

BY TUCKER DOHERTY

PRO POINTS

- **The Covid-19 vaccines that have been authorized for emergency use by the FDA are in limited supply, meaning high-risk groups such as front-line health workers and nursing home residents get priority.**
- **State are largely responsible for the “last mile” of vaccine distribution to health providers, and there are substantial differences between state plans.**
- **Because vaccine doses expire quickly once opened, states have had to strike a balance between strict prioritization and administering as many shots as they can.**
- **The incoming Biden administration is planning to change how the vaccines are distributed and will likely give the federal government a more prominent role.**

HOW WE GOT HERE

Development and production of the new coronavirus vaccines proceeded at an unprecedented pace after the genetic sequence of the coronavirus was released, but demand will substantially exceed supply for at least several months. To save as many lives as possible with a limited number of initial doses, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended that health care workers and nursing home residents get first priority, followed by essential workers and then the general public later on.

The federal government purchases the doses and distributes them to states, but ultimately state governments are responsible for allocating vaccine shipments to local providers and enforcing prioritization. While most state plans adhere closely to federal guidance, there are major differences in how priority groups are defined and phased in.

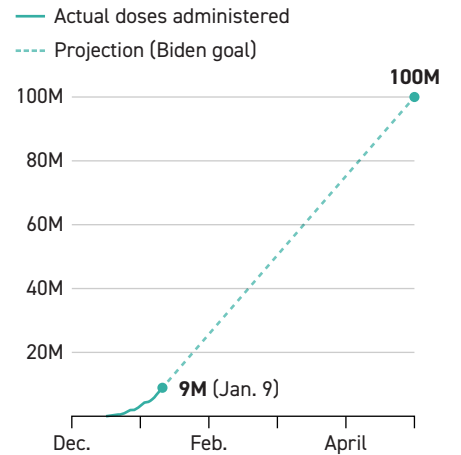
Pharmacies such as CVS and Walgreens received federal contracts to distribute doses to long-term care residents in the first phase, although West Virginia opted out. Eventually, pharmacies will play a central role in vaccinating the general public.

The first two vaccines, developed by Pfizer and Moderna, can survive for months in a freezer but will rapidly expire once thawed. In some cases, after running out of high-priority volunteers, health facilities have used up their allotments on lower-priority individuals or let them expire. Both outcomes have generated controversy.

In response, state leaders have adjusted rules and penalties for providers, striking a balance between enforcing prioritization — necessary to meet federal requirements — and the goal of administering the vaccines as quickly as possible without wasting doses.

Biden aiming for 100M doses administered by end of April

Total number of vaccine doses administered



Note: Some vaccines may require two doses
Source: Our World in Data

Some states included additional groups in first vaccination wave

According to CDC recommendations, the first wave of available shots sent to states — called “**phase 1A**” — should include health care workers and long-term care facility residents.

But several states, shown in the table on the right, decided to include additional groups that would otherwise belong in later phases.

Phase 1 distributes the vaccine to only a limited number of high-priority groups while supplies are limited, including seniors and some essential workers.

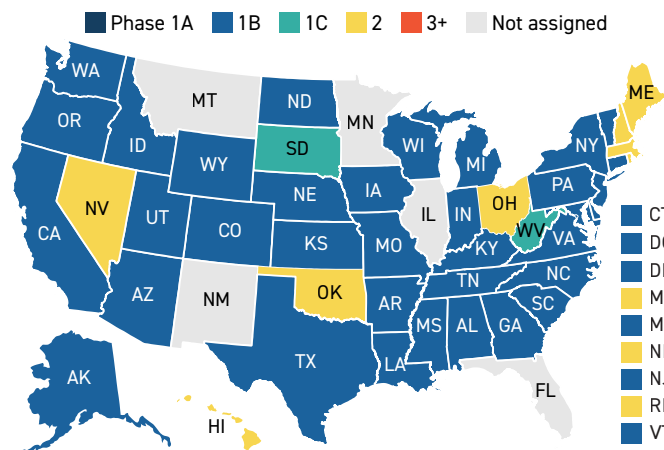
Phase 2, which covers more essential workers and vulnerable populations, will expand the number of available sites as supply meets demand.

Finally, during **phase 3**, supply exceeds demand and states set up broad networks to ensure access.

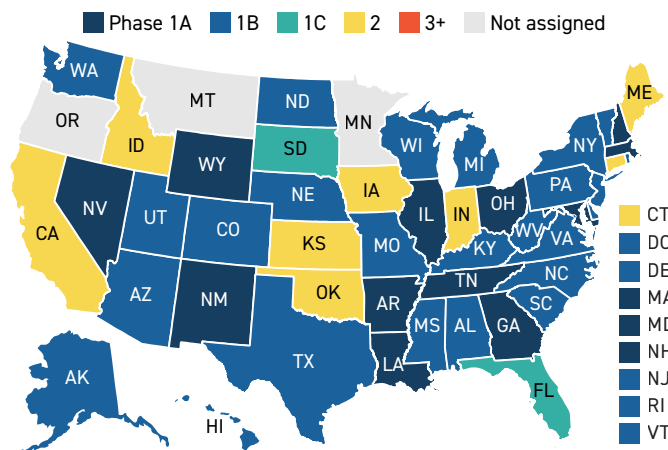
	Additional first responders	Seniors	Medically vulnerable	Incarcerated	K-12 and child care
Arkansas	✓				
D.C.			✓		
Florida		✓	✓		
Georgia	✓	✓			
Indiana	✓				
Maryland	✓				
Massachusetts	✓			✓	
Nevada	✓				
New Hampshire	✓				
New Jersey			✓	✓	
Ohio			✓		
South Dakota	✓				
Tennessee		✓	✓		
Utah					✓
Virginia	✓				
West Virginia		✓			
Wyoming	✓				

When states plan to vaccinate other selected groups

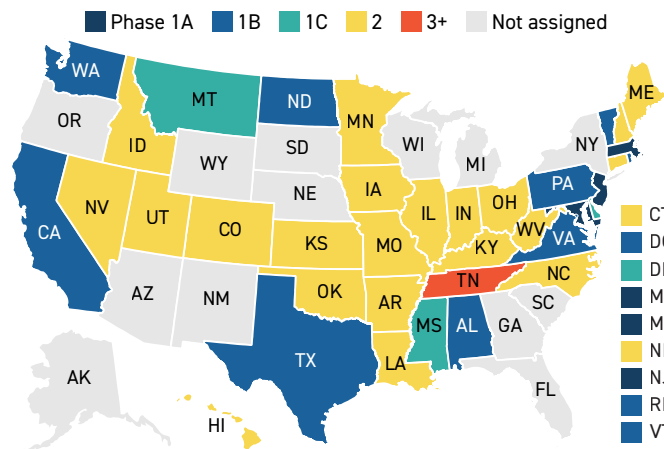
K-12 teachers and child care workers



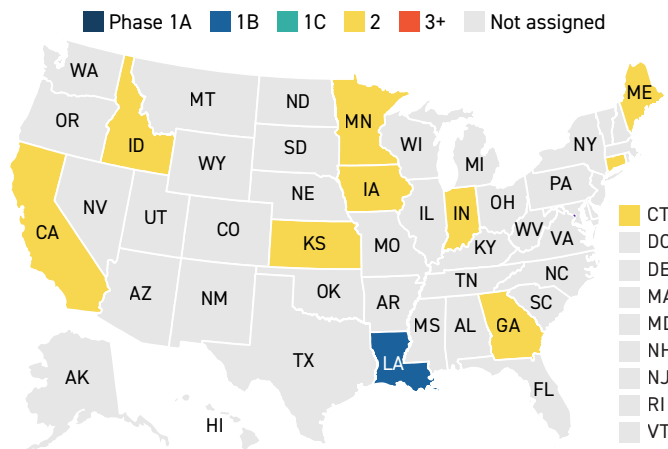
Law enforcement and fire personnel



Incarcerated populations



Rural and tribal areas



Notes: Based on analysis of state plans as of early January. Phase and group definitions vary by state, and in some cases states were matched with the closest federal equivalent. For groups assigned to multiple phases, the earliest phase indicated is shown.

Sources: Kaiser Family Foundation; National Academy for State Health Policy

WHAT'S NEXT

The incoming Biden administration is expected to expand the federal government's role in vaccine distribution, with an announced goal of achieving 100 million administered shots within the first 100 days of his term.

In a notable shift, Biden announced his administration would change the strategy for distributing the vaccines' second dose, which must be taken 21 days after the first Pfizer shot and 28 days after the first Moderna shot. The Trump administration kept half of the available doses in reserve for the second shots while the Biden administration plans to release all available doses immediately to reach more people faster.

In mid-January, before leaving office, the Trump administration announced that Operation Warp Speed would adopt the new dose distribution strategy and asked states to begin vaccinating older adults and those with risky medical conditions. Additionally, the federal government would begin distributing supplies based on how fast states can use them, rather than equal, per capita allocations.

While the pace of vaccine distribution has lagged expectations so far, several potential developments could accelerate progress, such as the authorization of additional vaccines or the discovery of a more efficient dosing regimen for existing vaccines.

Once enough doses are available to vaccinate a substantial majority of the population by late summer or fall, scientists expect the nation to achieve "herd immunity" — when the virus fails to multiply and spread because it runs out of vulnerable human hosts.

POWER PLAYERS



Xavier Becerra

President-elect Joe Biden's nominee for HHS secretary is a former congressman who has frequently defended the Affordable Care Act in his current role as California's attorney general and pledged to address health disparities if confirmed.



Jeff Zients

Biden's top coronavirus coordinator previously worked as an economic advisor in the Obama administration, where he lead the effort to rescue the troubled Healthcare.gov rollout.



Bechara Choucair

Biden's pick for the nation's top coronavirus vaccine coordinator is currently Kaiser Permanente's chief health officer; he also previously served as Chicago's public health commissioner.



Operation Warp Speed

The government's Covid-19 vaccine program was focused at first on speeding up their development and production, and is now charged with overseeing distribution.

PRODUCED BY AUBREE ELIZA WEAVER