

February 4, 2021

Summary

The United States has 26,603,190 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 453,545 reported related deaths. On Wednesday, the House approved a budget bill that will enable the Senate to pass President Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package with a simple majority. Though a bipartisan deal remains feasible, Democrats and Republicans disagree on the size of the relief package. A House subcommittee alerted OSHA, Tyson Foods, Smithfield Foods, and JBS USA of its investigation into COVID-19 outbreaks at meatpacking plants across the United States. On Tuesday, the Biden administration announced it will begin shipping vaccines directly to pharmacies that are serving "socially vulnerable communities" in an attempt to improve vaccine access equity. As vaccination efforts gain steam around the world, governments and companies alike consider rolling out COVID-19 "passports" that allow those who are vaccinated to travel more freely. As of February 4, nearly 1.3 million people nationwide receive the COVID-19 vaccines per day.

Across the United States, reported COVID-19 infections have dropped by 30% in the last two weeks, and 47 states have reported sustained declines in confirmed cases. The average daily death toll remains high at approximately 3,000 deaths per day; on February 4, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia each reached record-high, seven-day rolling death totals. On February 3, the federal government announced that it would open two mass vaccination sites in California—the first federal vaccination sites to date—at California State University and Oakland Coliseum.

New York reported 135 deaths, 7,967 hospitalizations, and 1,506 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Wednesday, February 3. Approximately 7,414, or 4.38% of the 169,186 tests administered in New York on February 3 were positive for COVID-19. As of February 3, New York has received 1,554,450 first doses of the vaccines and administered 1,475,122 first doses to patients. New York State has received 725,050 second doses of the vaccines and administered 369,186 second doses to patients. On February 3, New York State announced that it will provide nearly \$2 million in grants to New York businesses that manufacture life-saving products to help remedy businesses' supply chain issues. On February 3, Governor Andrew Cuomo announced that 35 pop-up vaccination sites located across the State would begin administering vaccines for limited periods of time. On February 2, Governor Cuomo announced that the federal government will increase vaccine supply to New York State by 20% for the next three weeks, and gave localities the option to add restaurant workers, taxi drivers, and developmentally disabled facilities to the 1B vaccine prioritization group.

Presidential updates

- [*House Moves Forward on Biden's COVID-19 Relief Bill*](#), February 4
 - On Wednesday, the House approved a budget bill that will enable the Senate to pass Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package with a simple majority.
 - The proposal includes a \$1,400 direct payment to individuals, a \$400 per week jobless benefit through September, a \$20 billion vaccination program, and \$350 billion in support for state and local governments.
 - While a [bipartisan](#) deal on the COVID-19 package is still feasible, Democrats and Republicans disagree on the size of the relief package. On Monday, ten Republican senators met with Biden to outline a [\\$618 billion](#) counteroffer.
- [*U.S. to Distribute COVID-19 Vaccines Directly to Pharmacies*](#), February 2
 - On Tuesday, the Biden administration announced it will ship some vaccines directly to pharmacies beginning February 11 in an effort to address vaccine-access inequities.
 - Over 60% of persons who received a vaccine in the United States between December 14 and January 14 were white, according to a CDC [study](#).
 - The administration plans to start shipments to 6,500 pharmacies, but hopes to expand that effort to [40,000](#) pharmacies over time. These shipments will be made in addition to other shipments made to the states each week.
- [*Meatpacking Companies, OSHA Face Investigation Over Coronavirus in Plants*](#), February 1
 - A United States House subcommittee sent letters to Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Tyson Foods, Smithfield Foods, and JBS USA announcing an investigation into COVID-19 outbreaks at meatpacking plants across the United States.
 - Nearly 54,000 workers at 569 meatpacking plants have tested positive for COVID-19 and 250 workers have died of the virus since the beginning of the pandemic.
 - On February 1, Representative James Clyburn announced, "Public reports indicate that under the Trump Administration, [OSHA] failed to adequately carry out its responsibility for enforcing worker safety laws at meatpacking plants across the country, resulting in preventable infections and deaths."
 - Under the Trump Administration, OSHA issued only eight citations totaling less than \$80,000 to meatpacking plants for COVID-19 violations.

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

- [*CDC Interpretation of Forecasts of New Deaths and Hospitalizations*](#), February 3
 - CDC [consolidated](#) data from 36 models projecting the COVID-19 death rate. Predicted rates of increase differ among the forecasts, depending on assumptions about the prevalence and rigor of social distancing behaviors. CDC's national ensemble forecast indicates that the number of newly reported COVID-19 deaths will likely increase over the next four weeks. It predicts between 496,000 and 534,000 cumulative COVID-19 deaths by February 27.
 - CDC [consolidated](#) data from 11 models projecting the number of daily COVID-19 hospitalizations. The forecasts estimate the number will likely decrease, with 4,000 to 14,600 new COVID-19 hospitalizations per day by March 1.

- [Updated COVID-19 Guidance](#), February 2-3
 - CDC updated COVID-19 safety guidelines for workers in: [aircraft maintenance](#), [homeless services](#), [agriculture](#), [manufacturing](#), airline [catering](#), [transit maintenance](#), and airline [customer service](#), among others.
 - Additionally, CDC published new guidelines for people with [HIV](#) and those returning from [cruise](#) ship travel.

New York State

- [New York State COVID-19 Updates](#), February 4
 - New York reported 135 deaths, 7,967 hospitalizations, and 1,506 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Wednesday, February 3, 2021.
 - Approximately 7,414, or 4.38% of the 169,186 tests administered in New York on February 3 were positive for COVID-19.
 - As of February 3, New York has received 1,554,450 first doses of the vaccines and administered 1,475,122 first doses to patients. As of February 3, New York has received 725,050 second doses of the vaccines and administered 369,186 second doses to patients.
 - On February 3, Governor Andrew Cuomo [announced](#) that New York State would provide nearly \$2 million in grants to New York businesses that manufacture life-saving medical products. This initiative seeks to alleviate product shortages resulting from businesses' supply chain issues. Governor Cuomo hopes that the funds will also help to create new jobs and prevent unfair pricing practices.
 - On February 2, Governor Cuomo [announced](#) that the federal government will increase its vaccine supply to New York State by 20% for the next three weeks. Due to this increase in supply, Governor Cuomo gave localities the option to add restaurant workers, taxi drivers, and developmentally disabled facilities to the 1B vaccine prioritization group.
- [Governor Cuomo Announces 35 Community-based Pop-up Vaccination Sites Coming Online This Week to Provide First Doses to over 25,000 New Yorkers](#), February 3
 - On February 3, Governor Cuomo announced that 35 community-based pop-up vaccination sites would begin operating this week in churches, community centers, public housing complexes, and cultural centers throughout the State.
 - Each site will administer first dose vaccines for one to five days at a time, depending upon the location, and then close. The sites will then reopen three weeks after their respective closing date to administer second doses.
 - The governor expects these sites to vaccinate over 25,000 people.

New York City

- [New York City COVID-19 Updates](#), February 4
 - On February 3, Mayor Bill de Blasio [announced](#) that a mass vaccination site would open at Yankee Stadium on February 5. The site will only serve Bronx residents during its first week of operation. The City implemented this residency restriction to combat the high positivity rate in the Bronx and to ensure fairness and social equity in the vaccine distribution process.

- [*Cuomo Denies NYC Ask to Free Up 2nd Shots*](#), February 4
 - On February 4, Mayor de Blasio called on Governor Cuomo to discontinue the practice of reserving COVID-19 vaccines for second dose administration.
 - Mayor de Blasio [argued](#) that he would rather have more people with limited protection from one dose, than fewer people with full protection from both.
 - Currently, Governor Cuomo has reserved 321,000 doses for New York City that can only be used for second dose inoculation.
 - New York State Health Commissioner Dr. Howard Zucker [responded](#) that New York State will continue to follow CDC recommendations, which currently oppose using second doses as first doses. Governor Cuomo supported this response—effectively denying the mayor’s request.

Other Domestic Updates

- [*First Federal COVID Vaccination Sites to Open in California*](#), February 4
 - On [February 3](#), the federal government announced that it will open two mass vaccination sites in California, which will be the first federal vaccination centers to date. The vaccination sites will be located at California State University – Los Angeles and Oakland Coliseum.
 - Both sites will be open seven days a week for at least three to six months. Officials expect to vaccinate approximately 6,000 people per day at the vaccination centers.
 - The vaccination centers are part of the Biden administration’s effort to increase inoculations as new coronavirus variants emerge.
- [*Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance Weekly Claims Report*](#), February 4
 - Department of Labor (DOL) reported that another 779,000 workers filed initial claims (seasonally adjusted) for unemployment benefits last week.
 - The number of new claims had trended downward since March, when nearly seven million people filed for unemployment insurance in a single week. However, claims began spiking again around December.
 - 348,912 new claims were filed for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, the federal program intended to help freelancers, gig workers, the self-employed, and others not normally eligible for state jobless benefits.
- [*FDA COVID-19 Updates*](#), February 4
 - Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [updated](#) its guidance on Conduct of Clinical Trials of Medical Products During the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis.
 - The updated guidance includes whether FDA considers receipt of medical products authorized under emergency use authorization (EUA) to be receipt of “investigational” medical products, which is relevant when sponsors are considering eligibility criteria to exclude patients from enrolling in new clinical trials.
- [*Vaccine “Passports” Are Emerging*](#), February 4
 - Governments and businesses alike will begin rolling out COVID-19 “passports,” which will allow a vaccinated person to travel more freely.

- Etihad and Emirates Airways announced they will start using a digital travel pass from International Air Transport Association that provides documentation that a passenger has either tested negative for COVID-19 or has been vaccinated for the virus.
- Denmark has announced it will introduce a digital passport within the next few months, and Biden has asked government agencies to “assess the feasibility” of a similar digital passport.
- [*U.K. Variant B.1.1.7. May Make Vaccines Less Effective*](#), February 1
 - The highly-infectious B.1.1.7. SARS-CoV-2 variant that emerged in the U.K. has [gained](#) a “worrisome mutation that could make it harder to control with vaccines.”
 - To date, several lines of evidence suggest that vaccines will work against the U.K. variant. On January 28, vaccine maker Novavax [announced](#) that its British trial found no evidence that B.1.1.7. could evade the vaccine.
 - However, scientists in the U.K. have found certain B.1.1.7. viruses that also contain the E484K mutation. Researchers believe the E484K mutation makes it harder for antibodies to grab onto the virus and provide protection.
 - The E484K mutation is found in the highly-infectious South African variant B.1.351, and vaccine studies in South Africa by [Novavax](#) and Johnson & Johnson have both found their vaccines less effective in trials against that variant.
 - The B.1.1.7. variant has so far been found in the U.S. in 541 cases spread across 33 states. The variant’s high infectivity, and now concerns about its emerging ability to reduce the effectiveness of vaccines, makes the push to vaccinate the population quickly all the more urgent.

International Updates

- On Thursday, the International Federation of the [Red Cross](#) and Red Crescent Societies warned of the consequences of delaying vaccination of people in poorer countries. “[I]f large pockets of the globe remain unvaccinated, the COVID-19 virus will continue to circulate and mutate,” Red Cross explained. “This may lead to the emergence of variants that do not respond to vaccines,” allowing the virus to infect those previously vaccinated.
- An antibody survey run by [New Delhi](#)’s health department estimates that more than half of the city’s population has had COVID-19. Of the 28,000 people who gave blood samples, 56% contained antibodies showing an immune response to the virus.
- Concerns about a resurgence of the coronavirus in [China](#) have eased as extensive testing, tracing, and isolation measures have halted the growth in cases.
- [Japan](#) has extended its state of emergency by another month, as the country has been unable to quell a third wave of infections.
- [British](#) scientists plan to study whether administering two different COVID-19 vaccines—specifically those from Pfizer and AstraZeneca—to the same person sufficiently protects against infection.
- [*World Health Organization Publishes COVAX Interim Distribution Forecast*](#), February 3
 - World Health Organization (WHO), along with other co-leads, published the first [distribution forecast](#) for COVAX, the initiative for equitable global access to COVID-19 vaccines.

- COVAX currently has agreements in place to distribute 336 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, and 1.2 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, in Q1 and Q2 2021.
- COVAX currently forecasts vaccine distributions to 145 low- and middle-income countries. The total doses cover, on average, 3.3% of the total population of the 145 participant countries receiving doses, in line with COVAX's goal to reach 3% population coverage in all countries in the first half of 2021, enough to protect the most vulnerable groups.
- [*Russia's Sputnik Vaccine Shows 92% Efficacy in Phase 3 Interim Results*](#), February 2
 - Interim [results](#) from a phase 3 trial showed that Russia's Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine is safe and highly effective – the vaccine showed an efficacy rate of 91.6%, and was completely protective against severe COVID-19.
 - The interim results, published in the respected British medical journal The Lancet, come months after Russia drew [criticism](#) from Western experts when it approved the vaccine for emergency use in August – before late stage trials had even begun.
 - Researchers commented that the vaccine design, which relies on a genetically modified cold virus and is similar to others, including vaccines by Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca, is difficult to mass produce.
 - Sputnik V requires shipping and storage at freezing temperatures below zero degrees Fahrenheit, and requires two doses to complete inoculation.
 - About two million people have been inoculated worldwide with Sputnik V.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [Unexpected Uses of Personal Data in the Coronavirus Pandemic Continue](#), January 13
- [To Vaccinate or Not to Vaccinate – That is the Question, but Who Should Know the Answer?](#), January 13

Send questions to:

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