

January 20, 2022

### Summary

Since COVID-19 was first identified in the United States, the government has confirmed a total of 68,572,066 COVID-19 cases and 857,781 reported related deaths in the country. On Wednesday, the Biden Administration announced that it would provide 400 million nonsurgical N95 masks to all Americans for free. The masks will be available at community health centers and retail pharmacies across the country, and the program will be fully up and running by early February.

The CDC published a new study on January 19 that suggests natural immunity gained from prior COVID-19 infection provided better protection against infection from the Delta variant than vaccination did. Meanwhile, the agency warned against travel to an additional 22 countries and territories, bringing the list of countries and territories designated “very high risk” above 100.

Case numbers have started to plummet in some regions across the country, especially the East Coast, as the Omicron surge begins to wane. Cases are rising fastest in Alaska, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin.

On January 19, New York reported 185 deaths, 11,370 hospitalizations, and 1,583 COVID-19 patients in intensive care. Approximately 30,631, or 11.05% of the 277,241 tests administered in New York on January 19 were positive for COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> New York has administered 35,247,747 doses of the vaccines to patients; 86.6% of New York residents have received at least one dose of the vaccines; and 73.3% are fully vaccinated.<sup>2</sup>

On January 19, New York Governor Kathy Hochul announced 80 new #VaxforKids pop-up vaccination sites that will operate across the State over a 6-week-period, with 10 sites launched this week. As of January 20, the State’s seven-day average of new COVID-19 cases was down 47.1% compared to last week, indicating that the State has turned a corner in the fight against the Omicron variant.

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<sup>1</sup> Testing data come from a New York State Department of Health database containing reported results from all labs testing samples from New York State residents and pooled/batch tests reported by institutions of higher education. The data does not include at-home tests.

<sup>2</sup> For surveillance purposes, CDC data counts people as “fully vaccinated” if they have received two doses on different days (regardless of time interval) of the two-dose mRNA series or received one dose of a single-dose vaccine.

## **U.S. Government Updates**

- [\*Biden Administration to Distribute 400 Million Masks to the Public for Free\*](#), Jan. 19
  - On Wednesday, the Biden Administration announced that it would provide 400 million nonsurgical N95 masks to all Americans for free. The masks will be available at community health centers and retail pharmacies across the country, and the program will be fully up and running by early February.
  - The masks will come from the Strategic National Stockpile, an emergency reserve of medical supplies maintained by the U.S. government.

## **Vaccines and Therapeutics**

- [\*Prior COVID infection more protective than vaccination during Delta surge - U.S. study\*](#), Jan. 19
  - A new study, published yesterday by the CDC, suggests that prior infection from COVID-19 imparted more protection against the COVID-19 Delta variant than vaccination alone.
  - The CDC stated that the study's results reveal a key difference between the Delta and Alpha variants: "Before the Delta variant, COVID-19 vaccination resulted in better protection against a subsequent infection than surviving a previous infection," but once Delta became dominant, "surviving a previous infection now provided greater protection against the subsequent infection than vaccination."
  - The agency emphasized that the study does not change the recommendation in favor of COVID-19 vaccination. Even if acquiring immunity through natural infection provided better protection against the Delta variant than vaccination alone provided, natural infection clearly carries significant risks, the agency said.
  - The study did not consider the efficacy of vaccination or natural immunity against the now dominant Omicron variant.

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

- [\*CDC Interpretation of Forecasts of New Deaths and Hospitalizations\*](#), Jan. 17
  - CDC [consolidated](#) data from 23 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. The CDC's national ensemble forecast predicts the number of newly reported COVID-19 deaths will likely increase over the next four weeks. It forecasts between 9,800 and 35,700 new deaths in the week ending February 12, 2022.
  - CDC [consolidated](#) data from 13 models projecting the number of new daily confirmed COVID-19 hospitalizations. The forecast predicts daily hospitalizations will likely remain stable or have an uncertain trend over the next four weeks, with between 9,600 and 36,900 new hospitalizations reported on February 11, 2022. It predicts that hospital admissions will increase in 13 jurisdictions, decrease in 8 jurisdictions, and have a stable or uncertain trend in other states and territories.
- [\*CDC adds 22 more destinations to COVID-19 'high risk' travel list\*](#), Jan. 20
  - On Tuesday, in response to an increase in COVID-19 cases, the CDC warned against travel to an additional 22 nations and territories, including: Albania, Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Bermuda, Bolivia, Cape Verde, Egypt, Grenada, Guyana, Israel, Panama, Qatar, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sint

Maarten, Suriname, the Bahamas, the British Virgin Islands, the Turks and Caicos Islands, and Uruguay.

- With this latest update, the CDC now lists over 100 nations and territories, including Canada, at “Level 4: Very High” risk level from COVID-19. A “Level 4” designation applies where more than 500 cases per 100,000 residents are registered in the past 28 days.

### **New York State**

- [New York State COVID-19 Updates](#), Jan. 20
  - New York reported 185 deaths, 11,370 hospitalizations, and 1,583 COVID-19 patients in intensive care on January 19, 2022.
  - Approximately 30,631, or 11.05% of the 277,241 tests administered in New York on January 19 were positive for COVID-19.
  - As of January 19, New York has administered 35,247,747 doses of the vaccines to patients; 86.6% of New York residents have received at least one dose of the vaccines; and 73.3% are fully vaccinated.
  - On January 19, Governor Kathy Hochul [announced](#) 80 new #VaxforKids pop-up vaccination sites that will operate across the State over a 6-week-period, with 10 sites launched this week. The program is aimed at increasing vaccination rates among children aged 5 years and older, a group with a relatively low vaccination rate.
  - As of January 20, the State’s seven-day [average](#) of new COVID-19 cases was down 47.1% compared to last week. The drastic drop in cases comes after Governor Hochul said last week that New York was “turning the corner” on the Omicron surge.

### **New York City**

- [New York City COVID-19 Updates](#), Jan. 20
  - A study of the City’s wastewater [suggests](#) that the Omicron variant was likely present in the City as early as Nov. 21, four days before South Africa announced its first cases, and ten days before the first U.S. case was reported.

### **International**

- [Japan](#) has placed 13 prefectures, including Tokyo, under a quasi-state of emergency due to a sharp rise in cases from the Omicron variant.
- [New Zealand](#) has closed its borders to citizens and visa holders in an effort to mitigate the risk of an outbreak of the Omicron variant.
- The [United Kingdom](#) has lifted all COVID-19 restrictions after reporting that the Omicron variant has “peaked nationally.”

### **Other Updates**

- [Department of Labor Unemployment Insurance Weekly Claims Report](#), Jan. 20
  - Department of Labor (DOL) reports that another 286,000 workers filed initial claims (seasonally adjusted) for unemployment benefits last week.
  - The number of new claims had trended downward since March 2020, when nearly seven million people filed for unemployment insurance in a single week. However, claims began spiking again around December 2020.

Other recent events covered in detail elsewhere:

- [Podcast: Non-binding Guidance: COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate Litigation](#), July 29
- [Three new General Licenses expand scope of COVID-19-related activity with Iran, Syria, and Venezuela under U.S. Sanctions](#), July 6
- [Regulatory Trends in Pharma Deal-making: Transitioning from the “Year of the Pandemic” to “Another Year of the Pandemic.”](#) June 3
- [Non-binding Guidance: The Defense Production Act and the COVID-19 Pandemic](#), May 27
- [Doug Brayley Discusses Employer Vaccination Policies on CNN](#), May 24

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