

Worst-hit US launches virus vaccine shipments

December 13 2020



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Trucks on Sunday began shipping millions of doses of COVID-19 vaccine in the United States, part of an enormous logistics operation that should see some vulnerable people being vaccinated as early as Monday

in the nation worst hit by the coronavirus.

Health care workers and nursing home residents will be among the first to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech shots, though it will likely be months before all those who want it can be vaccinated, officials said.

"My hope, again, is that this happens very expeditiously. Hopefully, (starting) tomorrow," US Food and Drug Administration commissioner Stephen Hahn said Sunday on CNN.

The heartening breakthrough comes at one of the darkest moments of the nearly yearlong pandemic, with infections in the United States soaring.

More than 1.1 million new cases have been confirmed in the past week and the [death toll](#) is nearing 298,000 in the US, which has reported the highest absolute death toll and number of cases in the world.

Fears of overconfidence

Even as health experts welcomed the unprecedented effort—with the [vaccine](#) developed, tested and distributed in record time—they cautioned Americans not to grow lax in observing normal precautions.

"The next number of weeks are going to be hell, I fear," New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy told ABC's "This Week."

"So we're begging people to please, please, please don't let your guard down."

Health officials have mounted an education campaign to persuade large numbers of skeptics that the vaccine is safe.

"The way we see light at the end of the tunnel, the way we get through this, is to achieve herd immunity, and that means we need to vaccinate a significant number of people," Hahn said.

Over the weekend, the US became the latest country to green-light the Pfizer vaccine, following nations like Britain and Canada.

As trucks rolled out of a Pfizer facility in Kalamazoo, Michigan, they were escorted to a local airport by armed US officers, in a sign of how precious the cargo is considered.

Two major package delivery services—UPS and FedEx—will then ship the supplies to 636 sites around the country by Wednesday.

Some 2.9 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine—enough to vaccinate half that many people in the two-shot regimen—are being shipped in boxes containing dry ice that can keep supplies at -70 degrees Celsius (-94 degrees Fahrenheit), the frigid temperature needed to preserve the drug.

The vaccine is being allocated to states based on each state's adult population. The states then decide the specifics of how to distribute the drug, but are expected to follow the federal guidance to place healthcare workers and nursing home residents at the front of the line.

More than one-third of US deaths have occurred in long-term care facilities.

Over the past two weeks, the US has repeatedly exceeded 2,000 COVID-related deaths per day, rivaling tolls from the early days of the pandemic.

Citation: Worst-hit US launches virus vaccine shipments (2020, December 13) retrieved 24 December 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-12-worst-hit-virus-vaccine-shipments.html>

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