

US vaccinates 10 mln against Covid but remains behind target

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More than 10 million people have received their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine in the United States, official data showed Wednesday, even as the country remains behind its immunization targets.

Of 29,380,125 doses of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines sent to states, 10,278,462 have been administered as first doses, according to the CDC's tracker.

That is around 3.1 percent of the total population of roughly 330 million people—though vaccines are not yet available to children.

The US has vaccinated more people than any other Western country, but rollout has fallen far behind goals set by authorities, who had hoped to reach 20 million people by the end of December.

As a percentage of population vaccinated, Israel is leading the world, followed by the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Britain, then the US.

As part of efforts to expand access to COVID

vaccines, the federal government said this week it would allow makers to release all their available doses instead of reserving booster shots.

This marks a break from the previous plan in which second doses were held back for those people who had received their first, to ensure that there is no delay.

The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines require boosters after three and four weeks, respectively.

"States have been blamed for being initially overly-prescriptive in how they distributed their supply, which led to doses lying unused in freezers or even being thrown away because they expired," Andrea Polonijo, a public health expert at the University of California, Riverside told AFP.

"Within states, there is also no standardized means of scheduling vaccination appointments, leaving many members of the public confused about when and where they can get vaccinated."

The federal government has now also recommended that states start vaccinating everyone over the age of 65, regardless of whether they have health conditions.

Cities are also preparing mass vaccination sites—California, which is facing the worst of the US outbreak, for example has designated Disneyland as such a site.

New York Mayor Bill de Blasio urged the federal government to ramp up supply, warning on Twitter: "We could run out of #COVID19 vaccines by the end of next week if we don't get a major shipment IMMEDIATELY."

Health secretary Alex Azar has called for a shift in distribution from hospitals to pharmacies and clinics.

He also said this week that future allocations of doses to states would be tied to the rate of administration as well as a state's population of over-65s.

The US is already the hardest-hit country in the world with more than 382,000 deaths and is facing its worst ever surge, with more than 4,000 people dying Tuesday.

Epidemiologists fear it could get even worse further as newer, more contagious variants of the virus become established in the US.

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