



Biden Administration Releases COVID-19 Strategy

President Biden released his COVID-19 strategy and signed 10 executive actions aimed at curtailing the coronavirus pandemic. The president outlined his COVID-19 strategy in a 200-page document describing the administration's goals and containing the executive actions put in place today. The new president noted it will take months for his administration's actions to significantly alter the trajectory of the pandemic, stating "it's gonna get worse before it gets better." President Biden predicted an additional 100,000 American deaths during his first six weeks in office.

The COVID-19 strategy focuses on accelerating vaccinations while slowing the spread of the virus through increased mask usage, additional testing, and other public health measures. Eight executive orders (EO), one National Security Directive (NSD), and one memorandum signed yesterday are intended to immediately begin to blunt the impact of the public health crisis. However, many portions of the plan will require Congressional action — namely additional funding — to accomplish. It is expected that funding for vaccines will be taken up quickly; however, other items may take more time to materialize.

Key vaccine strategies to disseminate vaccine include:

- Improving the allocation process by providing states and localities with clear, consistent vaccine supply projections to inform their planning.
- Encouraging states to move through the priority groups more quickly by expanding access to all adults 65 and older and essential frontline workers, including teachers and grocery store clerks. This would begin in February. The plan calls for staying laser-focused on ensuring that the highest risk members of the public, racial, ethnic and rural populations and those in *congregate care facilities*, can access the vaccine when and where they need it.
- The report correctly identifies congregate care settings as "communities most at risk" for severe COVID-19 disease and for infection in general. It also proposes the accelerated distribution of vaccines to residential care settings as well as building on the existing Long Term Care Pharmacy program. While details are few, these strategies are promising especially as we work to gain access to vaccine for Independent Living Communities.
- Creating 100 federally supported vaccination centers across the country, calling on the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to establish the centers by the end of February. He also said he would oversee the creation of thousands of community immunization sites, such as school gyms and community centers, as well as mobile vaccination units that would travel to hard-to-reach communities to deliver the vaccines.

- Using the Defense Production Act (DPA) to ramp up production of masks, face shields and other PPE so that the national supply exceeds demand and stockpiles – especially in hard-hit areas that serve disproportionately vulnerable populations – will be fully replenished. The DPA will also be used to make the supplies needed to administer vaccines, including syringes and personal protective equipment.
- Offering in-kind support and technical assistance from the federal government for state-, local- and community-run vaccination clinics, including support for the construction and management of local sites, management of cold-chain storage and transportation, and procurement of personal protective equipment and ancillary vaccination supplies.
- Calling on states to expand eligibility to other workers and younger age groups, much like the previous Administration recently did. We believe that doing this before ensuring that all senior living residents and staff have access, may stress the system and threaten the scarce supply of vaccine. This becomes more problematic when certain settings such as Independent living are being left out of the LTC Pharmacy Plans. ASHA believes the LTC Pharmacy program or any successor program is the most efficient and safest way to get vaccine to those most vulnerable. For the most part, these are not people who are physically able to navigate the tedious process of scheduling and transporting outside of their community. Clinics need to come to them. If they come by way of mobile unit as proposed for rural communities in the Administration’s strategy, that can be helpful too.

Executive Order on Protecting Worker Health and Safety

Directs the Department of Labor to issue new guidance regarding worker safety amidst the COVID-19 pandemic within two weeks. In addition, it is required to consider whether emergency temporary standards are necessary, including regarding masks in the workplace. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) will review enforcement efforts related to COVID-19 safety to date and will launch a nationwide enforcement campaign on COVID-19 violations that put large numbers of workers at serious risk. It also calls on relevant agencies to evaluate whether additional protections are needed for workers not covered by OSHA.