

Biden chief of staff warns U.S. COVID deaths will reach 500,000 by end of February

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A body wrapped in plastic is prepared to be loaded onto a refrigerated container truck used as a temporary morgue at Brooklyn Hospital Center in New York City. (Photo: AP)

Washington, January 18 (RHC)-- U.S. President-elect Joe Biden's incoming chief of staff Ron Klain has warned that the COVID death toll in the U.S. will reach 500,000 by the end of February as Biden is set to assume control of a struggling economy and surging coronavirus outbreak in less than two days.

"The virus is going to get worse before it gets better. People who are contracting the virus today will start to get sick next month, will add to the death toll in late February, even March, so it's going to take awhile to turn this around," Klain said.

The United States is fast approaching 400,000 virus deaths, with about 3,300 Americans dying from the coronavirus every day in the country. More than 23,983,600 people in the United States have been infected with the coronavirus as of Monday.

Over the past week, there have been an average of 218,971 cases per day in the U.S, an increase of 3 percent from the average two weeks earlier. Klain said the Biden's team was "inheriting a huge mess" in terms of vaccine production and distribution in comments directed at states' disappointment that a reserve of additional vaccines that the Trump administration had promised to release did not exist, US media say.

"But we have a plan to fix it," said Klain, who has been critical of President Trump's handling of the coronavirus pandemic. "We think there are things we can do to speed up the delivery of that vaccine."

Some U.S. states, including New York, are contending with lack of stockpile of additional vaccine doses despite the Trump administration's call for them to loosen eligibility criteria and to begin vaccinating all Americans 65 and older.

Top U.S. infectious diseases expert Dr. Anthony Fauci said on Sunday that he had been trying to sort through the confusion about how many doses were held by the federal government and where they were going. "I think there was just a misunderstanding. When doses were released, an equal amount was kept back to make sure if there was any glitches in the supply flow that the people who got their first doses would clearly get their second doses," Fauci said.

"The decision was made, instead of just giving enough for the first dose and holding back for the second dose, that as soon as they got the doses available, they would give it because now they would have confidence that the next amount they would get."

Brian Deese, the incoming head of the National Economic Council, also said: "The truth is, we're at a very precarious moment. We've got an acute economic crisis and human crisis, and we need decisive action."

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