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John Robbins 281-965-6390
Jun Gai 281-498-4310

Publisher: Wea H. Lee
President: Catherine Lee
Editor: John Robbins

Address: 11122 Bellaire Blvd., Houston, TX 77072
E-mail: News@scdaily.com



Inside C2

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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Chinese ambassador delivers birthday message to giant panda in Washington zoo

WASHINGTON, Aug. 21 (Xinhua) -- Chinese Ambassador to the United States Qin Gang on Saturday expressed his birthday wishes to giant panda Xiao Qi Ji at the Smithsonian's National Zoo and sent him a birthday gift via video.

"Hello Xiao Qi Ji, as you turn one today, let me wish you a very happy and fabulous birthday," said Qin in a video message posted on his Twitter account.

Xiao Qi Ji, which literally means "little miracle," was born on Aug. 21, 2020 to giant pandas Mei Xiang and Tian Tian.

"You came into the world last year during the pandemic. At such a difficult time, your arrival and every bit of your growth have given us joy and hope. For us, you are a miracle," said Qin.

Over the past year, with care and support from both Chinese and Americans, Xiao Qi Ji has grown from a tiny cub to an energetic and curious panda, said the ambassador.



"You also made your public debut not long ago. People have been watching and sharing every step of your life journey and got excited about it. You have truly added a splash of color to the exchanges between Chinese and American peoples," said Qin.

The ambassador also shared a piece of good news: The number of pandas in the wild in China is increasing. Forty years ago, there were only 1,100 pandas in the wild, but now there are 1,800. They are not "endangered" anymore, yet they will continue to be protected, Qin added.

The cooperation between China and the United States on the protection of giant pandas started in 1972. Mei Xiang and Tian Tian arrived in the United States in 2000.

More than 20 Asian-American advocacy groups have jointly sent an open letter to U.S. President Joe Biden, urging him to pause an ongoing initiative of the Department of Justice targeting China.

The letter, released on Thursday, also called for an independent review on whether the program unfairly targeted individuals based on their race and ethnicity, urging Biden to "redouble" efforts to combat hate and violence against Asian Americans.

"The Initiative ostensibly aims to investigate and prosecute economic espionage and the theft of trade secrets," said the organizations, adding "However, in practical effect, the Initiative, which formally began under the previous Administration, subjects Asian American and Asian immigrant scientists and others -- particularly those of Chinese descent -- to racial profiling, surveillance and wrongful prosecutions, where no evidence of economic espionage or trade secret theft exists."

In the letter, the organizations said the Biden administration should "pause the Initiative's work, pending the results of an independent review to determine whether it unfairly targeted individuals based on their race, ethnicity, or ancestry."

In late July, nearly 100 members of Congress urged U.S. Attorney General Merrick Brian Garland to investigate the Justice Department's alleged racial profiling of Asians.

The so-called "China Initiative" was launched by the U.S. Justice Department in 2018 to probe trade secret theft and economic espionage activities considered threats to U.S. national security.

However, the initiative was widely criticized, according to U.S. media reports, as many scholars and scientists of Asian descent including Asian Americans involved in most of the cases were prosecuted wrongly or despite lack of evidence.

A study released by Johns Hopkins University showed that the initiative also requires 94 federal judicial districts to file at least one accusation regarding China annually.

In the meantime, the letter also expressed strong concerns over the Biden administration's order on a 90-day investigation into the origins of COVID-19 by the intelligence community, saying that the "sad but undeniable truth is that the simple existence of that report will put our communities at risk."

"As you well know, while most scientists agree that transmission via natural origins is a more likely explanation, the hypothesis that COVID originated from Chinese laboratory experiments has sparked a flurry of conspiracy theories that have been weaponized by politicians and pundits resulting in a false scapegoating of Asian Americans as somehow to blame for the pandemic," the letter continued.



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11122 BELLAIRE BLVD., HOUSTON, TX 77072

WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

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Wea H. Lee
Wealee@scdaily.com

Chairman of International District Houston Texas
Publisher Southern Daily Wea H. Lee
 Southern News Group Chairman / CEO
 Chairman of International Trade & Culture Center
 Republic of Guiana Honorary consul at Houston Texas



More Politicians Get COVID-19



Three senators from Maine, Mississippi and Colorado all have tested positive for COVID-19 and all three have been vaccinated.

Senator King said in a statement that he began feeling mildly feverish and he is now quarantining at home and is telling the few people he has been in

contact with to get treated.

Senator Wicker also tested positive and is being treated by his Tupelo-based physician. He is also in isolation and everyone who has come in contact with him also has been notified.

The Senate will not be in session until next

month. With an alarming rise in COVID-19 cases, more Americans have recently made the decision to get vaccinated. In the last six months more than one million doses of vaccines have been administered, it was reported on Thursday. Because it takes weeks to gain immunity following a full

vaccination, even those people who just got vaccinated need to be very cautious.

Today hospitals across the state are doing everything possible to respond to the increasing demand being created by new COVID-19 patients.

The CDC has repeatedly urged people and stressed to them that preventative vaccinations are the most effective means to combat COVID-19.

We very much regret that still so many people don't believe that when you are not protected that the many people you come in contact with will also get infected.

We are so lucky we have the vaccine. For all of us looking at the rest of the world, especially in the poor nations, they don't have the vaccine and now they are suffering greatly.



Southern DAILY Make Today Different

Editor's Choice



People watch an excavator removing rubble from the site of a collapsed hotel after a 7.2 magnitude quake in Les Cayes, Haiti August 16, 2021. The tremor killed at least 2,189 people and reduced tens of thousands of buildings to rubble. REUTERS/Ricardo Arduengo



A man pulls a girl to get inside Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan August 16, 2021, after Taliban militants seized control over the weekend. Thousands of desperate Afghans clutching papers, children and some belongings thronged Kabul airport where gun-toting Taliban members urged those without travel documents to go home. In and around the airport, 12 people



A demonstrator releases a firework during a protest over the government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, in Bangkok, Thailand, August 15, 2021. Demonstrations have gained momentum in recent weeks as groups who sought Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's removal last year return with broader support from people angered by a worsening coronavirus situation. Thailand is on course to pass 1 million



A hyena stands chained to its handler at a circus in Gabasawa, Kano State, Nigeria, July 27, 2021. Hyenas are often viewed as repulsive and sinister, partly due to their scavenging habits in the wild, but in northern Nigeria some men keep the creatures in their homes, display them at festivals and even use their dung to make remedies. REUTERS/Afolabi Sotunde



An evacuee family is greeted following the arrival of Spanish and Afghan citizens at Torrejon airbase after evacuating from Kabul, in Torrejon de Ardoz, outside Madrid, August 19, 2021. REUTERS/Juan Medina



People carry the national flag at a protest held during Afghan Independence Day in Kabul, Afghanistan August 19, 2021. Several people have been killed as protests against the Taliban takeover spread to multiple cities including the capital. REUTERS/Stringer

CDC Director: Studies Show COVID-19 Vaccine Effectiveness 'Declining' Against Delta Variant



Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, testifies during a congressional hearing in Washington on March 18, 2021. (Susan Walsh/Pool/AFP via Getty Images)

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

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), said that data sourced from Israel on COVID-19 vaccines show that the efficacy of the shots has dropped among individuals who received their vaccines early on. Citing three studies that were released by the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Walensky said on Aug. 18 that the vaccines' efficacy decreases over time in preventing infection. Although protection against death and hospitalization is "holding up well," the COVID-19 vaccines' effectiveness is "waning" in even preventing severe illness or death, she said. "Even though our vaccines are currently working well to prevent hospitalizations, we are seeing concerning evidence of waning vaccine effectiveness over time and against the Delta variant," Walensky said during a news conference in explaining why federal officials are now recommending that booster shots be given to Americans eight months after they've been vaccinated with the Pfizer or Moderna shots. The two vaccines, the most widely used

in the United States, were pegged at 95 percent and 94.1 percent effective, respectively, when granted emergency use authorization in December 2020. But the efficacy against infection has plummeted to 53.1 percent for both vaccines, one of the new studies found.



A UK study suggests that COVID-19 vaccines are effective against the Delta variant after two doses, although the protection they offer begins to fall after 30 days. Credit: Ian Forsyth/Getty Researchers with the CDC's COVID-19 Response Team and the Vermont-based Lantana Consulting Group discovered that the two doses of mRNA-based vaccines were about 75 percent effective in

preventing infection in nursing home residents from March through May. During June and July, though, the number dropped by 22 percent. "Because nursing home residents might remain at some risk for SARS-CoV-2 infection despite vaccination, multiple COVID-19 prevention strategies, including infection control, testing, and vaccination of nursing home staff members, residents, and visitors, are critical. An additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine might be considered for nursing home and long-term care facility residents to optimize a protective immune response," the researchers, who analyzed weekly data from the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare, wrote.



People who have had Covid-19 gain even more antibodies when fully vaccinated.

Another study analyzed age-adjusted vaccine effectiveness in New York City between May 3 and July 25. Researchers with the New York State Department of Health and the University at Albany School of Public Health found that effectiveness against infection for adults dropped to 79.8 percent from 91.7 percent. They also said that data from four databases, including the Citywide Immunization Registry, showed that vaccine effectiveness (VE) against hospitalization "was relatively stable," ranging from 91.9 percent to 95.3 percent.

"These findings support a multipronged approach to reducing new COVID-19 hospitalizations and cases, centered on vaccination, and including other approaches such as masking and physical distancing," the researchers said, including additional vaccine doses.

The third study evaluated 1,129 fully vaccinated patients at 21 hospitals across 18 states. Researchers, including scientists from the University of Iowa, the University of Michigan, and Washington University, said the effectiveness of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines against hospitalization declined to 84 percent between 13 and 24 weeks after vaccination from 86 percent between two and 12 weeks after vaccination.



Without booster shots, Walensky suggested, there will be "worsening

infections over time" among those who have been vaccinated against COVID-19. In the backdrop of the CDC's findings, Walensky said that "we are planning for Americans to receive booster shots starting next month," saying that their initiative is designed to "stay ahead of this virus."

As a result, booster doses of the mRNA vaccines made by Pfizer and Moderna will likely be distributed starting the week of Sept. 20. White House COVID-19 response coordinator Jeff Zients and Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy told reporters during the news conference, however, that their plan is contingent on whether the CDC and Food and Drug Administration authorizes the booster doses. The CDC's advisory panel last week recommended booster shots for immunocompromised individuals, a day after drug regulators issued emergency use authorization for third shots for the population. Some outside scientists expressed concern about the move, which could inhibit efforts to get vaccines to developing countries.

"I'm truly disappointed. This decision is not justifiable at all looking at this data. We are going to use up millions of doses to reduce the small risk of mild infections in fully protected people with a tiny risk of hospitalization, while most of the world waits for a first dose," Dr. Muge Cevik, an infectious disease expert at the University of St. Andrews's School of Medicine, wrote on Twitter.



"The message I got from reading all three [studies] was that there may be some reduction in infection protection with delta in nursing homes, but no data about waning protection from severe disease or hospitalization," Dr. Walid Gellad, professor of medicine at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Medicine, added.

Weeks ago, the CDC and FDA said that individuals "do not need a booster shot at this time," contradicting a recommendation made by Pfizer. Last week, the CDC director told The Wall Street Journal that she's "really struggling" with how to communicate the CDC's findings and recommendations to the American public. (Courtesy <https://www.theepochtimes.com/>)

Related
COVID Vaccines Protect Against Delta,

But Their Effectiveness Weakens Over Time

A massive UK study of COVID-19 cases shows that people who are jabbed have good immunity at first, but quickly become more vulnerable to the fast-spreading Delta variant. While the Pfizer-BioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines are effective against the highly infectious Delta variant of SARS-CoV-2, their protection drops away over time, a study of infections in the United Kingdom has concluded. Researchers at the University of Oxford, UK, and the country's Office for National Statistics analysed a vast data set comprising the results of 2,580,021 PCR tests to check for SARS-CoV-2 from 384,543 UK adults between 1 December 2020 and 16 May 2021 — when the Alpha variant was dominant — and 811,624 test results from 358,983 people between 17 May and 1 August 2021, when the Delta variant was more prevalent.



The results, published in a preprint on 19 August, suggest that both vaccines are effective against Delta after two doses, but that the protection they offer wanes with time. The vaccine made by Pfizer in New York City and BioNTech in Mainz, Germany, was 92% effective at keeping people from developing a high viral load — a high concentration of the virus in their test samples — 14 days after the second dose. But the vaccine's effectiveness fell to 90%, 85% and 78% after 30, 60 and 90 days, respectively.

The vaccine developed by Oxford and the pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca in Cambridge, UK, was 69% effective against a high viral load 14 days after the second dose, falling to 61% by 90 days. The drop in effectiveness shouldn't be cause for alarm, says Sarah Walker, a medical statistician at the University of Oxford who led the study. For "both of these vaccines, two doses are still doing really well against Delta", she says.

The data also suggest that the time between doses of vaccine doesn't affect vaccine effectiveness, and that people who have previously tested positive for COVID-19 as well as receiving two vaccine doses have the best protection against future infection. (Courtesy <https://www.nature.com/>)

COMMUNITY

U.S. Adults To Be Offered COVID Booster Shots In Sept.



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

The Biden administration announced a plan for U.S. adults who received either Pfizer or Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine to receive booster shots starting in late September. "Having reviewed the most current data. It is now our clinical judgment that the time to lay out a plan for COVID-19 boosters is now," said Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, MD, MBA, during a briefing of the White House COVID-19 Response Team on Wednesday. "Recent data makes clear that protection against mild and moderate disease has decreased over time." This decline in protection appears to be due both to waning immunity and to the strength and pervasiveness of the Delta variant, he said. "Even though this new data affirms that vaccine protection remains high against the worst outcomes of COVID, we are concerned that this pattern of decline we are seeing will continue in the months ahead, which could lead to reduced protection against severe disease, hospitalization, and death," Murthy said. According to a joint statement from the CDC, FDA, NIH, and National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases that laid out the details of the administration's plan, the boosters will be offered starting the week of September 20 to U.S. adults who received their second mRNA dose at least 8 months earlier. "We are not recommending that you go out and get a booster today," Murthy clarified. The first shots will be given to people vaccinated earliest in the rollout: healthcare providers, residents and staff at long-term care facilities, and other seniors. The plan is contingent on both the FDA completing an independent review of the safety and

effectiveness of a third dose of the Pfizer and Moderna mRNA vaccines and on the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendations after review of the evidence, the joint statement explained.



CDC Director Rochelle Walensky, MD. "Our plan is to protect the American people and to stay ahead of this virus," said CDC Director Rochelle Walensky, MD. In explaining the new decision, she offered three key points: vaccine-induced protection does decline over time, effectiveness against hospitalization and death "remains relatively high," and the vaccines are generally less effective against Delta. New CDC data released in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) on Wednesday showed that in New York state, vaccine effectiveness against infection declined from 91.7% to 79.8% from the period of May 3 to July 25, as the Delta variant became dominant. Effectiveness against hospitalization, however, was stable (91.9% to 95.3%). Another MMWR of long-term care facilities in CDC's National Healthcare Safety Network reported declining effectiveness of the mRNA vaccines during Delta, dropping from an adjusted effectiveness rate of 74.7%

pre-Delta (March to May) to 53.1% during the period of Delta (June-July). "Taken together, these data confirm that while protection against infection may decrease over time, protection against severe disease and hospitalization is currently holding up pretty well," said Walensky. "Preliminary data" from two vaccine cohort effectiveness studies involving more than 4,000 healthcare personnel, first responders, and other frontline workers at eight different sites indicated "waning effectiveness against symptomatic and asymptomatic infection ... from 92% prior to Delta to 64% with Delta," Walensky added.



The effectiveness decreased against Delta, regardless of when an individual was vaccinated, she noted. "These data suggests full vaccination in the context of the Delta variant may be correlated with less protection against SARS-CoV-2 infection than against prior variants." NIAID Director Anthony Fauci, MD, presented the immunological argument for recommending a third vaccine dose. He said that "regardless of the variant," antibody levels decline over time in fully vaccinated people, highlighting a recent study in Science. Higher antibody levels, meanwhile, are associated with better protection, he said, citing a recent preprint. Importantly, boosters with the Moderna vaccine have been shown to increase antibody titers by "at least 10-fold, and likely much more," said Fauci, adding that Pfizer has shared "similar data." "So you get a dramatic increase in antibody titers when you do a third immunization dose," he said. Altogether, the current studies "support the use of a third booster mRNA immunization to increase the overall level of protection." The new guidance on boosters is restricted to recipients of Pfizer or Moderna's COVID shots, and do not apply to individuals who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, the rollout of which began later than the mRNA vaccines. "We expect more data on J&J in the coming weeks," said Murthy. "With those data in hand, we will keep the public informed with a timely plan for J&J booster shots." Murthy and other members of the response

teams continued to underscore the urgency of getting shots to unvaccinated Americans and people around the world, given that virtually all cases that have led to severe disease, hospitalization and death occurred in unvaccinated people. (Courtesy <https://www.medpagetoday.com/>)

Related
U.S. Surgeon General Urges U.S. Fight Against COVID Misinformation

U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy on Thursday called for a national effort to fight misinformation about COVID-19 and vaccines, urging tech companies, health care workers, journalists and everyday Americans

to do more to address an "urgent threat" to public health. "We must confront misinformation as a nation. Lives are depending on it." Given the role the internet plays in spreading health misinformation, Murthy said technology companies and social media platforms must make meaningful changes to their products and software to reduce the spread of misinformation while increasing access to authoritative, fact-based sources. Too often, he said, the platforms are built to encourage, not counter, the spread of misinformation.

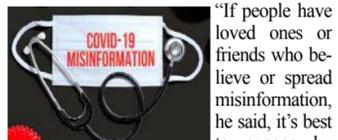
"We are asking them to step up," Murthy said. "We can't wait longer for them to take aggressive action."



U.S. Surgeon General Murthy said, "Social media platforms are built to encourage, not counter, the spread of misinformation...." But the social media platforms have defended their work to stem the tide of misinformation.

The criticism is not new, and Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and other platforms have defended their work to stem the tide of misinformation.

"We agree with the surgeon general," Twitter said in a statement. "Tackling health misinformation takes a whole-of-society approach." Murthy's recommendations went beyond tech firms. Teachers, he said, should expand lessons on media literacy and critical thinking. Journalists, he suggested, should work to responsibly debunk health misinformation without inadvertently spreading it further. And public health professionals, he added, should do a better job answering questions and explaining why public health guidelines sometimes change based on new information. As for everyday Americans, Murthy urged them to verify questionable health information with trusted sources like the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and to exercise critical thinking when exposed to unverified claims.



"If people have loved ones or friends who believe or spread misinformation, he said, it's best to engage by listening and asking questions rather than by confronting them. Misinformation hasn't just harmed our physical health — it has also divided our families, friends, and communities," Murthy wrote in the advisory. "The only way to address health misinformation is to recognize that all of us, in every sector of society, have a responsibility to act." (Courtesy <https://apnews.com/>)