Remarks by President Biden on the Administration’s COVID-19 Vaccination Efforts

MARCH 02, 2021 • SPEECHES AND REMARKS

State Dining Room

4:22 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon, folks. The Vice President and I have some good news to report, and I’d like to make two key announcements today related to our COVID-19 vaccination effort.

As you know, a few days ago, after a rigorous opening — open and objective scientific review process, the Food and Drug Administration issued an emergency use authorization for the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine. We should all be encouraged by this news of a third safe and highly effective COVID-19 vaccine. The more people who get vaccinated, the faster we’re going to overcome this virus and get back to our loved ones, get our economy back on track, and start to move back to normal.

But that’s — one of my first goals in office was — when I got into office was to say that there will be 100 million vaccination shots administered in my first 100 days in office. We’ve got halfway to that goal in 37 days, and I feel confident we’ll make it all the way.

As I — and as I’ve said, we have a long way to go, but, you know, as I said from the outset, we’re going to use every resource of the federal government to make it happen. Among the things I learned when I came into office was that Johnson & Johnson was behind in manufacturing and production. While we pote- — while we had the potential of another highly effective vaccine to accompany the two existing vaccines, it simply wasn’t coming fast enough. So my team — my team has been hard at work to accelerate that effort.

As I’ve always said, this was a wartime effort, and every action has been on the table, including putting together breakthrough approaches.
And today, we're announcing a major step forward: Two of the largest healthcare and pharmaceutical companies in the world — that are usually competitors — are working together on the vaccine. Johnson & Johnson and Merck will work together to expand the production of Johnson & Johnson’s vaccine. This is the type of collaboration between companies we saw in World War Two.

We also invoked the Defense Production Act to equip two Merck facilities to the standards necessary to safely manufacture the J&J vaccine. And with the urging and assistance of my administration, Johnson & Johnson is also taking additional new actions to safely accelerate vaccine production. Johnson & Johnson’s vaccine manufacturing facilities will now begin to operate 24/7.

In addition, we'll continue to use the Defense Production Act to expedite critical materials in vaccine production, such as equipment, machinery, and supplies.

I’ve also asked the Department of Defense to provide daily logistical support to strengthen Johnson & Johnson's efforts. And I want to thank Johnson & Johnson and Merck for stepping up and being good corporate citizens during this national crisis.

Here’s what all this means: We’re now on track to have enough vaccine supply for every adult in America by the end of May.

Let me say that again: When I came into office, the prior administration had contracted for not nearly enough vaccine to cover adults in America. We rectified that. About three weeks ago, we were able to say that we'll have enough vaccine supply for adults by the end of July.

And I’m pleased to announce today, as a consequence of the stepped-up process that I’ve ordered and just outlined, this country will have enough vaccine supply — I'll say it again — for every adult in America by the end of May. By the end of May. That's progress — important progress.

But it's not enough to have the vaccine supply. We need vaccinators — people to put the shots in people’s arms, millions of Americans’ arms.

To date, we’ve brought back retired doctors and nurses. We've developed — we deployed more than 1,500 federal medical personnel you usually see during natural disasters, from the Federal Emergency Management Agency — FEMA — and the Commissioned Health Corps at the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Defense Department, including the National Guard, with thousands of more to come.
We’re also increasing the places where people can get vaccinated. We’ve sent millions of vaccines to over 7,000 pharmacies to make it easier for folks to get their COVID-19 vaccine shot like they would their flu shot.

The federal government is also working with states to set up hundreds of mass vaccination centers in places like stadiums, community centers, parking lots that vaccinate thousands of people per day. My wife Jill and I just visited one in Houston last week. It’s incredible.

And with this increased production of three safe and effective vaccines, we have an opportunity to help address the urgent national need more quickly and getting our schools back open safely.

Right now, an entire generation of young people is on the brink of being set back a year or more in their learning. You can ask millions of parents; they understand. We’re already seeing rising mental health concerns due in part to isolation.

Educational disparities that have always existed grow wider each day that our schools remain closed. And remote learning isn’t the same for every student, as you all know.

Our educators are doing everything they can to protect and educate our students, despite the lack of resources and as districts face budget crises that risk education jobs.

Moms and dads are exiting the workforce in astonishing numbers in order to care for and manage the school experience for their children at home, hindering their own opportunities for — and further undermining the health of our economy.

This is a national imperative that we get our kids back into the classroom safely and as soon as possible. As you know, back in December, I set a goal of having a majority of our K-through-8 schools open by the end of my first 100 days as President.

To achieve that goal, I sent the American Rescue Plan to Congress to provide vital help to make sure schools can open safely — reopen safely. Essential things like more teachers to reduce class sizes, more buses and bus drivers to transport our kids safely, and more space to conduct in-person instructions, and more protective equipment, school cleaning services, physical alterations to reduce the risk of the spread of the virus. All cost money. The House passed the American Rescue Plan last week, and I hope the Senate will follow as quickly and as well.

You know, also, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the CDC, issued new guidelines on how to reopen schools safely. It’s a roadmap that will enable schools — if they have the resources they deserve — to reopen safely. I have given those schools a roadmap. I’ve
asked Congress to give them the tools. And today, to add one more tool to school reopening: a vaccinated workforce.

Let me be clear: We can reopen schools if the right steps are taken, even before employees are vaccinated. But time and again, we’ve heard from educators and parents that they have anxieties about that.

So as yet another move to help accelerate the safe reopening of our schools, let’s treat in-person learning like an essential service that it is. And that means getting essential workers who provide that service — educators, school staff, childcare workers — get them vaccinated immediately. They’re essential workers.

Over 30 states have already taken step to prioritize educators for vaccination. And today, I’m using the full authority of the federal government. I’m directing every state to do the same. My challenge to all states, territories, and the District of Columbia is this: We want every educator, school staff member, childcare worker to receive at least one shot by the end of the month of March.

To help make this happen, starting next week and for a month — the month of March, we will be using our federal pharmacy program to prioritize the vaccination of pre-K through 12 educators and staff and child care workers. Throughout March, they will be able to prioritize the vaccination of pre-K-through-12 educators and staff and childcare workers. Throughout March, they will be able to sign up for an appointment at a pharmacy near them.

And I want to be very clear: Not every educator will be able to get their appointment in the first week, but our goal — goal is to do everything we can to help every educator receive a shot this month, the month of March.

I want to conclude with this: We’re making progress from the mess we inherited. We’re moving in the right direction. And today’s announcements are a huge step in our effort to beat this pandemic. But I have to be honest with you: This fight is far from over. I told you I’d be straight up with you from the beginning. As I said many times, things may get worse again as new variants spread and as we face setbacks, like recent winter storms in the Midwest and South. But our administration will never take this public health threat lightly.

Though we celebrate the news of the third vaccine, I urge all Americans: Please keep washing your hands, stay socially distanced, wear masks — keep wearing them, get vaccinated when it’s your turn. Now is not the time to let up. I’ve asked the country to wear masks for my first 100 days in office. Now is not the time to let our guard down. People’s lives are at stake.
We have already — we have already — and I carry this in my pocket — lost more — as of today, we’ve lost more than 511,839 Americans, as of today. It’s got to stop.

We need the United States Senate to follow the House and pass the American Rescue Plan, because despite the optimism, without new resources, our entire effort will be set back. We need the resources in the American Rescue Plan and we need it urgently. We need them expanding testing, ramp up vaccine distribution, fund FEMA and other federal vaccine efforts, and continue reimbursing states for their efforts.

We need the resources to expand genomic sequencing; to stay ahead of emerging variants; find the protective gear, transportation, staffing, and other costs required for school and business to open safely. We need to fund it. The bottom line is: We need the American Rescue Plan now. Now.

There is light at the end of the tunnel, but we cannot let our guard down now or assure that victory is inevitable. We can’t assume that. We must remain vigilant, act fast and aggressively, and look out for one another. That’s how we’re going to get ahead of this virus, get our economy going again, and get back to our loved ones.

So thank you. And please, please, it’s not over yet. Great news, but stay vigilant. May God bless you, and may God protect our troops. Thank you all very, very much.

Q Mr. President, based on the news you announced, when do you think things will get back to normal? When do you think things will get back to normal?

THE PRESIDENT: When do I think things will get back to normal? I’ve been cautioned not to give an answer to that because we don’t know for sure. But my hope is, by this time next year, we’re going to be back to normal, and before that — my hope. But again, it depends upon if people continue — continue to be smart and understand that we still can have significant losses. There’s a lot we have to do yet. So thank you.

Q Did you receive a briefing about the border today?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I did.

Q What did you learn?

THE PRESIDENT: A lot.

Q Is there a crisis at the border, sir?
THE PRESIDENT: No, we'll be able to handle it, God willing.

END 4:34 P.M. EST