

Covid-19: Biden tells states to offer \$100 vaccine incentive as cases rise

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BBC News

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US President Joe Biden spars with reporter over mask mandates

US President Joe Biden has called for states to offer \$100 (£71) to the newly vaccinated in an effort to address flagging job rates amid virus surges.

The president also issued a strict new vaccine requirement for US federal workers, the nation's largest workforce with some two million people.

The order requires employees to show proof of vaccination or be subjected to mandatory testing and masking.

Just under half of the US is fully vaccinated, according to official data.

Speaking from the White House on Thursday, Mr Biden said that the new measures are a result of the highly contagious Delta variant's spread, made worse by a "pandemic of the unvaccinated".

"People are dying and will die who don't have to die," the president said.

Mr Biden added that the monetary incentive may seem unfair to already vaccinated Americans, but "we all benefit if we can get more people vaccinated".

States would use money from the \$1.9tn American Rescue Plan legislation to fund the incentives.

Mr Biden said that the federal government will be "fully reimbursing" small or medium-sized businesses that provide workers paid time off to get vaccinated.

While government workers who refuse to get vaccinated will not be fired, this move by the White House aims to set an example for other employers nationwide.

But public health experts warn that weekly testing is not an effective way of stopping outbreaks.

The Democratic president also addressed theories, spreading mostly in conservative circles, that the jabs are unsafe.

He emphasised there "is nothing political" about the vaccines, which were developed and authorised under a Republican administration and further distributed under his.

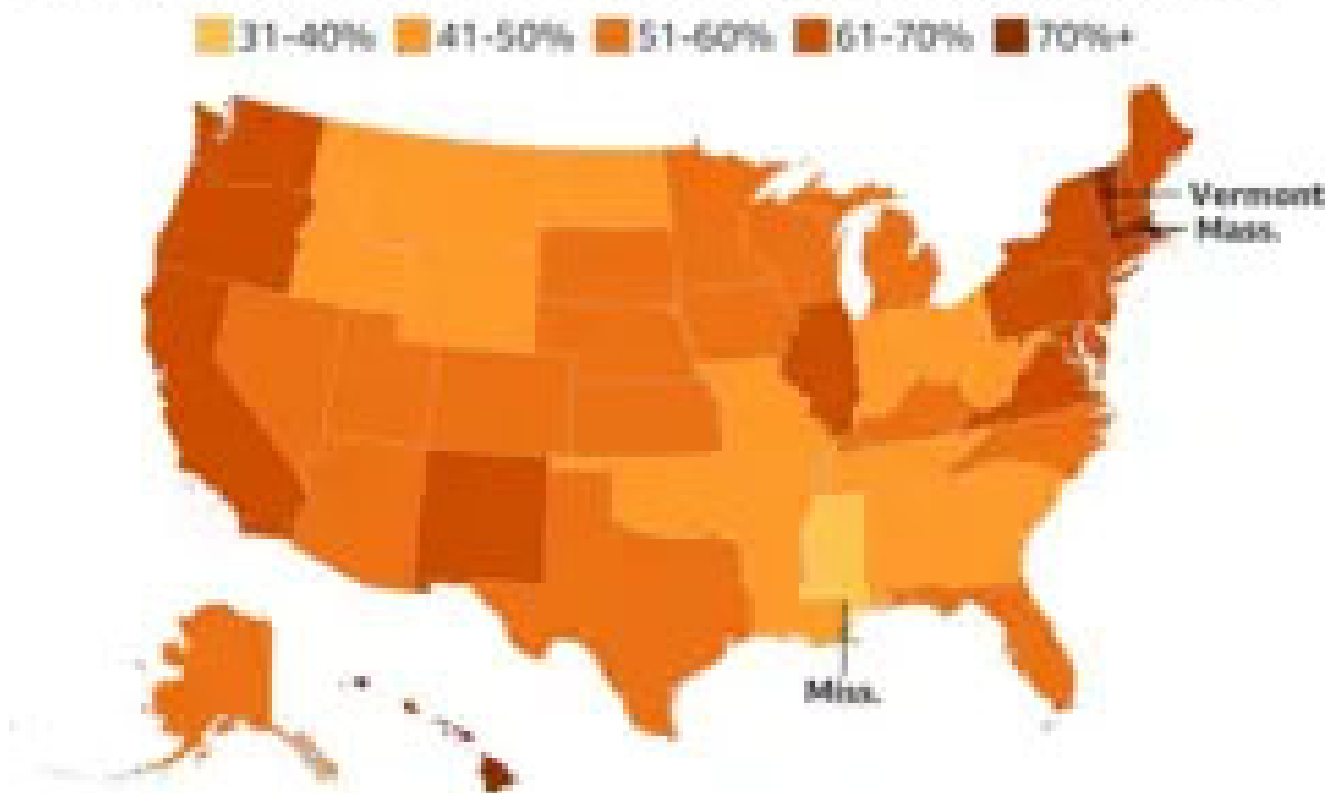
Last month, a study showed that over 99% of Covid-19 deaths have been among the unvaccinated.

Nearly 70% of adults have received at least one jab, according to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control. But vaccination rates are varied across the country. Southern and western regions, which are now experiencing Covid outbreaks, have much lower rates.

It comes as virus-related deaths climb to around 2,000 per week. New cases are now at their highest point in the last three months, with about 60,000 being recorded per day.

Big regional differences in vaccination rate

Percentage of residents given at least one dose, by US state



Source: US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, data to 28 July



Earlier this week, the CDC revised its mask policy for even fully vaccinated Americans in certain regions due to the Delta variant surges. Indoor mask use is now recommended for people in areas with higher rates of Covid transmission.

New York, California, and several other states have gone one step further - requiring that masks be worn in public indoor spaces.

In other Covid news:

- Mr Biden has called on Congress to act to halt a federal moratorium on evictions, which is due to expire on Saturday
- Starting on Thursday, Apple will begin requiring customer to wear masks in about half of their stores
- Atlanta and Washington DC have become the latest cities to return to imposing indoor mask mandates
- At the White House, staff and reporters are wearing masks again after Washington DC upgraded its transmission level to "substantial"

Do \$100 vaccine incentives work?

By BBC Reality Check

US President Joe Biden pointed towards New Mexico, Ohio and Colorado as reason for his \$100 incentive, claiming it has helped increase vaccination rates.

So is there evidence for this?

Last month, people in New Mexico who were fully vaccinated between 14 and 17 June got \$100.

The amount of Johnson & Johnson shots administered in that period quadrupled. It requires just one shot - so it was the quickest way to receive the reward.

According to the state's department of health, more than 20,000 people got either the Johnson & Johnson jab or their second dose of another vaccine between those dates.

In Ohio, the governor is offering state employees \$100 for getting vaccinated and an additional \$25 for their spouses if they do the same.

But this was only announced on 29 July, so it's too early to judge the impact. A similar programme in the state capital Columbus earlier in July saw the weekly vaccination rate increase three-fold.

And in Colorado, since 22 July, people who are vaccinated at certain sites have been given a \$100 gift card for the US retail store Walmart - although so far there's not been a significant uptick in vaccinations.