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U.S. can deliver COVID-19 aid checks quickly, but child tax credit is hurdle



FILE PHOTO: A healthcare worker draws the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccine from a vial at Dignity Health Glendale Memorial Hospital and Health Center in Glendale, California, U.S., December 17, 2020. REUTERS/Lucy Nicholson/File Photo

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - With plenty of practice sending out coronavirus relief payments, the U.S. government should be able to start delivering \$1,400 checks almost immediately once Congress finalizes a new aid bill and President Joe Biden signs it, tax experts say. Some Americans might receive direct payments as soon as this week if the House of Representatives, as expected, passes the \$1.9 trillion bill on Tuesday, compared with the lag of several weeks experienced in April 2020. Nearly 160 million households are expected to get payments, the White House estimates.

The Treasury Department's Internal Revenue Service will have new challenges on its hands, though, thanks to the relief bill, which Biden and his fellow Democrats argue is needed to stem the continuing economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

Incarcerated people, those with non-citizen spouses and relatives of those who died in 2020 will be eligible to receive payments.

The bill also includes an expanded

child tax credit of up to \$3,000 per child, or \$3,600 for each kid under the age of six. The IRS will pay part of this in monthly installments of \$250 or \$300 from July through December, adding a benefits distributor role to the revenue collection agency's responsibilities.

The IRS, which has more than 70,000 employees, handles over 190 million individual and corporate tax returns a year, but it has been hobbled by budget cuts and obsolete technology in recent years. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, as the COVID-19 relief package is called, includes \$1.46 billion for the agency, which is running into its busiest season, as the April 15 deadline for individual taxpayers approaches. A U.S. Treasury spokeswoman said the Biden administration's priority was to speed relief to Americans, adding: "Treasury stands ready to implement the direct payment check program as soon as the American Rescue Plan is passed."

FINDING THE UNCONNECTED
Making one-off payments to those who regularly file tax returns should not be a struggle for the IRS, said Janet Holtzblatt, senior fellow with the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center.

"They have already ironed out many of the snafus that slowed the previous rollouts," Holtzblatt said. "The IRS continues to surprise me in its ability to step up to these challenges."

It took more than two weeks for the IRS to begin sending here the first \$1,200 electronic payments to taxpayers last April after then-President Donald Trump signed the \$2.3 trillion CARES Act relief package into law on March 27. There was more than a three-week lag for paper checks, after changes were made to print Trump's name on them. Biden left the IRS plenty of wiggle room after the Senate passed the Democratic-backed bill on Saturday, saying his plan "would get checks out the door this month."

But Democrats in Congress, including Senator Bob Casey, were more optimistic on Sunday. Payments will go out "in very short order," Casey said. "The Treasury Department is prepared for this. They've been dealing with this issue since last March."

Another key priority for the next round will be signing up more people for electronic payments, including those earning too little to file tax returns or those not getting other federal benefits, who were left out of past payment rounds.

Homeless people and those without internet access will be difficult to reach, but Holtzblatt said community outreach groups that were shut down last spring due to the pandemic could now provide some help in signing them up.

The child tax credit changes are a vast undertaking, tax experts say. All taxpayers earning under \$200,000 with children 17 or under living with them at least half the year can claim the credit.

Biden's bill increases the credit to \$3,000, from \$2,000, for each child aged 6 to 17 for parents earning under \$75,000 each and allows the monthly installments to supplement incomes and reduce child poverty.

Nina Olson, executive director of the Center for Taxpayer Rights in Washington and the IRS' national taxpayer advocate from 2001 to 2019, said a key challenge would be determining whether the children actually lived with their parents, which could hold up the payments.

The IRS also needs to change its culture to reflect a changing mission, she said.

"The IRS needs to recognize that it's not just a revenue collector, but it is a social benefits administrator, and it needs to staff itself and organize its training accordingly," Olson said.

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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

CORONAVIRUS DIARY

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Help Is Really On The Way Again



000 and couples earning less than 150,000 would receive the full \$1,400 plus an additional \$1,400 per dependent. This bill does not just provide direct payments to Americans, it also extends jobless benefits and provides a huge financial infusion to states and local governments as well as to schools to help them reopen. It also provides funding for priorities like coronavirus testing and vaccine distribution.

The president told the nation that, “Help is on the way.” That is very true. We are the only country in the world that can really create this huge stimulus package to help our own people.

Time is very critical. We really need to overcome all these tragic times and look for better days ahead.

On Saturday the Senate passed President Biden’s \$1.9 trillion COVID relief bill. The bill now needs to be sent back to Congress and is scheduled for a vote tomorrow to approve the changes made in the Senate. That vote is expected to succeed on a party line with a Democratic majority.

There are more than 600 pages in the relief bill. After being signed by the president, people could start seeing the \$1,400 stimulus payments hit their bank account within days after he signs the bill.

This time individuals earning less than \$75,



















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Editor's Choice



A woman takes a photo in front of the beach as spring break begins in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, March 5, 2021. REUTERS/Maria Alejandra Cardona.



A college athlete is thrown in the air by a group of men on the beach to celebrate spring break in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, March 5, 2021. REUTERS/Maria Alejandra Cardona.



Women wearing traditional dresses dance during a rally to mark International Women's Day in Diyarbakir, Turkey March 8, 2021. REUTERS/Sertac Kayar



Revelers flock to the beach to celebrate spring break in Miami Beach, Florida, March 5, 2021. REUTERS/Marco Bello



A woman with a painted face takes part in a protest to mark International Women's Day in La Paz, Bolivia, March 8, 2021. REUTERS/David Mercado



People participate in Aurat March or Women's March, to mark International Women's Day in Karachi, Pakistan March 8, 2021. REUTERS/Akhtar Soomro

**Biden: U.S. Will Have Vaccine For All Adults
By The End Of May**



President Joe Biden

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

President Biden on Tuesday said that the United States will have enough vaccine supply to vaccinate all American adults for the coronavirus by the end of May, crediting a “stepped-up process” under his administration. Biden made the announcement while outlining a partnership between Merck and Johnson & Johnson to produce the latter’s single-dose coronavirus vaccine. “We’re now on track to have enough vaccine supply for every adult in America by the end of May,” Biden said in remarks Tuesday afternoon at the White House. “When we came into office, the prior administration had contracted for not nearly enough vaccine to cover adults in America. We rectified that.” The new timeline is more condensed than Biden’s previous prediction that the U.S. would have enough vaccines for all American adults — 600 million doses — by the end of July. Biden stressed that Tuesday’s developments marked a significant milestone in the fight against the virus, but he cautioned that more work needs to be done in order to distribute the vaccine and inoculate much of the U.S. population. He highlighted his administration’s efforts to boost the number of vaccinators and locations where Americans can receive doses. “That is progress, important progress,” Biden said. “But it’s not enough to have the vaccine supply.”



It could take much longer for the country to vaccinate the adult population, given the logistical hurdles of distributing and administering vaccines. Americans in states and cities, including Washington, D.C., have encountered challenges in signing up for appointments online. The Biden administration is also trying to address vaccine hesitancy by communicating that the vaccines are safe and effective in order to ensure that as much of the population as possible gets vaccinated. He also reiterated calls for Congress to swiftly pass his \$1.9 trillion relief proposal. To increase the number of vaccinations in circulation, Biden detailed Merck’s collaboration to expand production of the Johnson & Johnson single-dose vaccine approved by the Food and Drug Administration over the weekend. Biden said he has invoked the Defense Production Act to equip Merck facilities to safely manufacture the vaccine, and Johnson & Johnson

plans to operate its facilities 24 hours a day, seven days a week in order to increase supply.



The announcement Tuesday of the new timeline is a bright spot in the country’s yearlong fight against the virus. While cases and deaths remain high, they have come down from their peaks following the 2020 holiday season. Last week, Biden marked the milestone of the 50 millionth dose of coronavirus vaccine being administered. The White House said earlier Tuesday that the weekly supply of doses to states would increase to 18 million this week. Still, new variants of the coronavirus remain a cause for concern, and more than 500,000 people in the U.S. have died from the virus. “Things may get worse again as new variants spread and as we face setbacks like recent winter storms in the Midwest and South. But our administration will never take this public health threat lightly,” Biden said. “Now is not the time to let our guard down. People’s lives are at stake.” Asked at the conclusion of the event when the U.S. would get back to normal, Biden told reporters he had been cautioned not to give an answer due to uncertainty but said he hoped it would be within a year. “My hope is by this time next year we are going to be back to normal or before that,” Biden said. (Courtesy thehill.com)

Related
Team Biden Surprises With Positive Vaccine News

President Biden dramatically changed expectations on the supply of vaccines and the trajectory of the country’s comeback from the coronavirus pandemic on Tuesday in announcing there will be enough coronavirus vaccines for all American adults by the end of May. On Wednesday, government officials described a process that seemed to surprise

them for how swiftly it came together. The previous target for producing that much vaccine had been July. They said it wasn’t a decision that was taken lightly but said it was guided by facts and fast-moving events.

“We are not in a habit of overpromising, and therefore even as of several weeks ago, before such time as the approval of Johnson & Johnson, the president was talking about moving up the date until the end of July,” White House senior adviser on COVID-19 response Andy Slavitt told reporters.

The breakthrough came after the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted emergency use authorization for Johnson & Johnson’s single-dose COVID-19 vaccine, marking the third approved coronavirus vaccine in the U.S.



Vaccine manufacturer Merck, a competitor of Johnson & Johnson, then agreed to help manufacture the newly approved vaccine to double its U.S. capacity, a move brokered by the Biden White House. When Biden took over on Jan. 20, Johnson & Johnson was running behind and the administration didn’t think there would be enough of the vaccine available for all American adults until July or later. Using the Defense Production Act, the Biden administration allocated \$100 million to expand drug manufacturing and to convert a Merck facility into a manufacturing plant. The Department of Defense took on a logistical support role, and Biden brought on new teams of experts and manufacturers to ramp up production.

Everything clicked into place on Saturday, when the Johnson & Johnson vaccine was approved by the FDA. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reviewed the approval on Sunday, when the vaccines were first packed and shipped from Johnson & Johnson facilities. On Monday, the vaccines arrived at U.S. Postal Service and FedEx hubs for delivery on Tuesday, when the first Johnson & Johnson vaccines were administered to Americans.

With three vaccines approved and deliveries ramping up, the Biden administration felt confident enough to have the president move the timeline up dramatically, setting the marker for May. (Courtesy thehill.com)



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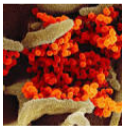


DATELINE: COVID-19™

This news page is dedicated to frontline healthcare workers and the world they live in every day to defend the health of the community.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

**The Latest On The Coronavirus
Pandemic And Vaccines**



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**Frontline Healthcare Workers At The
Top Of 100 Most Influential People List**

“The frontline worker” occupies the number-one slot in Modern Healthcare’s magazine 2020 list of the 100 most influential people in healthcare.

Those frontline workers include physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists, environmental service workers, and administrators, according to the list’s companion article. Modern Healthcare praises the healthcare workers for their selfless labor under dangerous conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also receive high praise for the compassion they’ve shown to patients, especially those dying alone in the hospital.

The other top-rated healthcare influencers on the list are more typical of those that Modern Healthcare places on its list every year. The vast majority of them are CEOs of big healthcare systems, insurers, and pharmaceutical companies.



The healthcare executives who occupy slots 2 and 3 on the list describe in the article what each of their systems did for the other during the public health crisis.

At the height of the pandemic last April, recalls Marc Harrison, MD (3), CEO of Intermountain Healthcare, his organization sent 50 clinicians to the New York hospitals of Northwell Health. Michael Dowling (2), CEO of Northwell, returned the favor in September by sending several teams to Salt Lake City to help with COVID-19 patients when a big virus surge hit Utah.

In Dowling’s comments on Harrison, he recalls that Northwell was desperate last April, and “staffing was by far our biggest concern. Among the first people I called for help was

Intermountain Healthcare President and CEO Dr Marc Harrison, saying, ‘We’re inundated here, and I’m wondering if you can help us in any way?’ His immediate response was, ‘Absolutely, what do you need?’ “

Tech and Politics
As on the 2019 list, the 2020 roll also includes several leaders of technology companies. Among them are Judy Faulkner (8), CEO of Epic Systems; Jason Gorevic (10), CEO of Teladoc; Karen DeSalvo, MD, MPH (26), chief health officer of Google; Kieran Murphy (27), president and CEO of GE Healthcare; and Paul Black (86), CEO of Allscripts Healthcare Solutions.

The only politician on the list this year is President Donald Trump, who falls to 28 from 9 last year. In 2019, besides Trump, the politicians on the “most influential people” roster included Elizabeth Warren (8), Nancy Pelosi (15), and Bernie Sanders (24).



However, there are plenty of government officials on the 2020 list, including US Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar (46), Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services administrator Seema Verma (16), and US Food and Drug Administration commissioner Stephen Hahn, MD (11).

Anthony Fauci, MD, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, is listed as the ninth most influential individual. Modern Healthcare’s article credits Fauci with standing up to Trump on the value of science. He is also praised for his tireless advocacy of public health measures like wearing masks and social distancing.

Deborah Birx, MD (31), who serves with Fauci on the White House Coronavirus Task Force, is described as “a leading clinical voice in the fight against COVID-19.” But the article notes that “Birx has drawn fire over actions some critics say have undermined the role of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention during the pan-

demic.”

Activism Applauded
Susan Bailey, MD (20), president of the American Medical Association, was applauded for defending physicians trying to save the lives of COVID-19 patients. Bailey, it is noted, took on Trump for claiming that doctors make more money when they diagnose patients with COVID-19.



Another important voice during the pandemic has been that of Bonnie Castillo, RN (17), executive director of National Nurses United. The union chief, the article recalls, has been a strong advocate for nurse safety during the COVID-19 crisis. She has also criticized hospitals for their lack of pandemic planning and preparedness, Modern Healthcare points out. Castillo is on Time’s list of the 100 most influential people of 2020, as well.

Some hospital executives were placed high on the list partly because of their social activism. Gene Woods (7), president and CEO of Atrium Health, contributed \$1 million of his own money to start an emergency care fund for Atrium Health employees. He was also reportedly vocal about “social equity” during the racial unrest of last summer.

Penny Wheeler, MD (22), president and CEO of Allina Health, was selected for a similar reason. Last May, as COVID-19 patients were overrunning Allina’s hospitals in the Minneapolis area, the George Floyd protests broke out. Wheeler signed a letter denouncing racism, along with other local CEOs. This occurred just after healthcare workers rallied at the state capitol to protest what they said were unsafe conditions at an Allina hospital. Wheeler said Allina had tried to obtain personal protective equipment from more than 500 sources.