businesses safely reopen by making low-cost, rapid testing available to the public. To begin the program, the State opened eleven testing sites across New York City with the capacity to conduct more than 5,000 tests per day. The governor said that additional sites are scheduled to open in more New York City locations, and across the State, in the coming weeks.

## **Vaccines and Therapeutics**

- [\*Study Shows Single Dose of Pfizer Vaccine 85% Effective, Fauci Says Two Doses Still Needed\*](#), February 19
  - Israeli scientists [released](#) a new study of the effectiveness of the Pfizer vaccine on more than 7,000 vaccinated health care workers.
  - The study shows that one dose of the Pfizer vaccine was 47% effective at preventing symptomatic disease during the first two weeks after administration and 85% effective 15 to 28 days after being given.
  - The authors of the study wrote that “[e]arly reductions of COVID-19 rates provide support of delaying the second dose in countries facing vaccine shortages.” But, they warned, “[l]onger follow-up to assess long-term effectiveness of a single dose is needed to inform a second dose delay policy.”
  - In the U.S., Dr. Fauci and others have stressed the need to receive a second dose because the durability of just one dose is unknown. Additionally, a two-dose regimen induces 10 times the neutralizing antibodies than the first dose alone, which could be key to protecting people against variants of the virus.
- [\*Pfizer Seeks to Store Vaccine at Higher Temperatures, Easing Logistics\*](#), February 19
  - Pfizer and BioNTech have [submitted](#) data to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that could allow the vaccine to be stored at temperatures more commonly found in pharmaceutical freezers and refrigerators, rather than the presently required ultra-cold temperatures.
  - If approved by FDA, this change would permit the vaccine to be shipped without specially designed containers. It would also expand the ability to distribute the vaccine in areas where capacity for deep freeze storage is limited or nonexistent.
- [\*FDA Issues Policies to Guide Medical Product Developers Addressing Virus Variants\*](#), February 22
  - FDA [published](#) a suite of guidance to medical product developers—specifically those that develop products related to vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics—to address the emergence and potential future emergence of COVID-19 variants.
  - FDA [recommends](#) that vaccine manufacturers collect clinical data comparing a vaccine recipient’s immune response to a virus variant induced by a modified vaccine against the immune response induced by the already authorized vaccine. Manufacturers should also study any modified vaccine in both naïve (non-vaccinated) individuals and individuals who have already received a vaccine.
  - Further, CDC [recommends](#) that test developers continually monitor publically available genomic databases for emerging genetic mutations in the virus and analyze the potential effects of these variations on tests that have been authorized by FDA. Developers should be mindful of the possibility of future mutations when designing new or updated tests.
  - Similarly, FDA recommends that developers of monoclonal [antibody](#) products, as well as drugs and biological products more [broadly](#), continually monitor genomic databases for emerging variants and evaluate the effectiveness of their products with regard to any variant.

## **International**

- [England](#) will begin reopening after a months-long lockdown. Schools will reopen on March 8, and people will be allowed to socialize outdoors starting on March 29.
- After World Health Organization (WHO) and locals alike criticized [Tanzania](#)'s President John Magufuli for declaring the pandemic was "finished" despite rising numbers of what the government claimed were "pneumonia" cases, Magufuli is changing course and asking Tanzanians to take precautions against COVID-19.
- [French](#) President Emmanuel Macron is under fire following the revelation that the French government in December entered into millions-of-euros contracts with consulting giants McKinsey and Accenture to assist in the delivery of COVID-19 vaccines. France's vaccine rollout has been one of the slowest in Europe; by early January, France had inoculated only "several thousand people," compared with 230,000 in Germany or 110,000 in Italy.
- The incoming head of the [World Trade Organization](#), Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, said that countries must drop export restrictions on vaccines and medical supplies in order to speed global COVID-19 recovery.
- [Argentina](#) plans to levy a tax on the wealthy to help speed the recovery of the country's virus-ravaged economy.
- [Israel](#), which has faced criticism from human rights groups for not extending vaccinations to Palestinian territories under its control, agreed to inoculate 100,000 Palestinians who "regularly cross into Israel to work."

## **Other Updates**

- [\*U.S. Airlines to Collect Information from International Travelers to Help with Contact Tracing\*](#), February 22
  - Seven U.S. air carriers said Friday that they would adopt a voluntary contract tracing program. As part of the program, the airlines will collect certain information from international travelers and share the information with CDC.
  - This announcement comes months after the Trump administration blocked a mandatory version of the program, citing privacy concerns.
  - The airline industry hopes participation in the program, combined with enforcement of CDC's testing requirements for international travelers, will encourage the government to more quickly lift travel restrictions.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [\*Nine Key Takeaways for Providers as Illinois Returns to Phase 4 of "Restore Illinois" Plan\*](#), February 11

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