

# Biden pledges surge in vaccine to states

## Push to inoculate 300M by early fall does little to lessen frustration of Texas leaders

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Bing Guan / Bloomberg

President Joe Biden likened his push to boost dosage deliveries to hard-hit states such as Texas to a “wartime effort.”



Eddie Seal / Bloomberg

Health care workers administer doses of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccination at a drive-thru clinic in Robstown on Tuesday.

Answering growing frustration over vaccine shortages, President Joe Biden announced Tuesday that the U.S. is surging deliveries to hard-pressed states over the next three weeks and expects to provide enough doses to vaccinate 300 million Americans by the end of the summer or early fall.

Biden, calling the push a "wartime effort," said the administration was working to buy an additional 100 million doses of each of the two approved coronavirus vaccines. He acknowledged that states in recent weeks have been left guessing how much vaccine they will have from one week to the next.

Shortages have been so severe that some vaccination sites around the U.S. had to cancel tens of thousands of appointments with people seeking their first shot.

"This is unacceptable," Biden said. "Lives are at stake."

In Texas, the problems with the vaccine rollout became a source of frustration during a meeting of the Texas Senate on Tuesday. While it wasn't on the agenda, several state lawmakers expressed their frustration about fielding calls from senior citizens struggling to get access to vaccine doses.

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, a Republican, tried to tone down any finger-pointing.

“To the public, it’s not the mayor’s fault. It’s not the county judge’s fault. It’s not the state’s fault. It’s not the federal government’s fault,” Patrick said. “The fact is the manufacturers are doing everything they can to send as many vaccines out around the country as they can.”

Patrick, who is never shy to lodge criticism at local governments, said the vaccine distribution cuts across all political lines.

“We are all united together trying to get the vaccine out to as many people as we can,” Patrick said.

Biden’s team held its first virus-related call with the nation’s governors Tuesday and pledged to provide states with firm vaccine allocations three weeks ahead of delivery.

He also promised a roughly 16 percent boost in deliveries to states over the next three weeks.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that the government plans to make about 10.1 million first and second doses available next week, up from this week’s allotment of 8.6 million. The figures represent doses of both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines.

It wasn’t immediately clear how long the surge of doses could be sustained.

Governors and top health officials have been increasingly raising the alarm about inadequate supplies and the need for earlier and more reliable estimates of how much vaccine is on the way so they can plan.

The administration said it plans to buy another 100 million doses each from drugmakers Pfizer and Moderna to ensure it has enough vaccine for the long term.

Even more vaccine could be available if federal scientists approve a single-dose shot from Johnson & Johnson, which is expected to seek emergency authorization in the coming weeks.

Vivian Ho, a health economist at Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy, said the new policies were a “step in the right direction, but they’re not going to solve the problem overnight.”

Particularly helpful, she said, is the Biden administration’s plan to notify vaccine centers three weeks before they ship new batches. Ho said that many have had to wait in limbo for new vaccine batches.

“That’s been a huge problem,” she said.

Harris County chief transitions officer Joshua Stuckey agreed.

“Where this could greatly improve the process is if we get guarantees for weeks ahead,” he said. “It will allow us flexibility in scheduling the public for longer durations and set a more consistent operational tempo.”

Biden’s announcement came a day after he grew more bullish about exceeding his vaccine pledge to deliver 100 million injections in his first 100 days in office, suggesting that a rate of 1.5 million doses per day could be achieved soon.

The administration also has promised more openness and said it will hold news briefings three times a week, beginning Wednesday, about the outbreak that has killed over 420,000 Americans.

“We appreciate the administration stating that it will provide states with slightly higher allocations for the next few weeks, but we are going to need much more supply,” said Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, a Republican.

The setup inherited from the Trump administration has been marked by miscommunication and unexplained bottlenecks, with shortages reported in some places even as vaccine doses remain on the shelf.

Officials in West Virginia, which has had one of the best rates of administering vaccine, said they have fewer than 11,000 first doses on hand even after this week’s shipment.

“I’m screaming my head off” for more, Republican Gov. Jim Justice said.

California, which has faced criticism over a slow vaccine roll-out, announced Tuesday that it’s centralizing its hodgepodge of county systems and streamlining appointment sign-up, notification and eligibility. Residents have been baffled by the varying rules in different counties.

And in Colorado, Democratic Gov. Jared Polis said the limited supply of vaccine from the federal government is prompting the state to repurpose second doses as first doses, though he expects that people scheduled for their second shot still will be able to keep their appointments.

As of Tuesday afternoon, the CDC reported that just over half of the 44 million doses distributed to states have been put in people’s arms. That is well short of the hundreds of millions of doses that experts say will need to be administered to achieve herd immunity and conquer the outbreak.

The U.S. ranks fifth in the world in the number of doses administered relative to the country’s population, behind No. 1 Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Britain and Bahrain, according to the University of Oxford.

The reason more of the available shots in the U.S. haven’t been dispensed isn’t entirely clear. But many vaccination sites apparently are holding large quantities of vaccine in reserve to make sure people who already have gotten their first shot receive the required second one on schedule.

Also, some state officials have complained of a lag between when they report their vaccination numbers to the government and when the figures are posted on the CDC website.

*Zach Despart, Robert Downen and Jeremy Wallace contributed to this report.*