

March 1, 2021

Summary

The United States has 28,647,136 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 514,192 reported related deaths. Early Saturday morning, House Democrats passed President Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 stimulus plan with 219 votes. Democrats could introduce the legislation to the Senate as soon as Wednesday. In a letter to the White House coronavirus task force, two Democratic senators asked that vaccine doses set aside for second shots instead be administered as first doses. Their call comes amid concerns that more contagious COVID-19 variants could cause a new wave of infections.

FDA has now granted emergency use authorization to a third COVID-19 vaccine, developed by Johnson & Johnson's Janssen Pharmaceutical Company. The company has already started shipping about 4 million doses of the one-shot vaccine, which should begin to be administered to patients immediately. CDC released data from Israel showing that vaccines may prevent severe cases requiring the use of a ventilator, even when someone contracts the virus after being vaccinated. FDA has authorized for emergency use an at-home COVID-19 test, and NIH is funding a study into a smartphone app developed to help people self-administer the test.

As of February 28, the United States has a seven-day, rolling COVID-19 case average of 66,594—the lowest since October 2020. However, the death toll per day remains high with 1,129 reported COVID-19 deaths yesterday, led by California, which surpassed 50,000 deaths—the most of any state. As health authorities expected, Texas experienced artificial variations in their COVID-19 testing and reporting due to weather issues earlier this month. On February 25, Texas reported about 7,800 positive COVID-19 cases (compared to just 2,400 cases reported on the same day last week). Colleges and universities have struggled to contain COVID-19, as more than 115,000 cases have been reported on campuses since the beginning of 2021.

New York reported 80 deaths, 5,307 hospitalizations, and 1,065 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Sunday, February 28. Approximately 6,235, or 3.58% of the 174,158 tests administered in New York on February 28 were positive for COVID-19. As of February 28, New York has received 3,206,430 first doses of the vaccines and administered 2,954,858 first doses to patients. New York State has received 2,023,520 second doses of the vaccines and administered 1,628,758 second doses to patients. As of February 26, New York State will begin partnering with local health departments to create vaccination sites specifically for people 65 years and older. Where needed, these sites will also provide assistance with transportation to and from the vaccination facilities.

U.S. Government Updates

- [House Democrats Pass Biden's \\$1.9 Trillion Stimulus Plan](#), February 27
 - Early Saturday morning, House Democrats passed Biden's \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 stimulus plan with 219 votes.
 - The plan, which some Democrats are likening to the [New Deal](#), includes a number of sweeping aid measures: \$1,400 checks for many Americans; billions for unemployment benefits, emergency rental assistance, and direct relief to small businesses; an increase to the child welfare tax credit; and \$128 billion to help k-12 schools reopen.
 - Democrats, who hope to pass the bill before emergency unemployment benefits [expire](#) next week, could introduce the legislation to the Senate as soon as Wednesday.
 - Senate Republicans are unlikely to vote for the stimulus package.
 - More than 7 in 10 Americans back Biden's plan, according to a *New York Times*/SurveyMonkey poll.
- [Senators Ask White House to Use Reserved Second Doses to Vaccinate More People](#), March 1
 - In a letter to the White House coronavirus task force, two Democratic senators asked that vaccine doses set aside for second shots instead be administered as first doses.
 - Senators Chris Van Hollen and Martin Heinrich explained, "Based on conversations with health officials, we believe this approach is worthy of serious consideration." The Senators clarified they are not asked for a "single-dose regimen," but rather "deploying existing second doses to cover more first doses—couple with using real-time inventory in the coming weeks to serve as boost doses."
 - The Senators cited data published in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#) that a single dose of Pfizer's vaccine is 74% effective against hospitalization and 72% effective against COVID-19-related deaths. Both Pfizer and Moderna have said their vaccines should be delivered as a two-dose regimen.
 - The debate of how best to deploy the vaccines has reemerged amid concerns that more contagious COVID-19 variants could cause a new wave of infections.

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

- [COVID Data Tracker Weekly Review](#), February 26
 - CDC summarized key COVID-19 disease indicators for the previous week.
 - The number of new cases reported in the United States for the week ending February 26 was 74,806. The seven-day average number of daily cases reported was 66,348. This is a 13.5% decrease compared to the previous weeks' average. There has been a six-week downward trend in new cases.
 - As of February 25, 68.3 million vaccine doses have been administered in the United States. Overall, approximately 46.1 million people in the United States have received at least one dose of vaccine, which is 13.9% of the population. About 21.6 million people have received two doses of vaccine, which is 6.5% of the population. The seven-day average number of reported vaccine dose administrations was 1.5 million, a 7.1% decrease compared to the previous week.
 - The number of new hospital admissions on February 23 was 6,562. The current seven-day average of new hospitalizations is 6,431 per day, a decrease of 11.3% compared to the prior week's average.

- The total number of new deaths reported on February 24 was 2,407. The current seven-day average of reported deaths is 2,687 per day, a 23.8% decrease compared to the prior week's average.
- [*Reduction in COVID-19 Patients Requiring Mechanical Ventilation Following Implementation of a National COVID-19 Vaccination Program in Israel*](#), February 26
 - CDC [analyzed](#) results from an ecological study conducted in Israel to measure the efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines in preventing severe COVID-19. To do so, the researchers compared the number of patients who required the use of a ventilator before and after widespread vaccine distribution.
 - By February 2021, two-dose vaccination coverage in Israel was 84% among people age 70 and older and 10% among those younger than 50. The ratio of COVID-19 patients 70 or older requiring mechanical ventilation to those aged under 50 declined 67% from October, November, and December 2020 to February 2021.
 - The findings provide preliminary evidence that vaccines are effective in preventing severe cases of COVID-19, even among those who contract COVID-19 after being vaccinated.

New York State

- [*New York State COVID-19 Updates*](#), March 1
 - New York reported 80 deaths, 5,307 hospitalizations, and 1,065 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on Sunday, February 28, 2021.
 - Approximately 6,235, or 3.58% of the 174,158 tests administered in New York on February 28 were positive for COVID-19.
 - As of February 28, New York has received 3,206,430 first doses of the vaccines and administered 2,954,858 first doses to patients. As of February 28, New York has received 2,023,520 second doses of the vaccines and administered 1,628,758 second doses to patients.
 - As of February 26, New York State will begin [partnering](#) with local health departments to create vaccination sites specifically for people 65 years and older. Where needed, these sites will also provide assistance to New Yorkers with transportation to and from the vaccination facilities. Details on sites—including locations, opening dates, and hours of operations—will be forthcoming from the site host or sponsor.
- [*New York Health Commissioner Defends Nursing-Home Response*](#), February 25
 - On February 25, New York State's Assembly and Senate health committees held a joint budget hearing. During this proceeding, New York Health Commissioner Howard Zucker testified regarding the State's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and decisions that affected nursing-home deaths during the height of the crisis.
 - Specifically, lawmakers questioned Dr. Zucker about a directive from New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), which said nursing homes could not deny admission to a resident who tested positive for COVID-19. The NYSDOH later updated that directive to reverse the decision and permit nursing homes to deny entry.
 - During the hearing, Dr. Zucker claimed that the directive was “not the driver” of nursing-home fatalities, instead pointing to a NYSDOH study (released last summer),

which found that COVID-19 was primarily introduced to nursing-homes by infected staff.

New York City

- [*New York City COVID-19 Updates*](#), March 1
 - On February 28, New York City Economic Development Corp. (NYEDC) [announced](#) that it will provide financial support to a Columbia University research team focused on developing, and gaining authorization for, a point-of-care or at-home COVID-19 test. The research team expects to begin seeking emergency-use approval from U.S. Food and Drug Administration this week for their antigen test, which delivers results in about 10 – 15 minutes. According to NYEDC, their hope is that these tests would be available directly to the City (without passing through federal or state channels), which would guarantee more supply for the City and permit a faster reopening.
 - As of February 28, New York City Council is [considering](#) legislation that would provide relief to small businesses. Specifically, City Council will look into easing code-violation enforcement and refunding thousands of fines that businesses have received during the COVID-19 pandemic. From July to October of 2020, City Health Department, which inspects restaurants, collected around \$8.4 million in fines and City Department of Consumer Affairs, which enforces licensing and other regulations, collected \$2.9 million in fines.

Vaccines and Therapeutics

- [*FDA Issues Emergency Use Authorization for Third COVID-19 Vaccine*](#), February 27
 - U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [issued](#) an emergency use authorization to Janssen Biotech Inc., a Janssen Pharmaceutical Company of Johnson & Johnson.
 - The Janssen vaccine now becomes the third vaccine approved for emergency use by FDA.
 - FDA highlighted effectiveness data showing that the vaccine is approximately 67% effective in preventing moderate to severe/critical COVID-19 occurring at least 14 days after vaccination and 66% in preventing moderate to severe/critical COVID-19 occurring at least 28 days after vaccination. As it relates to preventing only severe/critical COVID-19 (and not moderate COVID-19), the vaccine was approximately 77% effective at least 14 days after vaccination and 85% effective at least 28 days after vaccination.
 - Johnson & Johnson has now begun to [ship](#) the first doses of the new vaccine, approximately four million doses. The company's CEO, Alex Gorsky, said on March 1 that he expects Americans to begin receiving shots within 24 to 48 hours.

- [*NIH To Evaluate COVID-19 At-Home Testing System*](#), March 1
 - National Institutes of Health (NIH) [announced](#) that it has funded a research team that launched a study assessing the performance and usability of a smartphone app paired with an at-home COVID-19 test. More than 200 participants have signed up to use the newly developed test and accompanying app to perform at-home testing as part of the NIH-funded study.

- The app is called MyDataHelps, developed by CareEvolution, LLC. It provides step-by-step instructions for taking the test and important tools, like timers to ensure that each step of the test is performed at the right interval.
- The app will be paired with a new test, the QuickVue At-Home COVID-19 Test. FDA [issued](#) an Emergency Use Authorization on March 1 to Quidel Corporation, the test's manufacturer. The antigen test is performed using a nasal swab, which is placed in a test tube, followed by the addition of a test strip. Lines then appear on the test strip in about ten minutes indicating a positive or negative result.

International

- The [Philippines](#) began its inoculation campaign on Monday, though its population remains broadly wary of the Sinovac vaccines the country plans to distribute.
- COVID-19 cases in [Somalia](#) are rising amid the unrest associated with elections that were due last month.
- After intense debate, the [European Union](#) has announced it will propose issuing a “Digital Green Pass,” which would allow people who have been inoculated against COVID-19 to travel freely within the bloc.
- [Israeli](#) health officials have called for the country's leaders to vaccinate all Palestinians. The call comes one day after Israel announced it would vaccinate only 110,000 Palestinian day laborers who work in Israel. Israel has already vaccinated certain “special categories” of Palestinians, including those in Israeli jails.
- [Syria](#) has begun vaccinating at-risk health-care workers with a doses donated by a “friendly country.”
- Though COVID-19 cases are decreasing in much of the world, [Brazil](#)'s outbreak is worsening, due to the more contagious variant circulating there and a slow vaccine rollout.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [Nine Key Takeaways for Providers as Illinois Returns to Phase 4 of the “Restore Illinois” Plan](#), February 11

Send questions to:

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