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United States

Attacking anti-vaccine movement, Biden mandates widespread COVID shots, tests

By Jeff Mason and Ahmed Aboulenein, Trevor Hunnicutt

WASHINGTON, Sept 9 (Reuters) - President Joe Biden took aim on Thursday at vaccine resistance in America, announcing policies requiring most federal employees to get COVID-19 vaccinations and [pushing large employers](#) to have their workers inoculated or tested weekly.

[The new measures](#), which Biden laid out in remarks from the White House, would apply to about two-thirds of all U.S. employees, those who work for businesses with more than 100 workers.

"We've been patient," Biden told the tens of millions of Americans who have declined to get coronavirus shots. "But our patience is wearing thin, and we've lost much of it."

Taken together, the policies and speech represented Biden's most aggressive move yet to put Americans resistant to getting shots as the fast-spreading Delta variant sparks a new wave of sickness and deaths.

The Delta Wave Explained
Reuters Graphics

Quick Take Open

The surge has proved increased risk not just to the country but to a president who ran on promises to get control of the pandemic. Biden's approval ratings have sagged since he said in July the United States had "turned the corner" on declaring an independence from a deadly virus.[1]

Biden's actions Thursday are expected to be the subject of political and legal challenges.

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Explainer: Beyond Delta, scientists are watching new coronavirus variants emerging

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Despite a full-throttled campaign by the Biden administration urging Americans to get the free and widely available vaccine, [just 52% of adults Americans](#) are fully vaccinated, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

On Thursday, Biden warned that "we're in a tough stretch and it could last for a while."

Infectious disease and health policy experts said the mandates are unlikely to significantly change infection rates quickly.

Still, they would help against potential future waves of the virus, reducing deaths and hospitalizations and alleviating the stress on the healthcare system, said Cornelius Clancy, chief scientist at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

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Corporate, union reaction to Biden vaccine mandate for companies reut.rs/3uVmwl

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"It's absolutely the right thing to do," he said. "Ideally everyone would have been vaccinated already."

YEAR, CONTROL AND MANDATES

In a televised speech running a bit under half an hour, the Democratic president accused it's distinct minority of elected officials who have made it a point of opposing mandates on freedom of choice and economic growth as "making people sick."

The White House [COVID-19 recovery plan](#) was based on the vast majority of eligible Americans being vaccinated this year. But the public health issue has become politicized, with a vocal minority refusing the shots and made mandates.

Florida Republican Governor Ron DeSantis issued an executive order in late-August to ban mandates in schools.

Administration medical officials have said over 97% of people hospitalized with COVID-19 are not vaccinated, and those people account for an even higher share of deaths.

Reuters @
@reuters

Cathy McMorris Rodgers, the senior Republican on the House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee, said Biden "is using fear, control, and mandates."

The Republican National Committee said it intends to sue the Biden administration over the vaccine mandate.

Under Biden's plan, the administration will also require vaccinations for workers at healthcare facilities operated at hospitals and other institutions that participate in Medicare and Medicaid social programs for poor, disabled and older Americans.

Biden previously required that federal employees be vaccinated or get tested. Federal workers now have 75 days to get vaccinated, or face weekly testing and masking in mandated exemption categories.

Federal workers unions suggested on Thursday they would [accept the vaccine mandate](#).

SUBSIDIAL FINES

The U.S. Labor Department's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) plans to take enforcement actions against companies that do not comply with the vaccine mandate, with substantial fines of nearly $16,000 per violation.

The administration is also calling on entertainment venues to require tests or shots and for states to adopt mandates for school employees. It is also multiplying the [flags](#) charged to people who fail to wear masks on airplanes, trains and buses.

It plans as well to ramp up testing capacity for the virus.

Biden will use authority under the Defense Production Act to spur industry to accelerate production of the tests, and the retailers including Walmart [WMT.N], Amazon.com Inc and Kroger Co [KR.N] have reported to sell the tests at cost or have vow to make them more affordable.

Reuters @
@reuters

Biden's administration is developing a single vaccine that combines a booster shot against COVID-19 with its experimental flu shot reut.rs/3uqDdfK

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Critics have said the Biden administration has [put done enough](#) on testing [reuters](#) in recent months to offer. Still, the new demand for tests could be already strained supplies.

Administration officials believe the full recovery of the U.S. economy depends on blunting the spread of the virus, the key focus of the president since entering office in January.

They have also [hinted](#) that the United States and the United States, and deaths and hospitalizations have been rising sharply as the easily transmissible Delta variant of the virus spreads.

The spread of the Delta variant has raised concerns as children head back to school, while also rattling investors, spending company moves to offer plans and [hampering](#) plans hiring.

The White House also plans to offer booster shots providing additional protection to those who are fully vaccinated. But supplies are limited and the World Health Organization has begged rich countries to pause booster programs until more people worldwide are inoculated.

Reuters @
@reuters

Rich nations would do better to send vaccines to Africa to help fight the global COVID-19 pandemic, rather than giving third shots to their populations, the World Health Organization has said. But, the African Union's top health official said reut.rs/3ptaCDR

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But with Delta causing more symptomatic breakthrough infections among fully inoculated individuals, [most vaccinated Americans want a booster](#), a recent Reuters-Ipsos opinion poll found. Boosters could begin the week of Sept. 20.

"Can vaccinated," Biden urged in closing his speech.

Reporting by Jeff Mason, Ahmed Aboulenein and Trevor Hunnicutt; Additional reporting by Michael Tanko, Chris Sanders, Jonathan Landay, Jeff Dunn, Eric Beech, Maya Gebeily and Trevor Hunnicutt; Editing by Heather Timonen, Howard Goller and Peter Cooney

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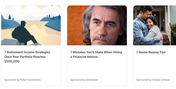

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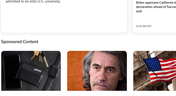

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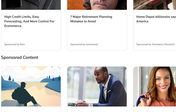

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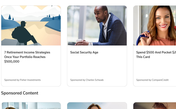

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