

Authorities say seven U.S. states make up half of COVID cases

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COVID-19 cases are up about 43 percent over the previous week and daily deaths are up more than 39 percent, according to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [Caitlin Ochs/Reuters]

Miami, August 6 (RHC)-- Seven U.S. states with the lowest COVID-19 vaccination rates account for half of the country's new cases and hospitalisations in the last week, despite making up less than 25 percent of the nation's population, the White House said on Thursday.

The states are Florida, Texas, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi, according to President Joe Biden's COVID-19 coordinator, Jeff Zients, who spoke during a press briefing. Of those states, Florida and Texas account for about a third of new coronavirus cases and an even higher share of hospitalisations in the country. "Driven by the more transmissible Delta variant, these cases are concentrated in communities with low vaccination rates," Zients said.

Although 70 percent of adults nationwide have received one shot, in Mississippi that figure is only 40 percent. Louisiana and Alabama have similar figures: 43 and 44 percent, respectively.

Zients said several states with low vaccination rates have been making a recent push to vaccinate more people, and in the past 24 hours, At least 864,000 doses have been administered nationwide – the highest number since July 3rd. "Vaccinations are the best line of defence against COVID and the Delta variant," Zients said, "and we're doing everything we can to get shots in arms."

The Biden administration has been eager to thaw opposition by some Americans, including those who distrust the government, to taking the vaccine as the highly infectious Delta variant sweeps the country.

COVID-19 cases are up about 43 percent over the previous week and daily deaths are up more than 39 percent, according to US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Dr Rochelle Walensky, who also spoke during the briefing.

"Across the board, we are seeing increases in cases and hospitalisation in all age groups," Walensky said. "Those at highest risk remain people who have not yet been vaccinated. Now is the time to get vaccinated. We know these vaccines are working and we know they save lives."

With over 614,000 deaths, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University, the coronavirus has killed more people in the United States than in any other country.

But the decision by many school boards to enforce mask wearing for students and teachers has angered some parents. A video on social media from Kansas City, Missouri on Thursday showed dozens of parents protesting outside the Johnson County offices during a discussion over a proposed order that would require elementary school students to wear masks while on school grounds. A local reporter said 93 people had requested to speak during the discussion.

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