

New York speeds up COVID-19 vaccinations amid sluggish rollout

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Faced with growing criticism over a sluggish rollout of the coronavirus vaccine, New York opened several large vaccination centers on Monday and relaxed criteria for getting a shot despite doses remaining insufficient.

Dozens of people queued patiently at a center in the Bronx, one of three pop-up sites in New York City that mirror hubs established elsewhere, including in Florida and New Jersey.

"This is the turning point in our fight against COVID-19," Mayor Bill de Blasio wrote on Twitter.

Over 75s, police officers, firefighters, teachers and transport workers became eligible to get vaccinated after New York Governor Andrew Cuomo eased the state's strict guidelines following anger over discarded doses.

The vaccine, which is free, was reserved for frontline health care workers, and staff and residents of nursing homes, with authorities threatened with fines for violating the rule.

But Cuomo announced a loosening of restrictions Friday after some hospitals reported that they were having to throw away vials that had expired because they couldn't find people to vaccinate.

"It's a little surreal," said 39-year-old teacher Amir Khosrowpour, at the Bronx vaccination clinic. "I was not expecting to do that today, just less than 24 hours ago, but it feels good."

Roughly 100 sites across New York City, including hospitals, [health centers](#) and pharmacies, started making appointments available Monday, although many of the sites are not yet operational.

The other two large centers opened in the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens.

Although New York is less hard-hit than it was in the spring, rates are soaring as the pandemic continues to engulf the United States.

The US is by far the country worst hit by [coronavirus](#) in absolute terms, with almost 375,000 deaths from more than 22 million cases, according to an AFP tally.

The country hit a new record for cases on Friday, notching nearly 290,000 in 24 hours, according to Johns Hopkins University.

De Blasio said the new centers would help New York City almost double the number of injections from 100,000 last week to 175,000 this week.

But Cuomo said Monday the federal government was delivering insufficient doses, adding that the state had only received one million doses for four million eligible people.

"At this rate it will take us 14 weeks just to receive enough dosages for those currently eligible," he said.

In Florida, where over-65s are already entitled to vaccines, large vaccination centers that opened last week quickly ran out of doses.

New Jersey also opened the first of its large vaccination sites Monday.

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