

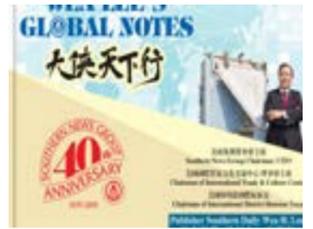


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U.S. Congress closes in on \$900 billion COVID-19 aid bill as Friday deadline looms



FILE PHOTO: U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) speaks during a news conference on Capitol Hill, in Washington, U.S., December 10, 2020. REUTERS/Erin Scott

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -U.S. congressional negotiators on Wednesday were "closing in on" a \$900 billion COVID-19 aid bill that will include \$600 to \$700 stimulus checks and extended unemployment benefits, as a Friday deadline loomed, lawmakers and aides said.

Top members of the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives and Republican-controlled Senate sounded more positive than they have in months on a fresh response to a crisis that has killed more than 304,000 Americans and thrown millions out of work.

Their aides were struggling on Wednesday to draft legislative language as rates of COVID-19 infections are soaring to new highs, even as the United States starts to vaccinate people. The American economy is showing signs of weakening.

Negotiators were looking for a way to shift the approach to aiding hard-hit state and local governments, which has been a key Democratic priority but opposed by Republicans, one source familiar with the talks said. The measure, to be attached to a spending bill that must pass by Friday to avert a government shutdown, is not expected to include new protections for companies from lawsuits related to the pandemic, something high on the Republican agenda.

Senator Dick Durbin, the chamber's No. 2 Democrat, said the goal was to reach an agreement on Wednesday and have it ready for voting beginning on Thursday.

Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said he felt optimistic.

"We made major headway toward hammering out a targeted pandemic relief package," McConnell said in the Senate. "We need vaccine distribution money, we need to re-up the Paycheck Protection Program to save jobs, we need to continue to provide for laid-off Americans."

PPP is the federal loan and grant aid program to small businesses suffering from the pandemic.

But the House Democratic leader, Steny Hoyer, said that if the Friday midnight deadline for approving the spending measure is not met, he could envision another stopgap spending bill of three or four days' duration to keep government agencies open while negotiations continue.

BOOSTING THE ECONOMY

Senator John Thune, the Senate's No. 2 Republican, said the proposed direct payments to individuals would be around \$600 to \$700 per person.

Mark Ritacco, director of governmental affairs for the National Association of Counties, said some steps Congress could take to help local authorities include providing a one-year extension of unused funds provided by the CARES Act, a COVID-19 relief bill enacted in March.

His organization also hopes Congress will expand the number of counties that can receive aid to include smaller counties, especially as they must administer the new vaccines. It suggested having the federal government replenish more local COVID-19 relief costs already partly reimbursed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, such as personal protective equipment for schools and other government buildings.

But some Republicans are wary that having FEMA pay more is a roundabout way of providing more state and local government aid.

"If it's simply a way of disguising money for state and local governments, we'll have a lot of opposition," Thune said.

The negotiations come at a key moment for a U.S. economy clearly weakening after an initial rebound from recession triggered by the pandemic earlier this year. Consumer spending, buoyed through the summer and early fall by more than \$3 trillion in federal assistance, has hit a wall as new lockdowns limit business activity and keep people home.

Democratic President-elect Joe Biden said the stimulus package was encouraging but more aid would be needed.

"It looks like they're very, very close, and it looks like there is going to be direct cash payments, but it's a down payment - an important down payment - on what's going to have to be done beginning at the end of January, into February," he told reporters.

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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

12/16/2020

CORONAVIRUS DIARY

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Emergency Rescuing Action

The FDA is expected to grant emergency authorization to Moderna which will lead to another source to give millions of American access to a second coronavirus vaccine beginning early next Monday.

history. But how long will it take for all 330 million Americans to be inoculated? We will have to wait until March or April to find out.

The review by the FDA confirms Moderna's assessment that its vaccine had an efficacy rate of 94.1 percent in a trial of 30,000 people was correct. The exciting news came at the time of record-setting numbers of new coronavirus cases that are overwhelming hospitals and increasing deaths.

Half of all planned doses of available coronavirus vaccines have been bought up by rich countries including the U.S., Japan and Australia. The rest of the populations will be unable to get vaccinated until 2022.

President-elect Biden today went to Georgia to support the democratic senate candidate. He said, "My heart goes out to all of you who have fallen on hard times through no fault of your own. I

The vaccine rollout is one of the most ambitious undertakings in the nation's



have been unable to sleep at night staring at the calling weighed down by the worry of what tomorrow will bring to you and equally important for your family."

Biden, who will take office on Jan 20th, said the U.S. will get through the pandemic together.

Logos for Southern News Group 40th Anniversary (1979-2019) and STV KVVV15.3 美南國際電視台. Text: Southern News Group Chairman / CEO, Chairman of International Trade & Culture Center, Chairman of International District Houston Texas.



Publisher Southern Daily Wea H. Lee

Stay Home!

BUSINESS

Wear Mask!

U.S. Administers First Doses Of Pfizer Coronavirus Vaccine



Sandra Lindsay, left, a nurse at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, is inoculated with the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine by Dr. Michelle Chester, Dec. 14, 2020, at the Jewish Medical Center, in the Queens borough of New York. (Right) Nurse Annabelle Jimenez congratulates nurse Sandra Lindsay after she is inoculated with the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine. (Photo/© Mark Lenihan/AP)

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

The rollout of the first coronavirus vaccine began Monday morning as the first doses of the Pfizer medication was administered to healthcare workers and nursing home staffers.

A critical care nurse from Northwell Long Island Jewish Medical Center was vaccinated at 9:23 a.m. during a livestreamed event with New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo. "You didn't flinch," Cuomo said.

The University of Louisville Hospital in Kentucky will receive its first delivery of the vaccine at 9:30 a.m. and at 10:30 a.m., three doctors and two nurses will receive the vaccine. Other locations in Connecticut, New York, Iowa, Washington, D.C., and Michigan are also expected to administer vaccine doses on Monday. The rollout comes less than a week after the U.S. Food and Drug Administration authorized the vaccine for emergency use for Americans over 16. The order from the FDA led to the pharmaceutical company shipping 2.9 million doses to 636 sites across the country.



Shipments of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine are loaded into a UPS plane on Dec. 13, 2020 in Lansing, Michigan. (Photo/© Rey Del Rio/Getty Images)

Pfizer, which produced the vaccine alongside German company BioNTech, began shipping the doses from its Michigan warehouse Sunday directly to those sites, which were pre-selected by governors and local health officials. Pfizer said it would roll out a second batch of 2.9 million doses shortly after the first batch. The U.S. government is opting to keep 500,000 doses in reserve to address any shipping or distribution mishaps.

The vaccine, which requires two doses for full inoculation, began distribution in the United Kingdom last week. The vaccine is

the first in the country to use the genetic technology mRNA instead of viral components. Pfizer claimed its trials showed the vaccine was 95% effective at preventing symptomatic COVID-19. The FDA will hold a hearing on Dec. 17 with Moderna, which also developed an mRNA-based vaccine, before possibly giving emergency authorization for its deployment. Moderna said its clinical trials showed the vaccine was 94% effective at preventing the coronavirus and trial patients who had the vaccine had elevated antibodies in their system three months after the vaccines were administered.



Boxes containing the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine are prepared to be shipped at the Pfizer Global Supply Kalamazoo manufacturing plant in Portage, Michigan, Dec. 13, 2020. (Photo/ Gash/Reuters)

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According to the World Health Organization, there are 52 COVID-19 vaccines in human trials, and 162 vaccines in pre-clinical development. The vaccine developments come as the U.S. is in the midst of the deadliest period of the pandemic, according to health data. America leads the world with over 16 million cases and close to 300,000 deaths, according to

Johns Hopkins University's Coronavirus Resource Center.

The seven-day averages of new daily cases, 211,494, hospitalizations, 106,656, and deaths, 2,427, were at record highs on Dec. 13, according to health data from the COVID Tracking Project. (Courtesy msn.com)

Related Most people won't experience allergic reactions to the vaccine, experts insist.

A Breakdown Of The Pfizer Vaccine And Why Most People Will Qualify For The Injection

The Food and Drug Administration late Friday authorized Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine for people ages 16 and up, but warned that those with known severe allergic reactions to any of the vaccine's components should avoid taking it. But what is in the vaccine? The good news is that Pfizer's mRNA vaccine doesn't contain any known allergens like eggs or metals.



Dr. David Stukus, director of the Food Allergy Treatment Center at Nationwide Children's Hospital

"There are no derivatives of food allergies, there is no aluminum or mercury or anything like that," Dr. David Stukus, director of the Food Allergy Treatment Center at Nationwide Children's Hospital, said in an interview with ABC. "There is nothing in there that is inherently allergenic."

In fact, to allergy experts, most of the ingredients don't raise any alarm bells. Pfizer's vaccine has genetic material known as mRNA, as well as fats, salts and other ingredients commonly found in everyday medications that help maintain stability. Because we already have mRNA in nearly every cell of our bod-

ies naturally, it's harmless, experts explained. The lipids, or fat lobules, and salts found in the vaccine add stability and structure to the mRNA and also help the mRNA slide into our cells. This way, our immune system's cells can appropriately respond and learn to attack the virus when exposed to it naturally in the real world.



There is only one ingredient in the vaccine, called PEG, that could potentially cause an allergic reaction, but experts agree it is unlikely to be a problem for the vast majority of people.

PEG "is a very common inactive ingredient found in a lot of over-the-counter things and in a lot of injectable medications," Dr. Erin L. Reigh, a staff physician in the Section of Allergy and Clinical Immunology at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, told ABC News. "I have seen a few cases of allergies to this in my career, but it is very rare," she added. (Courtesy abcnews.go.com)



Editor's Choice



Women, including widows and relatives of farmers who were believed to have killed themselves over debt attend a protest against farm bills passed by India's parliament, at Tikri border near Delhi, India. REUTERS/Anushree Fadnavis



U.S. President-elect Joe Biden looks at his watch as former South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg arrives behind him to be announced as his nominee for secretary of transportation during a news conference at Biden's transition headquarters in Wilmington, Delaware. REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque/Pool



Darragh Foley falls out of the ring in his fight with opponent Ty Telford during the Sydney Super Fight boxing event at Bankwest Stadium in Sydney, Australia. REUTERS/Loren Ellio



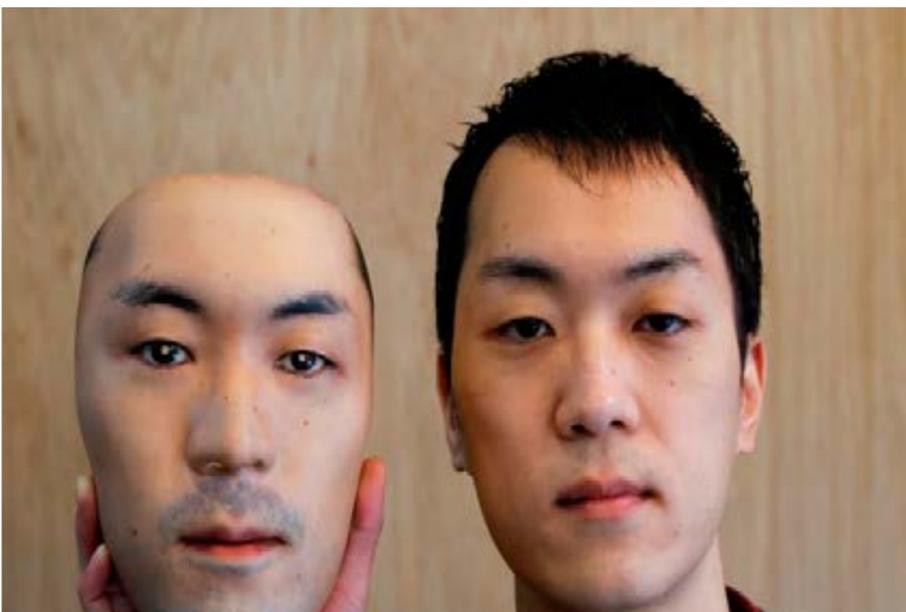
Myron Burrell (C) is joined by friends and family as he walks free after having his life sentence commuted by the Minnesota Board of Pardons and being granted immediate release from the Minnesota Correctional Facility in Stillwater, Minnesota. REUTERS/Stephen Maturen



People arrange Christmas displays at a church, in Las Pinas City, Metro Manila, Philippines. REUTERS/Lisa Marie David



Valerie Dominguez, whose results came back negative, is tested for coronavirus at United Memorial Medical Center in Houston, Texas. REUTERS/Callaghan O'Hare



Shuhei Okawara, 30, owner of mask shop Kamenya Omote, holds a super-realistic face mask based on his real face, made by using 3D printing technology, in Tokyo, Japan. REUTERS/Issei Kato



Dr. Joshua Barocas, an infectious diseases physician at Boston Medical Center, receives a coronavirus vaccine administered by RN Kayla Johnson at Boston Medical Center in Boston, Massachusetts. Erin Clark/Pool

FDA OK's Emergency Use Authorization For Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine – Houston Ready



KEY POINT

The Food and Drug Administration authorized an emergency rollout of what promises to be a strongly protective vaccine from Pfizer Inc. and its German partner BioNTech.

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

WASHINGTON -- The U.S. gave the final go-ahead Friday to the nation's first COVID-19 vaccine, marking what could be the beginning of the end of an outbreak that has killed nearly 300,000 Americans, according to a person familiar with the decision but not authorized to discuss it publicly.

Shots for health workers and nursing home residents are expected to begin in the coming days after the Food and Drug Administration authorized an emergency rollout of what promises to be a strongly protective vaccine from Pfizer Inc. and its German partner BioNTech.

Initial doses are scarce and rationed as the U.S. joins Britain and several other countries in scrambling to vaccinate as many people as possible ahead of a long, grim winter. It will take months of work to tamp down the coronavirus that has surged to catastrophic levels in recent weeks and already claimed 1.5 million lives globally. While the FDA decision came only after public review of data from a huge ongoing study, it has also been dogged by intense political pressure from the Trump admin-

istration, which has accused the agency of being too slow and even threatened to remove FDA chief Stephen Hahn if a ruling did not come Friday.



The move sets off what will be the largest vaccination campaign in U.S. history -- but it also has global ramifications because it's a role model to many other countries facing the same decision.

The world desperately needs multiple vaccines for enough to go around, and the Pfizer-BioNTech shot is the first based on rigorous scientific testing to emerge from that worldwide race -- a record-setting scientific achievement that shaved years off the usual process. "I don't think you would have found a scientist on this planet that would have predicted this 11 months ago," said Dr.

Paul Offit, a vaccine expert at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia who advises the FDA.

The U.S. is considering a second vaccine, made by Moderna Inc., that could roll out in another week. In early January, Johnson & Johnson expects to learn if its vaccine is working in final testing. Europe is set to make its own decision on the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna shots later this month, an important step as some other candidates that multiple countries were anxiously awaiting have hit roadblocks. Friday, Sanofi and GSK announced a months-long delay after early tests showed their vaccine didn't work well enough in older adults. And China and Russia didn't wait for final-stage tests before beginning vaccinations with some homegrown shots.



About 3 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine are expected in the first shipments around the country, according to officials with Operation Warp Speed, the Trump administration's vaccine development program. A similar amount is to be held in reserve for those recipients' second dose.

Emergency use means the vaccine still is experimental. Most important for would-be recipients to know:

--Some protection begins after the first dose, but it takes a second dose three weeks later for full protection. It's unclear how long protection lasts.

--The vaccine protects against COVID-19 illness, but no one yet knows if it can stop the silent, symptomless spread that accounts for roughly half of all cases. The ongoing study will attempt to answer that but for now, the vaccinated still will need to wear a mask and keep their distance.

--Expect a sore arm and some flu-like

symptoms such as fever, fatigue, headache and chills after the second dose. While uncomfortable, those reactions only last about a day. "That's just your immune system working. It's a good thing," Offit said.



--Authorities are investigating several allergic reactions reported in Britain by people with a history of severe allergies. Offit said it is routine in the U.S. for the vaccinated to stick around for a half-hour so they could get prompt treatment if such reactions appear.

Getting shots into arms is the big challenge, especially as a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found only half of Americans want the vaccine when it's their turn. About a quarter say they won't get it and the rest aren't sure.

President Donald Trump bashed the FDA again last Friday for taking too long, complaining that the agency "is still a big, old slow turtle." One of his deputies even pressed Hahn to clear the shots by the end of the day or face possible firing, two administration officials said.

The FDA is unique in analyzing drug-makers' raw data, a process that takes longer than many other countries' regulatory reviews. In addition, the FDA insisted that large COVID-19 vaccine studies track at least half the participants for two months to look for side effects, a time period when historically any vaccine problems appear. (Courtesy abc13.com)

Related

Houston's DeBakey Medical Center Among 37 VA Hospitals To Get First Vaccine

Dosages



Now that the FDA has approved emergency-use authorization of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine, Houston's VA hospital will be among 37 in the country to receive the first dosages.

The Department of Veterans Affairs made the announcement Thursday in the midst of an FDA panel voting to endorse the vaccine for the emergency-use designation.

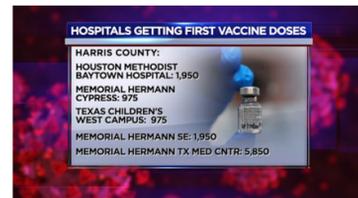
Houston's Michael E. DeBakey VA Health Care System, Dallas' VA Medical Center and San Antonio's Audie L. Murphy VA Hospital were among the Texas VA facilities tapped to receive the vaccines.

Related

Houston Hospitals Ready For Thousands Of Vaccine Doses For Workers

HOUSTON, Texas (KTRK) -- Doses of the Pfizer vaccine could arrive in the Texas Medical Center in just days after an FDA panel endorsed emergency use authorization on Thursday.

Multiple hospital systems told Eyewitness News they expect to receive thousands of doses next week. The vaccine will go first to healthcare workers. The experts said it will likely be spring or summer 2021 before the general public will have access to the vaccines.



Meanwhile, Houston Methodist said they expect 13,000 vaccines in the first shipment next week.

UTHealth anticipates it will begin to receive vaccines for employees later this month, with additional shipments arriving as supplies are available. (Courtesy abc13.com)

Kelsey-Seybold is now scheduling **VIRTUAL** and **IN-PERSON** appointments!



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