

January 28, 2020

### Summary

The United States has 25,686,826 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 431,289 reported related deaths. All three major COVID-19 variants (from United Kingdom, Brazil, and South Africa) have been detected in the United States. On Thursday, President Biden signed an executive order reopening enrollment for health coverage through the Affordable Care Act to “give Americans that need health care coverage during this global pandemic the opportunity to sign up.” Earlier this week, he announced a plan to purchase 200 million additional COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna. A CDC study found low incidence of in-school coronavirus transmission when students and staff wore masks and engaged in other mitigation strategies, providing encouraging data for school re-openings. CDC has also released updated coronavirus safety guidelines for certain industries and groups of people.

State health departments have identified at least 315 cases of the U.K. variant in 28 states. California, Florida, New York, Florida, Michigan and Georgia have the highest number of confirmed cases of the U.K. variant. Two South Carolina residents tested positive for the South African variant; the pair have not recently traveled to South Africa, indicating community spread. Despite fears of the new coronavirus variants, several states and localities—including Michigan, Oregon, Washington, D.C., and Chicago—have loosened restrictions to allow indoor businesses to re-open at reduced capacity, citing declining case loads over recent weeks. North Dakota eased its restrictions and allowed a mask mandate to expire. Ohio Governor Mike DeWine announced a plan to vaccinate 91,000 teachers and support staff in an effort to re-open in-person schooling in March.

New York reported 162 deaths, 8,520 hospitalizations, and 1,584 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Wednesday, January 27, 2021. Approximately 13,398, or 5.34% of the 250,668 tests administered in New York on January 27 were positive for COVID-19. As of January 28, New York has received 2,812,625 doses of the vaccines and administered 1,630,504 doses to patients. On January 28, the New York Attorney General released a report indicating that deaths in nursing homes might be 50% greater than reported and that several nursing homes failed to install proper infection-control procedures. Twenty nursing homes are currently under investigation. On January 27, citing reduced case loads following the holiday surge, Governor Cuomo decided to lift localized economic and social-gathering restrictions imposed under the State’s microcluster strategy. Governor Cuomo is also considering whether to re-open reduced-capacity indoor dining in New York City.

## Presidential updates

- [\*Biden Signs Executive Order Expanding Health Care Access\*](#), January 28
  - On Thursday, Biden signed an order re-opening enrollment for health coverage through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) from February 15 to May 15 to “give Americans that need health care coverage during this global pandemic the opportunity to sign up.”
  - Additionally, the order requires federal agencies to “reconsider rules and other policies that limit Americans’ access to health care,” including those that undermine protections for people with pre-existing conditions, make enrollment difficult, and reduce coverage affordability.
  - Typically, an annual enrollment period runs six weeks in the fall. This year, enrollments were down during that period, in part due to a lack of [advertising](#). Biden plans to heavily advertise the reopening.
- [\*Biden to Purchase 200 Million Additional COVID-19 Doses\*](#), January 27
  - On Tuesday, Biden said he would secure an additional 200 million doses of Pfizer and Moderna’s vaccines. This purchase would increase the United States’ supply by 50% and suffice to fully vaccinate 300 million people.
  - Biden said he expects the additional doses would be delivered during the summer.
  - Currently, Pfizer and Moderna have agreed to deliver 200 million doses each by the end of June.
- [\*Biden COVID-19 Response Team Hosts First COVID-19 Briefing\*](#), January 27
  - Biden’s coronavirus response team held its first [briefing](#) on Wednesday.
  - When asked if the Defense Production Act might be used to expedite vaccine production, team lead Jeffrey Zients said, “everything is on the table.”
  - Zients also announced the Department of Health and Human Services will permit retired doctors and nurses to administer shots.
  - According to Andy Slavitt, a senior adviser on the team, vaccinations in the US are accelerating. “So far this week, we’ve been hitting our target of an average of 1 million vaccinations per day necessary to meet the president’s early commitment to administer 100 million shots in 100 days.” Slavitt warned, however, that it would be “months before everyone who wants a vaccine will be able to get one.”

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

- [\*CDC Interpretation of Forecasts of New Deaths and Hospitalizations\*](#), January 27
  - CDC [consolidated](#) data from 38 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 decrease over the next four weeks. It predicts between 479,000 and 514,000 cumulative COVID-19 deaths by February 20.
  - CDC [consolidated](#) data from 11 models projecting the number of daily COVID-19 hospitalizations. The models predict daily hospitalizations will decrease over the next four weeks. The forecasts estimate 5,700 to 15,000 new COVID-19 hospitalizations per day by February 22.

- [COVID-19 Cases and Transmission in 17 K-12 Schools](#), January 26
  - According to a CDC study, COVID-19 incidence among students and staff in 17 Wisconsin schools that required masks was lower than in the country overall (3,452 versus 5,466). Among those cases identified, only 3.7% were linked to in-school spread.
  - In addition to masks, the schools employed other mitigation strategies, such as seating the same students near each other each day, holding all classes and lunch periods indoors, and limiting mixing of different grade levels.
  - This data indicates that schools might be able to safely reopen, so long as students and staff consistently wear masks and engage in other mitigation strategies.
- [Negative COVID-19 Test for All Air Passengers Goes into Effect](#), January 26
  - The January 12 [order](#) requiring all passengers flying to the United States present evidence of a negative COVID-19 test before boarding their flights went into effect on January 26.
- [Updated COVID-19 Guidance](#), January 26 – 28
  - Between January 26 and 28, CDC updated COVID-19 safety guidelines for [construction](#) employers and employees, [pregnant](#) women and new parents; [correctional](#) and detention facilities, and K-12 [schools](#), among others.

#### **New York State**

- [New York State COVID-19 Updates](#), January 28
  - New York reported 162 deaths, 8,520 hospitalizations, and 1,584 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Wednesday, January 27, 2021.
  - Approximately 13,398, or 5.34% of the 250,668 tests administered in New York on January 27 were positive for COVID-19.
  - As of January 28, New York has received 2,812,625 doses of the vaccines and administered 1,630,504 doses to patients.
  - On January 27, Governor Cuomo [announced](#) that New York would lift localized economic and social-gathering restrictions in most areas of the State, which were imposed under the microcluster strategy. The governor, in consultation with Mayor de Blasio and local health officials, is also considering opening indoor dining in New York City. Governor Cuomo explained that the restrictions could be relaxed because positivity rates were declining following a post-holiday surge.
  - On January 25, Governor Cuomo [announced](#) that New York would begin to relax economic restrictions that were imposed after Thanksgiving to curb the rise in coronavirus cases throughout the State. Elective surgeries will be permitted in Erie County, and other health-care restrictions may be lifted in New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and New Rochelle.
- [New York Undercounted Nursing-Home Covid-19 Deaths, Report Says](#), January 28
  - On January 28, the New York Attorney General’s Office announced that the number of deaths in nursing homes may have been undercounted by more than 50% at some facilities. As of Tuesday, New York has confirmed 8,711 deaths in the State’s nursing homes.

- The Attorney General’s Office surveyed 10% of the State’s facilities and compared the figures the facilities reported to the Attorney General with the figures the facilities had reported to the New York Department of Health.
- The office also found that nursing homes put residents at increased risk of harm because they failed to completely comply with infection-control protocols. In particular, nursing homes with low staffing rates before the pandemic had among the highest fatality rates during the pandemic.
- The Attorney General’s Office is investigating potential misconduct in 20 nursing homes throughout the State.

### **New York City**

- [\*New York City COVID-19 Updates\*](#), January 28
  - The Real Estate Board of New York, a lobbying group for landlords, and the New York Legal Aid Society, a non-profit legal association that advocates for tenants rights, have [joined](#) forces to lobby the government for additional relief for tenants. The two groups, who are normally adversaries, believe that evictions will not successfully address the more than \$2 billion in tenant debt that New York City residents are estimated to carry.
  - Thousands of New York City actors, musicians, and other creative professionals are at [risk](#) of losing or have already lost their health-care coverage due to coronavirus-related shutdowns. Health-care enrollment in the Actors’ Equity Association, for example, which covers actors and stage managers and is tied to their employment, is down a quarter since the end of 2019, and officials estimate that enrollment will continue to drop 10% each month.

### **Other Domestic Updates**

- [\*Most U.S. States Have Identified Cases of Coronavirus Variant First Spotted in UK\*](#), January 27
  - At least 315 cases of the U.K. variant have been detected in 28 states.
  - Florida and California have detected 92 cases each; New York has detected 22 cases; Michigan has detected 17 cases; and Georgia has detected 14 cases.
  - Alaska, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming each have detected fewer than 10 cases.
- [\*States Lift Restrictions Gradually Amid Fears of New Variant\*](#), January 28
  - Due to declining case loads throughout the United States, several state and local governments have begun loosening COVID-19 restrictions. The states are proceeding cautiously due to fears of several coronavirus variants in the country that could spread more quickly.
  - Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced that bars and restaurants could re-open indoor dining at 25% capacity for the first time in two and a half months, although a 10 p.m. curfew would be enforced.
  - Oregon Governor Kate Brown announced that indoor businesses, such as gyms and movie theaters, could re-open with limited capacity on Friday, although indoor dining will remain prohibited in the state’s hardest-hit counties.

- Last week, after North Dakota’s case rate dropped to the lowest in the country, North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum relaxed indoor-dining capacity limits and let a statewide mask mandate expire.
- Washington, D.C. ended its month-long ban on indoor dining. This past weekend, Chicagoland restaurants re-opened indoor dining for the first time since October.
- [\*Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance Weekly Claims Report\*](#), January 28
  - Department of Labor (DOL) reports that another 847,000 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.
  - 426,856 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.
- [\*The South Africa COVID-19 Variant Is in the United States\*](#), January 28
  - On Thursday, health officials in South Carolina reported two cases of the COVID-19 variant first found in South Africa.
  - The variant is more [contagious](#) and likely less responsive to available treatments.
  - Variants that first emerged in Brazil and the United Kingdom have also been detected in the United States.
- [\*People of Color Face the Most Pandemic Housing Insecurity\*](#), January 28
  - The Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University (JCHS) analyzed recent census data and determined that Black and Latino households struggled the most to make rent and mortgage payments during the pandemic.
  - 20% of Black renters/owners and 19% of Latino renters/owners faced pandemic housing insecurity. Only 8% of white renters/owners did. The average across all races was 11%.
  - According to JCHS, the higher insecurity among people of color was the result of discriminatory housing practices and cost burdens before the pandemic.
- [\*FDA COVID-19 Updates\*](#), January 28
  - FDA [placed](#) all alcohol-based sanitizers from Mexico on a countrywide import alert. The alert subjects the sanitizers to heightened FDA scrutiny, and FDA staff may detain the shipment. Several of the imported sanitizers have tested positive for methanol contamination, a toxic substance that can be life-threatening when ingested.

### **International Updates**

- Tensions are rising in the [European Union](#) (EU) as vaccine supplies lag and COVID-19 variants spread. Spain became the first EU country to partially suspend its vaccination program, and [Germany](#)—which helped fund the development of the Pfizer vaccine—announced vaccination delays will last another 10 weeks. Only 2% of people in the EU have

received at least one dose of a vaccine, as compared to 40% in Israel, 11% in Britain, and 6% in the US.

- [Germany](#)'s vaccination advisory committee is recommending adults age 65 and older not receive AstraZeneca's vaccine, because the vaccine's developers have not released data on its efficacy in older people. Meanwhile, the [Philippines](#) approved AstraZeneca's vaccine for broad use.
- [China](#) introduced a new COVID-19 testing protocol that uses anal swabs. According to Chinese doctors, an anal swab can detect the virus for days longer than a nose swab. The country will use the swabs only on select groups, such as those in quarantine centers.

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

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