

February 8, 2021

### Summary

The United States has 27,064,922 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 464,470 reported related deaths. On Friday, President Joseph Biden's administration announced new initiatives aimed at accelerating COVID-19 vaccinations and expanding the production of rapid tests and protective equipment. Later tonight, House Democrats plan to unveil legislation that will make millions of Americans eligible to receive up to \$3,600 per child under Biden's \$1.9 trillion stimulus package.

South Africa has halted use of the AstraZeneca-Oxford coronavirus vaccine after evidence emerged suggesting that the vaccine failed to protect participants against mild or moderate illness caused by the more contagious variant reported in the country. U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced that it has scheduled a meeting to discuss Janssen Biotech's request for emergency use authorization for its vaccine.

Across the United States, reported positive COVID-19 cases have declined by nearly 30 percent over the last two weeks, and hospitalization rates have fallen. This decline is led by several western states that have shown significant signs of improvement—with Arizona, California, Idaho, and Wyoming reporting a 40% decrease in positive cases. There is a large gap between states administering vaccines per capita; with Alaska having inoculated nearly 14% of residents, while Idaho has given the vaccine to only around 6.3% of residents. The B.1.1.7 strain of COVID, which was first detected in the U.K., has now been identified in at least 33 states. Experts warn that the highly contagious variant will likely soon become dominant in the United States. As of February 7, Chicago and San Francisco authorities have reached tentative deals with their respective teachers unions to begin reopening schools.

New York reported 114 deaths, 7,716 hospitalizations, and 1,454 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Sunday, February 7, 2021. Approximately 8,448, or 4.28% of the 197,183 tests administered in New York on February 7 were positive for COVID-19. As of February 6 (the latest date for which statistics are available), New York has received 1,874,975 first doses of the vaccines and administered 1,627,191 first doses to patients. New York State has received 933,850 second doses of the vaccines and administered 509,018 second doses to patients. As of February 5, Governor Cuomo announced that people with certain comorbidities and underlying conditions could receive the COVID-19 vaccine beginning on February 15. On February 5, Governor Andrew Cuomo penned a letter to the New York congressional delegation asking for fair and proportional funding in the next COVID-19 aid package.

## **Politics**

- [\*Biden Announces New Initiatives to Speed Vaccinations and Production of Protective Equipment\*](#), February 5
  - On Friday, the Biden administration announced new initiatives aimed at accelerating COVID-19 vaccinations and expanding the production of rapid tests and protective equipment.
  - The administration is taking steps under the Defense Production Act to ensure Pfizer has access to equipment it needs to scale up production of its vaccine. Pfizer did not receive the same government funding that some other pharmaceutical companies, like Moderna, did in early 2020.
  - The administration is also finalizing contracts with six companies to increase the supply of at-home COVID-19 [tests](#).
  - Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin approved a request to deploy 1,100 troops to help at federally supported vaccination sites. Biden has promised to stand up 100 new sites within 30 days. Currently, 175 such sites exist throughout the country.
- [\*Democrats Will Unveil a Child Tax Credit up to \\$3,600 as Part of the Stimulus Bill\*](#), February 8
  - House Democrats plan to unveil legislation that will make millions of Americans eligible to receive up to \$3,600 per child under Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 stimulus package.
  - This expansion of the child tax credit will provide \$3,600 per child under 6 and \$3,000 per child between 6 and 17. It will also phase out payments for Americans who make more than \$75,000 per year and couples who make more than \$150,000.
- [\*House Panel Renews Probe into Trump Administration's Interference with COVID Response\*](#), February 8
  - On Monday, the House Oversight Committee renewed its investigation into political interference in the nation's COVID-19 response.
  - Representative James E. Clyburn, who chairs the Committee, wrote in a letter to White House Chief of Staff Ron Klein and acting Health and Human Services Secretary Norris Cochran that the Committee has new evidence of efforts by Trump administration officials to [suppress](#) scientific data and pressure the White House Coronavirus Task Force into altering public information. He further wrote that the Trump administration blocked the Committee's past inquiries and failed to comply with subpoenas and document requests.
  - Clyburn is now requesting documents from 46 current and former health department officials.

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

- [\*COVIDView Weekly Surveillance Summary of U.S. COVID-19 Activity\*](#), February 5
  - CDC summarized key COVID-19 disease indicators for the week ending January 30.
  - The national average of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 decreased from 11.2% to 9.7% from January 24 to January 30. The rate of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 declined in all 10 regions and among all age groups.
  - The overall cumulative hospitalization rate is 417.2 per 100,000.

- Based on death certificate data, the percentage of total deaths attributed to pneumonia, influenza, or COVID-19 for the week ending January 30 was 28.4%. The percentage remains above the epidemic threshold and will likely increase as more death certificates are processed.
- [\*Decline in COVID-19 Hospitalization Growth Rates Associated with Statewide Mask Mandates\*](#), February 7
  - CDC and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas obtained and analyzed data on statewide mask mandates and hospitalization rates from March through October 2020.
  - The study focused specifically on hospitalization growth rates less than three weeks after the implementation of mask mandates. This is consistent with the typical incubation period for the virus—the median incubation period, according to recent data, was 5.1 days, and most symptomatic patients report symptoms within 11.5 days of exposure.
  - The study’s findings suggest that statewide mask mandates were associated with statistically significant declines in weekly COVID-19 hospitalization growth rates.

### **New York State**

- [\*New York State COVID-19 Updates\*](#), February 8
  - New York reported 114 deaths, 7,716 hospitalizations, and 1,454 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Sunday, February 7, 2021.
  - Approximately 8,448, or 4.28% of the 197,183 tests administered in New York on February 7 were positive for COVID-19.
  - As of February 6 (the latest date for which statistics are [available](#)), New York has received 1,874,975 first doses of the vaccines and administered 1,627,191 first doses to patients. As of February 6, New York has received 933,850 second doses of the vaccines and administered 509,018 second doses to patients.
  - State-run vaccination sites in Long Island were [closed](#) on February 7 due to heavy snow, high winds, and potentially hazardous conditions. The State rescheduled these appointments for February 8 – 14. State-run vaccination sites in Buffalo were also [closed](#) on February 6 due to inclement weather. The State rescheduled all appointments to February 7 and February 8. Governor Cuomo allowed vaccinations to continue at Westchester County Center, Javits Center, Yankee Stadium, and Aqueduct Racetrack since these sites are located indoors and could be run safely.
  - On February 5, Governor Cuomo [announced](#) that, beginning on February 15, people with certain comorbidities and underlying conditions could receive the COVID-19 vaccine. This group currently includes those who suffer from: cancer, chronic kidney disease, pulmonary disease, intellectual and developmental disabilities, heart conditions, an immunocompromised state, severe obesity, pregnancy, sickle cell disease or thalassemia, type 1 or 2 diabetes mellitus, cerebrovascular disease, neurologic conditions, and liver disease.
  - On February 5, Governor Cuomo penned a letter to the New York congressional delegation asking for fair and proportional [funding](#) in the next COVID-19 aid package. Specifically, Governor Cuomo requested that congress repeal the state and local tax cap, provide mortgage relief, and financially support restaurant workers.

## **New York City**

- [\*New York City COVID-19 Updates\*](#), February 8
  - On February 8, New York City Department of Education officials [announced](#) that New York City middle-school students would return to campus on February 25. Middle-school students have been learning online for almost three months, after Mayor Bill de Blasio closed schools on November 19, 2020.
  - More than 30 candidates have entered the race to become the [mayor](#) of New York City. Thus far, candidates have centered their platforms on New York City's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, which wiped out nearly 878,000 jobs in the second quarter of 2020 according to New York City's Independent Budget Office.

## **Vaccines and Therapeutics**

- [\*AstraZeneca's Vaccine Does Not Work Well Against Virus Variant in South Africa\*](#), February 8
  - South Africa has [halted](#) use of the AstraZeneca-Oxford coronavirus vaccine after evidence emerged from a clinical trial suggesting that the vaccine failed to protect participants against mild or moderate illness caused by the more contagious variant reported in the country. The study showed that the vaccine had only a 10% efficacy rate against the variant.
  - Due to limited data, it is not yet clear whether the vaccine protects against more severe disease caused by the South Africa variant, but scientists said that it might. South African health officials said if further studies show that the vaccine does, in fact, protect against more severe illness, they would consider resuming distribution of the vaccine.
  - The variant, known as B.1.351, has since spread to at least 32 other countries.
  - Other vaccine makers, including Pfizer, Moderna, Novavax, and Johnson & Johnson, have indicated that their vaccines are less effective against the variant, but not entirely ineffective.
- [\*Clinical Trial in Hospitalized COVID-19 Patients Evaluates Long-acting Antibody Therapy\*](#), February 8
  - National Institutes of Health (NIH) has [begun](#) enrolling participants in a new sub-study evaluating AZD7442, an investigational long-acting antibody combination developed by biopharmaceutical company AstraZeneca.
  - The study is part of a larger international clinical trial, known as ACTIV-3. Researchers at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville isolated these antibodies, which were then licensed to AstraZeneca.
  - Based on initial results from approximately 150 volunteers, AZD7442 may be both safe and effective as a therapeutic. An additional 700 participants will be enrolled, allowing researchers to better evaluate the effectiveness of the therapeutic.
- [\*FDA Announces Advisory Committee Meeting to Discuss Janssen Biotech Inc.'s COVID-19 Vaccine Candidate\*](#), February 4
  - U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced that it has [scheduled](#) a meeting of its Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee to take place on

February 26, 2021. The Committee will discuss Janssen Biotech Inc.’s request for emergency use authorization for a COVID-19 vaccine.

- FDA intends to make background materials available to the public, including the meeting agenda and committee roster, at least two business days prior to the meeting.
- The meeting will be live-streamed on FDA’s social media channels and website.
- FDA states that it cannot predict how long its evaluation of the data and manufacturing information will take following the meeting, but the agency intends to “review the request as expeditiously as possible, taking into consideration the discussion by the advisory committee, while still doing so in a thorough and science-based manner.”

### **International**

- On Monday, [Indonesia](#) will begin vaccinating people 60 and older, reversing an earlier decision to exclude the age group because of concerns the Chinese-made vaccine the country is using is unsafe for older people.
- [China](#) reported no local COVID-19 transmissions for the first time since mid-December.
- The People’s Liberation Army of China has donated vaccines to [Pakistan and Cambodia](#)’s armies.

### **Other Updates**

- [\*Supreme Court Doubles Down of Religious Rights Amid Pandemic\*](#), January 6
  - In a 6-3 ruling, the Supreme Court found California’s ban on indoor church services unconstitutional. California had instituted these restrictions in order to curb the pandemic.
  - However, the Court said the state may still [limit](#) indoor attendance to 25% of building capacity and restrict singing and chanting.
- [\*Chicago, San Francisco Reach Tentative Deals With Teachers Unions on Reopening Schools\*](#), February 7
  - On February 7, authorities in Chicago and San Francisco announced that they reached tentative agreements with their respective teachers unions to reopen schools.
  - In Chicago—pending union ratification of the deal—pre-K through 8th grade students would begin returning to in-person learning on February 11, with the oldest students returning on March 8.
  - The San Francisco Unified School District and the teachers union reached a deal providing that schools could begin reopening if community spread becomes “moderate” according to state standards (2% to 4.9% of tests for COVID-19 are positive). Alternatively, schools could also reopen with more “widespread” community infection (5% to 8% of tests are positive) if all teachers and staff have been vaccinated.

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:

- [COVID-19-Implications@ropesgray.com](mailto:COVID-19-Implications@ropesgray.com)