



Weekly Checkup

Biden's COVID-19 Strategy

CHRISTOPHER HOLT | JANUARY 22, 2021

This week the Biden Administration [released](#) a 200-page “National Strategy for the COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness,” including roughly a dozen executive orders (EOs) related to the pandemic signed by President Biden in his first 24 hours in office. Let’s examine the details and key takeaways from Biden’s flurry of COVID-19 actions.

Biden’s strategy document details several goals, which his EOs seek to implement, including restoring trust with the American people; mounting a safe, effective and comprehensive vaccination campaign; mitigating the continued spread of the virus; and addressing shortfalls of critical supplies. **But even as the new administration works to detail and implement these plans, the document and EOs in question are more aspirational than technical, and much of what President Biden would like to undertake will require congressional action.**

A number of the EOs direct federal agencies to develop national strategies to address various pandemic-related challenges such as school reopening. The specifics of how to achieve many of the objectives remain to be determined. Immediate, substantive actions include reversing course on President Trump’s decision to leave the World Health Organization, and requirements that Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations for social distancing and mask wearing be adhered to on all federal properties. Biden will also make additional FEMA funding available to states, localities, and tribes to cover costs related to testing and vaccinations efforts. Many other proposals, including orders to use the Defense Procurement Act to expand the supply of testing, treatment, vaccination, and protective equipment supplies will take a little longer to implement. Other proposals such as the establishment of a new 100,000 worker federal public health service, or increasing the federal share of vaccination-related Medicaid costs to 100 percent, will require Congress to provide new or expanded authority to the Biden Administration, as well as much of the funding Biden hopes to deliver.

Two broad themes are clear immediately, however. First, Biden intends to increase transparency, with plans to expand public briefings and establish new publicly accessible databases tracking both COVID-19 and the administration’s response. Second, Biden is seeking to establish a much more central role federal role in directing and coordinating a national pandemic response. The Biden Administration is proposing to establish 100 federally run vaccination centers; undertaking a number of public information campaigns related to limiting the virus’ spread and promoting vaccine take-up; and seeking to expand the federal role in testing. The administration will also aim to provide more guidelines and direction to schools and employers on how to open their operations safely. Finally, much of Biden’s language is couched in the familiar theme of a new administration’s first 100 days—100 million Americans vaccinated in the first 100 days, schools fully reopened within the first 100 days, etc.

Many specifics of the Biden Administration’s pandemic response remain to be sorted out, but one thing is clear: Biden is looking to assert much stronger federal leadership of the pandemic response. Centralized planning could be crucial to accelerating vaccinations and a return to normalcy, but the administration is also accepting more direct responsibility for the effort than the Trump Administration was willing to do. April 30—the hundred-day mark—looms as a self-imposed measure of its success.

CHART REVIEW: TOTAL COVID-19 CASES VERSUS VACCINE ADMINISTRATION AMONG VARIOUS COUNTRIES

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In advance of President Biden’s inauguration this week, there has been much debate about the effectiveness of the Trump Administration’s COVID-19 vaccination efforts, and how the Biden Administration might change course. As of January 21, the United States has exceeded [24 million](#) COVID-19 cases with approximately [16 million](#) vaccines administered thus far. The chart below shows the number of COVID-19 vaccines administered in comparison to total COVID-19 cases across various countries. As the chart shows, the U.S. response to date is in line with that of most other nations, though both the United Kingdom and Israel have administered more vaccines than their total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases.