

**\*EMBARGOED UNTIL 12/21, 5AM ET\***

## **President Biden Announces New Actions to Protect Americans and Help Communities and Hospitals Battle Omicron**

Today, President Biden will announce new actions to protect Americans and help communities and hospitals battle Omicron, building on the robust plan he announced earlier this month to get people maximum protection ahead of the winter and prepare for rising cases driven by the new variant.

We know how to protect people from severe illness, we have the tools needed to do it, and thanks to the President's Winter Plan, we are ready: 73% of adult Americans are fully vaccinated—up from less than 1 percent before the President took office—and we are getting about 1 million booster shots in arms each day. Vaccines are free and readily available at 90,000 convenient locations. There is clear guidance on masking and other measures that help slow the spread of COVID-19. And, federal emergency medical teams are ready to respond to surges nationwide.

Our vaccines are the most powerful tools we have—they work to protect people from serious illness and death, and boosters provide people optimal protection. While cases among vaccinated individuals will likely increase due to the more transmissible Omicron, evidence to date is that their cases will most likely be mild. In contrast, unvaccinated individuals are at high risk of getting COVID-19, getting severely ill, and even dying. Today's actions will mitigate the impact unvaccinated individuals have on our health care system, while increasing access to free testing and getting more shots in arms to keep people safe and our schools and economy open.

Today, President Biden will announce the following actions:

**Increased Support for Hospitals:** The President will take several steps to ensure states and health systems across the country have the personnel, beds, and supplies they need as they battle rising Omicron hospitalizations, mostly among the unvaccinated. Today's steps build on the President's Winter Plan, which made over 60 Winter COVID-19 emergency response team deployments available to states, and the COVID-19 Surge Response Teams the Administration mobilized over the summer and fall to fight the Delta surge.

### *Deploying Additional Medical Personnel*

- **Mobilizing an Additional 1,000 Troops to Deploy to COVID-Burdened Hospitals:** The President is directing Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to ready an additional 1,000 service members – military doctors, nurses, paramedics, and other medical personnel – to deploy to hospitals during January and February, as needed.
- **Deploying Federal Medical Personnel Available to States Immediately:** The President is announcing that six emergency response teams – with more than 100 clinical personnel and paramedics – are deploying to six states now: Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Arizona, New Hampshire and Vermont. This is on top of the 300 federal medical personnel that we have deployed since we learned about Omicron.

### *Expanding Hospital Capacity*

- Activating FEMA Response Teams to Help States and Hospitals Add Capacity Now: The President is directing the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to activate additional staffing and capacity for the National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) and FEMA regions, and to mobilize planning teams to work with every state and territory to assess hospital needs ahead of winter surges, and to start expanding hospital bed capacity now—with the federal government paying for all of it. The Administration is also pre-positioning the federal government’s own supplies and resources to help make more beds available.
- Providing Ongoing Support to States to Help Hospitals Create and License More Beds: FEMA has already provided states hundreds of millions of dollars to expand hospital capacity. This includes two new medical surge facilities in Shreveport, Louisiana, added beds for COVID-19 patients in Baltimore, Maryland, and expanded intensive care units and emergency departments in Fresno, California.
- Deploying Hundreds of Ambulances and Emergency Medical Teams to Transport Patients to Open Beds: To get ahead of surges, FEMA is ready to deploy hundreds of ambulances and emergency medical teams so that if one hospital fills up, they can transport patients to open beds in other facilities. Just this week, 30 paramedics are heading to New Hampshire, 30 to Vermont, and 20 to Arizona, and 30 ambulances are headed to New York and 8 to Maine. The Administration is also continuing to provide 100 percent federal reimbursement to states for all COVID-19 emergency response costs.

#### *Providing Critical Supplies*

- Pre-Positioning Critical Supplies from the Strategic National Stockpile: Thanks to the President’s leadership, the U.S. government has hundreds of millions of N-95 masks, billions of gloves, tens of millions of gowns, and over 100,000 ventilators in the Strategic National Stockpile—all ready to ship out if and when states need them. The Administration has pre-positioned these supplies in strategic locations across the United States so that we can send them to states that need them immediately.
- Deploying Ventilators to States: HHS continues to expedite the deployment of ventilators to states. Just last week, the Administration sent 330 ventilators to states like Indiana, Michigan, Maine, and New Hampshire, with more planned deliveries on the way to states that are facing strains and need them.

**Robust Access to Free Testing:** The President will announce new actions to ensure Americans have access to free testing, including convenient, at-home tests. Since January 2021, the Administration has already taken significant actions to increase testing. As a result, there are now 20,000 free testing sites across the U.S., four times as many at-home tests available to Americans than were available this summer, and at-home tests being made available at key community sites, such as community health centers and rural clinics. Today’s steps build on this progress and further increase the availability of free and convenient testing options.

- Standing up New Federal Testing Sites: Today, the President is announcing that new federal testing sites will be stood up around the country, helping states that need additional testing capacity. The first will be stood up in New York City this week.
- Distributing Free, Rapid Tests to Americans: Today, the President is announcing his Administration will purchase a half-billion at-home, rapid tests this winter to be

distributed for free to Americans who want them, with the initial delivery starting in January 2022. The Administration will stand up a website where Americans can go to get at-home tests delivered to their home—for free.

- Utilizing the Defense Production Act to Further Accelerate Production: The President is pledging to continue using the Defense Production Act (DPA) and other authorities to make sure the U.S. is producing as many tests as quickly as possible. Through the President's aggressive actions this summer, including use of the DPA, the Administration has already quadrupled the monthly supply of at-home, rapid tests in the U.S. The Administration will continue to use the DPA to accelerate production; just in the last week, the Administration used DPA to ensure that two testing manufacturers have the raw materials and equipment they need to produce as many tests as they can—enabling one company to double its production of lab-based tests, and another to rapidly to scale up production of new over-the-counter and point-of-care tests.

**Expanding Capacity to Get Shots in Arms:** President Biden will announce additional steps to ensure people can get vaccinated and boosted and get their kids vaccinated easily this winter. Over the fall, the Administration has added 10,000 more vaccination sites across the country where Americans can get their shots. There are now 90,000 convenient locations nationwide, with many sites offering walk-in appointments and vaccinations for the whole family.

- Standing Up New Pop-Up Vaccination Clinics: The President will announce that FEMA is standing up new pop-up vaccination clinics across the country. This includes a new mobile unit in Washington, and four new mobile units across New Mexico that are opening today. FEMA will help stand up additional sites in areas of high demand over the coming weeks.
- Deploying Additional Vaccinators: To further increase capacity, the Biden Administration is deploying hundreds of federal vaccinators across 12 states, Tribes and territories. Together, these vaccinators will help enable thousands of additional appointments over the next few weeks.
- Allowing Flexibility to Surge Pharmacy Teams: In response to strong demand for vaccinations in communities across the country, the Administration will cut red tape to help surge pharmacy teams to places where there is higher demand. To do so, HHS will issue an amendment to the PREP Act Declaration allowing flexibility for pharmacists and pharmacy interns to administer a wider set of vaccinations across state lines.
- Continuing to Scale Pharmacy Capacity: Nationwide, pharmacies are adding appointments and capacity across their network. Pharmacy partners have taken steps to surge capacity, including by hiring tens of additional clinical and operational staff nationwide. And, pharmacies are opening up hundreds of new vaccination sites for kids in January.