

Feds Authorize \$22 Billion to Boost Vaccine Rollout

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The CDC will send \$3 billion to the states to boost a lagging national COVID-19 vaccination program.

The Department of Health and Human Services announced the new funding as only 30% of the more than 22 million doses of vaccine distributed in the U.S. has been injected into Americans' arms.

Along with the \$3 billion, HHS said another \$19 billion is headed to states and jurisdictions to boost COVID testing programs. The amount each state will receive will be determined by population.

The news comes days after President-elect Joe Biden said he planned to release all available doses of vaccine after he takes office on Jan. 20. The Trump administration has been holding back millions of doses to ensure supply of vaccine to provide the necessary second dose for those who received the first shot.



Dr Robert Redfield

"This funding is another timely investment that will strengthen our nation's efforts to stop the COVID-19 pandemic in America," CDC Director Robert Redfield, MD, said in a statement. "Particularly now, it is crucial that states and communities have the resources they need to conduct testing, and to distribute and administer safe, high-quality COVID-19 vaccines safely and equitably."

Federal officials and public health experts, however, expressed concerns this weekend about Biden's plan.

Outgoing Trump administration officials and others said they worry that doing so will leave providers without enough second doses for people getting the two-shot vaccines.

If Biden releases all available doses and the vaccine-making process has an issue, they said, that could pose a supply risk.

"We have product that is going through QC right now — quality control — for sterility, identity check that we have tens and tens of millions of product. We always will. But batches fail. Sterility fails...and then you don't have a product for that second dose," Alex Azar, secretary of health and human services, told the American Hospital Association on Friday, according to [CNN](#).

"And frankly, talking about that or encouraging that can really undermine a critical public health need, which is that people come back for their second vaccine," he said.

One of the main roadblocks in the vaccine rollout has been administering the doses that have already been distributed. The U.S. has shipped 22.1 million doses, and 6.6 million first shots have been given, according to the [latest CDC data](#) updated Friday. Azar and other federal health officials have encouraged states to use their current supply and expand vaccine access to more priority groups.

"We would be delighted to learn that jurisdictions have actually administered many more doses than they are presently reporting," a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services told CNN. "We are encouraging jurisdictions to expand their priority groups as needed to ensure no vaccine is sitting on the shelf after having been delivered to the jurisdiction-directed locations."

Releasing more vaccines for first doses could create ethical concerns as well, since people getting vaccines expect to get a second dose in the proper amount of time, according to [The Week](#). Biden's transition team said Friday that he won't delay the second dose but, instead, plans to ramp up production to stay on track.

To do this well, the federal government should create a coordinated vaccine strategy that sets expectations for an around-the-clock operation and help state and local vaccination programs meet their goals, Leana Wen, MD, a professor at George Washington University, wrote in an [editorial](#) for *The Washington Post*.

"The Biden team's urgency around vaccinations is commendable," she added [in a Twitter post](#) Monday morning. "I'd like to see a guarantee that every 1st dose given will be followed with a timely 2nd dose. Otherwise, there are ethical concerns that could add to vaccine hesitancy."

Biden has pledged that 100 million doses will be administered in his first 100 days in office. He has grown frustrated as concerns grow that his administration could fall short of the promise, according to [Politico](#). His coronavirus response team has noted several challenges, including what they say is a lack of long-term planning by the Trump administration and an initial refusal to share key information.

"We're uncovering new information each day, and we're unearthing — of course — more work to be done," Vivek Murthy, MD, Biden's nominee for surgeon general, told [Politico](#).

The team has uncovered staffing shortages, technology problems, and issues with health care insurance coverage. The incoming Biden team has developed several initiatives, such as mobile vaccination units and new federal sites to give shots. It could take weeks to get the vaccine rollout on track, the news outlet reported.

"Will this be challenging? Absolutely," Anthony Fauci, MD, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and Biden's incoming chief medical adviser on the coronavirus, told [Politico](#). "This is an unprecedented effort to vaccinate the entire country over a period of time that's fighting against people dying at record numbers. To say it's not a challenge would be unrealistic. Do I think it can be done? Yes."

Sources:

CNN: "Exclusive: Biden will release nearly all available vaccine doses in break from Trump administration policy of holding back stock for second dose."

CDC: "COVID-19 Vaccinations in the United States."

The Week: "Experts express concern about Biden's plan to release nearly all available vaccine doses."

The Washington Post: "Releasing more vaccines for first doses could create more problems than it solves."

Twitter: [@DrLeanaWen](#), Jan. 11, 2021.

[Politico](#): "Biden dresses down his Covid team over plans to speed vaccinations."

Department of Health and Human Services: "HHS Announces \$22 Billion in Funding to Support Expanded Testing, Vaccination Distribution."

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