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Atlanta, February 1 (RHC)-- Confirmed COVID-19 cases in the United States have now topped 26 million, and 440,000 deaths. Hospitalizations fell below 100,000 this weekend for the first time in nearly two months.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has ordered masks to be worn on almost all forms of public transportation, including airplanes, ships, trains, subways, buses, taxis and ride-shares. This comes as experts warn new variants of coronavirus could soon outnumber the original in the U.S.

The variant first identified in South Africa has now been reported in two states: Maryland and South Carolina. Top epidemiologist Michael Osterholm warns a “hurricane” is coming, with major surges expected in the next six to 14 weeks, and urges rushing the first dose of the vaccine into as many arms as possible.

The White House’s chief medical adviser, Dr. Anthony Fauci, said the variants should be a “wake-up call,” and also pushed the goal of vaccinating as many people as quickly as possible. Dr. Anthony Fauci: “Getting people vaccinated as quickly and as efficiently as you possibly can will always be the best way to prevent the further evolution of any mutant, because when you do that, you prevent replication, and replication is essential for mutation.”

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