

January 19, 2020

Summary

The United States has 24,186,358 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 400,292 reported related deaths. Over 100,000 Americans have died from COVID-19 in just the last five weeks. Moderna and Pfizer estimate they will provide 200 million vaccine doses to the United States by July. Currently, 7.7 million Americans have been vaccinated. CDC expects the more contagious U.K. variant of COVID-19 to be the dominant strain in the U.S. by March. Last week, President Trump announced that his administration would release all reserved vaccine doses, but no such federal stockpile existed. As a result, more than half of the states that recently expanded vaccine eligibility are searching for additional doses. Trump lifted the travel ban against travelers from most of Europe and Brazil, but not China or Iran. President-elect Biden plans to reverse the travel ban reversal after his inauguration; he also intends to require masks to be worn on federal grounds and in interstate travel. Biden's \$1.9 trillion stimulus plan, which he unveiled last Thursday, includes funding for a national vaccine program that will be led by former FDA chief David Kessler.

New COVID-19 cases are down 7% for the week ending January 18 compared to two weeks prior, the first such extended decline since September. California became the first state to surpass three million COVID-19 infections. Los Angeles County cases remain high, and some researchers estimate as many as one in three L.A. County residents have been infected with COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. Washington Governor Jay Inslee announced the state has turned to Starbucks for help streamlining the vaccine rollout; the company has assigned 11 employees with labor and logistics experience to work full time improving the distribution system. Data from Florida's Department of Health shows 45,000 residents are overdue for second doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. The more infectious U.K. variant was found in Massachusetts – 122 confirmed cases of the variant have now been found across 20 states.

New York reported 167 deaths, 9,236 hospitalizations, and 1,614 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Sunday, January 18. Approximately 12,512, or 7.06% of the 177,269 tests administered in New York on January 18 were positive for COVID-19. As of January 19, New York has received 1,884,325 doses of the vaccines and administered 757,466 doses to patients. A Siena College Research Institute poll released today indicates that more than a quarter of New Yorkers are unwilling to take the coronavirus vaccine. Vaccines are in short supply throughout the State after the government broadened eligibility and the State and City opened several new government-run vaccination hubs; Governor Cuomo has proposed to purchase additional vaccines directly from Pfizer. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority delayed scheduled fare increases, citing, among other things, the economic impact from COVID-19.

Presidential updates

- [President Trump Ends Restrictions on Travelers from the Schengen Area, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, and Brazil](#), January 18
 - On Monday, President Trump issued an executive order ending a ban on certain travelers from Europe and Brazil. The ban sought to slow the spread of COVID-19 to the United States. Travel restrictions remain in place for travelers from Iran and China.
 - Trump stated that the ban was no longer necessary because travelers flying into the United States will be required to present a negative COVID-19 test before boarding starting on January 26.
 - Jan Psaki, the incoming White House press secretary, said Biden would [overturn](#) Trump's actions. "With the pandemic worsening, and more contagious variants emerging around the world, this is not the time to be lifting restrictions on international travel," Psaki tweeted.
- [Biden Unveils \\$1.9 Trillion Stimulus Proposal, Policies to Combat Pandemic](#), January 14
 - Last Thursday, Biden proposed a \$1.9 trillion [package](#) to combat the economic effects of COVID-19. The proposal seeks \$1,400 direct payments to most Americans, an unemployment insurance supplement of \$400 per week, and aid for schools and state and local governments, among other stimulus measures. Biden's proposal also seeks \$160 billion for a national vaccine campaign.
 - On Friday, Biden revealed details regarding his proposed national vaccine [campaign](#). He stated the campaign would "get more people vaccinated for free, create more places for them to get vaccinated, mobilize more medical teams to get the shots in people's arms, increase supply and get it out the door as soon as possible." Despite Biden's promises, he faces a scarcity of vaccine doses. Last week, states learned the federal government does not have a reserve stockpile of COVID-19 vaccine doses.
 - Biden has asked David [Kessler](#) to oversee his federal COVID-19 vaccines campaign. Kessler is a pediatrician and lawyer who led the F.D.A. under Presidents Bill Clinton and George Bush.
 - Biden recently announced several other measures to combat the pandemic. After taking office, he plans to sign an executive order requiring [masks](#) on federal property and for interstate travel and to request that Americans commit to wearing masks during the first 100 days of his administration.

World Health Organization (WHO)

- [WHO COVID-19 Updates](#), January 19
 - WHO Director-General Tedros excoriated nationalistic vaccine policies in wealthy countries, [warning](#), "the world is on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure – and the price of this failure will be paid with lives and livelihoods in the world's poorest countries."
 - WHO Emergency Committee on COVID-19 met on January 15 to [discuss](#) emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants. The Committee called for a global expansion of genomic sequencing and sharing of data, and urged WHO to develop a standardized system for naming new variants that avoids geographic markers.

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

- [COVIDView Weekly Surveillance Summary of U.S. COVID-19 Activity](#), January 15
 - CDC summarized key COVID-19 disease indicators for the week ending January 9.
 - The national average of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 decreased from 15.4% to 14.5% from January 2 to January 9. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for COVID-19 declined in 9 out of 10 regions, but increased in New England.
 - The overall cumulative hospitalization rate is 364.3 per 100,000. The weekly hospitalization rate for the week ending on January 9 was 11.3 per 100,000. The weekly hospitalization rate reached its highest point at 17.6 per 100,000 during the week ending December 12.
 - Based on death certificate data, the percentage of total deaths attributed to pneumonia, influenza, or COVID-19 for the week ending January 9 was 17.2%. The percentage remains above the epidemic threshold and will likely increase as more death certificates are processed.
- [CDC Issues Warning Regarding New COVID-19 Variants](#), January 15
 - On January 15, CDC predicted that the more contagious variant of COVID-19 first discovered in the [United Kingdom](#) will become the dominant strain in the United States by March. Scientists believe the new variant is about 50% more transmissible than the original strain. Currently, the variant has been detected in 10 [states](#), including California, Texas, New York, and Florida.
 - A variant first detected in [South Africa](#) has not yet been detected in the United States. Scientists believe the variant is about 50% more contagious, too. Additionally, CDC states there is some evidence indicating the variant may limit the efficacy of antibody treatments and “perhaps even” the vaccine.
 - According to CDC, a variant first detected in [Brazil](#) also contains mutations that may affect its transmissibility and the efficacy of antibody treatments. The variant has not been detected in the United States.
- [Allergic Reactions Including Anaphylaxis After Receipt of the First Dose of Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine](#), January 15
 - On January 15, CDC published a study on allergic reactions to the first dose of Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine.
 - Between December 14 and 23, the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System recorded 21 cases of anaphylaxis following the first dose of the vaccine.
 - A total of 1,893,360 doses were administered, bringing the rate of a severe allergic reaction to 11.1 per million doses. 71% of the cases of anaphylaxis occurred within 15 minutes of vaccination.
 - California recommended that health providers temporarily [halt](#) the use of doses from one batch of Moderna’s COVID-19 vaccine due to a “higher than usual” number of severe allergic reactions. The state’s epidemiologist said the recommendation was born from an “extreme abundance of caution” after [six](#) patients who received doses from the batch at a clinic in Southern California had reactions. The state said it was not aware of reactions at any other vaccine site, but is still urging providers to use “other available vaccine [inventory](#).” 330,000 doses in the batch that have not yet been distributed to

providers will be kept in storage until public health experts complete an investigation into the allergic reactions. About 40,000 Californians are testing positive for COVID-19 each day, and the state is among the first dealing with the more contagious COVID-19 [variant](#) first discovered in the United Kingdom.

New York State

- [New York State COVID-19 Updates](#), January 19
 - New York reported 167 deaths, 9,236 hospitalizations, and 1,614 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Sunday, January 18, 2021.
 - Approximately 12,512, or 7.06% of the 177,269 tests administered in New York on January 18 were positive for COVID-19.
 - As of January 18, New York has received 1,884,325 doses of the vaccines and administered 757,466 doses to patients.
 - According to a Siena College Research Institute poll [released](#) on January 19, 27% of New Yorkers do not plan to take the vaccine, which is up 3% from the Institute's November 24, 2020 poll. 35% of self-identified Republicans, 35% of self-identified independents, 39% of Latinos, 36% of African-Americans, and 36% of people ages 18 to 34 said they would not get the vaccine.
 - On January 18, Governor Cuomo [sent](#) a letter to Pfizer requesting to purchase vaccines directly from the company. Governor Cuomo argued that Pfizer could provide vaccines directly to New York State, unlike Moderna, because it had opted out of Operation Warp Speed. Governor Cuomo claimed that CDC's decision to liberalize vaccine-eligibility guidelines without a corresponding increase in vaccine distribution necessitated the request.
 - On January 18, new state-run vaccination sites [opened](#) at SUNY Stony Brook, Aqueduct Racetrack, SUNY Potsdam, and Plattsburgh International Airport. Vaccinations are available to eligible New Yorkers by appointment only. Appointments for the second dose are scheduled when the patient receives the first dose. Additional sites will be opened in the coming days.
 - On January 18, Governor Cuomo [proposed](#) to boost partial unemployment by basing the benefits on the number of hours a recipient worked instead of the number of days a recipient works. The proposal is intended to boost the post-pandemic economic recovery without penalizing residents who accept part-time work.

New York City

- [New York City COVID-19 Updates](#), January 19
 - New York City's high-school graduation rate [increased](#) 1.5% during the coronavirus pandemic, likely as a result of eased graduation requirements such as canceled standardized testing.
 - Twelve vaccination hubs [opened](#) in New York City on Saturday, January 16, bringing the total number of open vaccination hubs to 15, but, due to the increased vaccination rate, the City is quickly running out of available vaccines. A vaccination hub at the Brooklyn Army Terminal opened last Sunday, but closed this past Friday due to a vaccine shortage. According to Mayor de Blasio, the City will run out of vaccines by the end of this week.

- Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) [suspended](#) previously scheduled fare increases. MTA Chairman Patrick Foye explained that the economic struggles for riders resulting from the pandemic and the possibility that MTA might receive federal relief allowed the MTA to avoid the scheduled increase. Fare increases are scheduled regularly every two years.

Other Related Updates

- [*Home Quarantine Linked to Increase in Near-Sightedness Among Young Children*](#), January 14
 - Home quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic was [associated](#) with a significant increase in the prevalence of myopia (near-sightedness) among young school-aged children.
 - Nearly 125,000 children in China underwent school-based eye exams up to six times from 2015 through 2020. From 2015 through 2019, the prevalence of myopia was relatively stable.
 - In June 2020, the prevalence of myopia among six-year-olds increased from 6% in 2019 to 22% in 2020.
 - Similar increases were not observed among children between ages nine and thirteen. Researchers explain “[y]ounger children’s refractive status may be more sensitive to environmental changes than older children, given [that] younger individuals are in an important period for the development of myopia.”
 - Researchers recommended that parents should limit screen time and increase outdoor activity as much as safely possible.
- [*FDA COVID-19 Updates*](#), January 19
 - FDA published [guidance](#) on protecting participants in bioequivalence studies for abbreviated new drug applications.
 - FDA published [guidance](#) describing methods that applicants should use to ensure the potency of monoclonal antibodies and other therapeutic proteins proposed for use as anti-infective agents for COVID-19.
- [*Vaccine Reserve Was Exhausted when Trump Administration Vowed to Release All Available Doses, Dashing Hopes of Expanding Access*](#), January 16
 - After Trump announced he would release all reserved vaccines doses, states learned most of the stockpile was already [gone](#).
 - Last Tuesday, Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar urged states to expand vaccine access to persons 65 and older, as well as persons with conditions that put them at a high risk for a severe COVID-19 reaction. He stated the government would release the vaccines held in reserve for second doses.
 - According to state and federal officials, there is no reserve, as the Trump administration shipped what was available in December.
 - More than half of [states](#) expanded access as encouraged by Azar, only to realize they would not receive enough doses to cover persons newly eligible for the vaccine.

- [Companies Scramble to Expand Coronavirus Vaccine Supply](#), January 15
 - Production of the two COVID-19 vaccines authorized for emergency use in the United States is ramping up.
 - By July, the United States should have 200 million doses each from Moderna and Pfizer, enough to inoculate 70% of the United States' adult population.
 - [Johnson & Johnson](#) is likely to apply for emergency use authorization for its one-dose vaccine in February. If authorized for use, the vaccine will further increase the number of doses available.
- [COVID-19 Supply Deal Lets Vaccine Maker Earmark Doses for Employees and their Families](#), January 15
 - Trump announced a \$628 million federal contract with Emergent BioSolutions “to advance [manufacturing](#) capabilities and capacity for a potential COVID-19 vaccine as well as therapeutics.” The company is currently working with Johnson & Johnson, Novavax, and Vaxart on vaccine development and manufacturing.
 - According to the contract, Emergent can hold “a reasonable quantity of vaccines,” to distribute to their “employees and critical subcontractors, and their respective immediate families.”
 - This clause does not appear in other Operation Warp Speed contracts, such as those with AstraZeneca or Johnson & Johnson.

International Updates

- On Saturday, [India](#) began inoculating its 1.3 billion people. The country has authorized the AstraZeneca/Oxford University vaccine for emergency use, as well as one produced by Bharat Biotech called Covaxin.
- On Monday, [Brazil](#) began its nationwide vaccination campaign, though it expected the rollout to be slow due to political infighting and a “strained” health care system.
- The head of [Australia](#)'s Health Department, Brendan Murphy, said on Monday that the country is unlikely to fully reopen its borders in 2021.
- [Portugal](#)'s hospitals are overrun; of the country's 672 ICU beds, 647 were in use as of Sunday.
- Some [German](#) states are planning guarded quarantine centers for people who disobey quarantine rules.
- This week, [European](#) leaders will debate whether to create COVID-19 passports that would allow vaccinated persons to travel freely within the EU.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [To Vaccinate or Not to Vaccinate – That is the Question, But Who Should Know the Answer?](#), January 13
- [Podcast: COVID-19: Pandemic Fundraising Insights and What Lies Ahead for Private Equity in 2021: Conversation with Tom Burger, Gridiron Capital](#), January 8
- [Podcast: COVID-19: End of Life Fund Issues](#), January 6
- [Coronavirus Relief Legislation Creates Substantial Changes to Copyright and Trademark Law](#), December 28

Send questions to:

- COVID-19-Implications@ropesgray.com
- COVID-19RecoveryPolicies@ropesgray.com