

May 20, 2021

Summary

The United States has 33,027,220 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 587,122 reported related deaths. On Wednesday, the government's leading infectious-disease expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, told reporters that the public is misinterpreting last week's announcement by CDC that fully vaccinated people can go without masks indoors. Unvaccinated individuals, he emphasized, should still be wearing masks.

FDA announced Wednesday that it has eased cold storage rules for the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine so that the doses can be kept at normal refrigerator temperatures for up to one month, instead of five days, once thawed. A British public-health agency revealed real-world data showing that the vaccine developed by Oxford and AstraZeneca is 85-90% effective at preventing symptomatic disease.

The United States reached a milestone on Tuesday of this week, with 60% of adults having now received at least one COVID-19 vaccine. Yet, vaccination rates are uneven across the country, with seven states having vaccinated more than 70% of adults and ten states having vaccinated fewer than 50% of adults. COVID-19 infection rates are approximately 19% higher in the below-50% states than they are in the over-70% states. Significant racial disparities in vaccination rates also continue to exist.

Across the United States, reports of new cases are at their lowest levels since June 2020 and deaths are at their lowest since July 2020. In almost every state and territory, cases are down in the last two weeks, with the exception of Louisiana and Guam, which have seen increases of less than 10 percent.

As of May 19, New York reported 18 deaths, 1,490 hospitalizations, and 339 COVID-19 patients in intensive care. Approximately 1,583, or 0.85%, of the 186,078 tests administered in New York were positive for COVID-19. New York has administered 18,025,115 doses of the vaccines to patients; 51% of New York residents have received at least one dose of the vaccines; and 42.9% are fully vaccinated. Effective May 19, Governor Cuomo announced updated guidance for health and safety measures at child care, day camp, and overnight camp programs. Additionally, Governor Cuomo announced additional guidance for county fairs and local festivals in New York State.

U.S. Government

- [Press Briefing by White House COVID-19 Response Team and Public Health Officials](#), May 18
 - In its Tuesday COVID-19 press briefing, the White House announced that, as of Monday the 17th, more than 60% of Americans 18 years and older had received at least one vaccine dose.
 - Additionally, in the week since FDA's authorization of the Pfizer vaccine for adolescents, over 600,000 Americans aged 12–15 have been vaccinated.
- [Fauci Says the Public Is 'Misinterpreting' the CDC's Latest Mask Guidance](#), May 19
 - On Wednesday, the government's leading infectious-disease expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, told reporters that the public is misinterpreting last week's announcement by CDC that fully vaccinated people can go without masks indoors.
 - Unvaccinated individuals, he emphasized, should still be wearing masks.

Vaccines and Therapeutics

- [FDA Eases Strict Pfizer-BioNTech Vaccine Rules, Allowing Longer Cold Storage](#), May 20
 - U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [announced](#) Wednesday that it has eased cold storage rules for the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine so that the doses can be kept longer at normal refrigerator temperatures.
 - The move will simplify the transport and delivery of the highly effective vaccine, which must be stored at ultra-cold temperatures in special freezer units. Previously, once the vials had been thawed, they could be stored in a normal refrigerator for only five days. That time period has now been extended to a month.
- [Uneven Vaccination Rates Across the U.S. Linked To COVID-19 Case Trends, Worry Experts](#), May 19
 - On Tuesday, the U.S. reached a new milestone: 60% of adults have now received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, [according](#) to CDC. But vaccination rates are uneven across the country, worrying experts.
 - Seven states have already reached the Biden administration's goal of vaccinating at least 70% of adults by July 4: Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Vermont. Ten states have vaccinated fewer than 50% of their adult residents: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wyoming.
 - The states with less than half of their adult populations vaccinated have an average per capita COVID-19 case rate that is about 19% higher than the states that have reached or exceeded the 70% mark.
 - Another troubling trend shows that there are clusters of unvaccinated people in various parts of the country, particularly in rural areas. Experts worry that a vaccine-resistant variant of the virus could emerge when the virus inevitably begins to spread in these clusters.
 - Data from CDC also show that significant racial [disparities](#) persist in vaccinations, with only 22% of Black Americans having received a shot, compared to 29% of Hispanics and 33% of non-Hispanic whites.

- [Two AstraZeneca COVID-19 Shots 85-90% Effective - UK Real-World Analysis](#), May 20
 - Two doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine are around 85% to 90% effective against symptomatic disease, according to an analysis of real-world data cited by Public Health England.
 - Meanwhile, preliminary results from a Spanish [study](#) show that a mixed vaccination of one shot of the Pfizer vaccine administered to people who have already received a shot of AstraZeneca vaccine is highly safe and effective.

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

- [CDC Interpretation of Forecasts of New Deaths and Hospitalizations](#), May 19
 - CDC [consolidated](#) data from 35 models projecting the COVID-19 death rate. Predicted rates 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 1,200 and 4,600 new deaths and between 594,000 and 604,000 cumulative deaths by June 12.
 - CDC [consolidated](#) data from 12 models projecting the number of daily COVID-19 hospitalizations. The national forecast predicts daily hospitalizations will likely decrease over the next four weeks, with between 900 and 3,600 new hospitalizations per day by June 14.

New York State

- [New York State COVID-19 Updates](#), May 20
 - New York reported 18 deaths, 1,490 hospitalizations, and 339 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on May 19, 2021.
 - Approximately 1,583, or 0.85%, of the 186,078 tests administered in New York on May 19 were positive for COVID-19.
 - As of May 19, New York has administered 18,025,115 doses of the vaccines to patients; 51% of New York residents have received at least one dose of the vaccines; and 42.9% are fully vaccinated.
 - Effective May 19, Governor Cuomo [announced](#) updated guidance for health and safety measures at child care, day camp, and overnight camp programs. The measures include COVID-19 testing, physical distancing, and sanitation in order to prevent COVID-19 cases. Facilities and programs must collect COVID-19 vaccination status and documentation for all children and staff, as well as implement a mandatory daily health screening practice for children and staff, which includes daily temperature checks. Children and campers over the age of two and staff who are not fully vaccinated must wear face coverings except when eating, drinking, showering, swimming, or sleeping.
 - Governor Cuomo [announced](#) additional guidance for county fairs and local festivals in New York State. Local governments must permit county fairs, and the State Department of Health (DOH) must approve events with over 5,000 expected attendees. Additionally, county fairs and local festivals must ensure that the total number of attendees is limited so that six feet of distance can be maintained between individuals who are not members of the same party—unless all attendees present proof of full vaccination status.

New York City

- [New York City COVID-19 Updates](#), May 20
 - On May 17, Mayor Bill de Blasio [backed](#) CDC's guidance on easing mask mandates for people fully vaccinated against COVID-19, but stated that individuals who work inside city-run buildings will continue to wear face coverings for now. He also said that he thinks New Yorkers should still wear their masks "a fair amount of the time," given the danger of the virus and how accustomed some New Yorkers are to masking up.
 - On May 18, Mayor de Blasio [announced](#) that a mobile vaccination site will be stationed outside of the Barclays Center in New York City in an effort to get more New Yorkers vaccinated.

International

- Ambassadors from the [European Union](#)'s 27 member states approved on Thursday a proposal to waive quarantine for travelers from non-E.U. countries who have been vaccinated against COVID-19.
- On Thursday, the Parliament of [Ukraine](#) named a new health minister, who promised to speed up vaccinations. The previous health minister was fired earlier this week after Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal accused him of failing to supply vaccines quickly enough.
- In [France](#), as coronavirus restrictions were partially lifted for cultural attractions on Wednesday, protesters occupied about one-hundred state-funded theaters around the country in protest of the French government's overhaul of unemployment benefits.
- [Malawi](#) incinerated nearly 20,000 expired doses of coronavirus vaccine on Wednesday in a move health officials said was intended to reassure skeptical citizens that they would not receive expired shots. In doing so, Malawi became the first African country to publicly destroy expired doses.

Other Updates

- [Drone Companies Are Preparing To Deliver Coronavirus Vaccines In Rural U.S.](#), May 20
 - Many Americans want to get vaccinated but are in areas so remote that they cannot easily get to a vaccination site. Drone companies are positioning themselves to deliver refrigerated medical products to such individuals.
 - Drones tend to be faster and cheaper for handling smaller payloads to remote locations than trucks or helicopters.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [Annual Meetings, Compensation and COVID-19: Where Things Stand](#), April 13
- [Managing Volatility in a Pandemic? Document your Derivatives Transactions Appropriately](#), April 13
- [California Authorities Issue a Wide Range of Rules and Guidance on COVID-19](#), April 10
- [HHS Initiates Initial \\$30 Billion Distribution of the \\$100 Billion Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund](#), April 10

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