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Inside C2

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

Southern Daily News is published by Southern News Group Daily

Sunday, April 11, 2021

U.S. considering cash payments to Central America to stem migration

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -The United States is considering a conditional cash transfer program to help address economic woes that lead migrants from certain Central American countries to trek north, as well as sending COVID-19 vaccines to those countries, a senior White House official told Reuters on Friday.

The possible cash transfer program would be targeted at people in the Northern Triangle region of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, Roberta Jacobson, the White House's southern border coordinator, told Reuters in an interview, without saying who exactly would receive the cash.

Roughly 168,000 people were picked up by U.S. Border Patrol agents at the U.S.-Mexico border in March, the highest monthly tally since March 2001 and part of steadily increasing arrivals in recent months.

"We're looking at all of the productive options to address both the economic reasons people may be migrating, as well as the protection and security reasons," she said.

Jacobson did not provide a detailed explanation of how any cash transfer program would work.

"The one thing I can promise you is the U.S. government isn't going to be handing out money or checks to people," she said.

Jacobson said that no decision had been made regarding whether to prioritize sending vaccines to the Northern Triangle countries, but added that the Biden administration would consider how the vaccines could help ailing economies in those countries.



Doctor who performed George Floyd autopsy stands by homicide conclusion

MINNEAPOLIS (Reuters) -The medical examiner who performed the autopsy on George Floyd after last May's deadly arrest explained how he concluded the death was a homicide at the hands of police in testimony on Friday at former Minneapolis policeman Derek Chauvin's murder trial

As jurors studied autopsy photographs, Dr. Andrew Baker, Hennepin County's chief medical examiner, said he stood by the cause of death he determined last year: "cardiopulmonary arrest complicating law enforcement subdual, restraint and neck compression."

In short, Baker ruled that Floyd's heart stopped beating and his lungs stopped working because Chauvin, 45, and other officers pinned him to the ground in a way that starved his body of oxygen.

Prosecutors also have presented testimony from four other medical experts to challenge Chauvin's defense against murder and manslaughter charges - that Floyd may have died of a drug overdose - and back up Baker's findings. Chauvin has pleaded not guilty.

Chauvin, who is white, was seen in videos of the arrest kneeling for more than nine minutes on Floyd's neck as the 46-year-old Black man, in handcuffs, begged for his life in a fading voice. Floyd's death prompted protests against racism and police brutality in many cities in the United States and around the world. Here is a look at some important moments from the 10th day of witness testimony in the trial:

DR. ANDREW BAKER, MEDICAL EXAMINER WHO PERFORMED FLOYD AUTOPSY

Baker described how he performed the autopsy, including

extra steps to cut into the flesh around where Floyd's wrists were handcuffed and along his back to look for bruising from the arrest. Chauvin and three other officers were attempting to arrest Floyd on suspicion of using a fake \$20 bill to buy cigarettes at a grocery store. They were fired the following day.

Baker said he noted Floyd's heart disease and the fentanyl and methamphetamine found in his blood on the death certificate because they may have played a role in the death, but "were not direct causes." "Mr. Floyd's use of fentanyl did not cause the subdual or the neck restraint, his heart disease did not cause the subdual or the neck restraint," Baker told the jury, referring to the way police pressed Floyd face down against the street.

Prosecutor Jerry Blackwell asked Baker why he did not photograph Floyd's heart, anticipating

questions by Chauvin's lawyer on whether heart disease caused Floyd's death.

"I don't normally photograph organs that appear to be perfectly normal unless there's some reason to," Baker said. "I don't have a photograph of Mr. Floyd's spleen or Mr. Floyd's liver, either, because those were also grossly normal." **DR. LINDSEY THOMAS, FORENSIC PATHOLOGIST** Dr. Lindsey Thomas, an assistant medical examiner in the Hennepin County medical examiner's office until she went into "semi-retirement" in 2017, said the sheer volume of videos of Floyd's arrest helped support Baker's findings.

"There's never been a case I was involved in that had videos over such a long time frame and from so many different perspectives," Thomas testified, saying the videos made it clear physical signs

associated with opioid overdose were not present in Floyd's death.

Thomas said she had performed more than 5,000 autopsies during her career. While physically examining a body can be helpful in determining a cause of death, Thomas said other records and inquiries can sometimes be even more illuminating.

"What was absolutely unique in this case was the volume of materials I had to review," Thomas said, referring to videos recorded on bystanders' cellphones and police body-worn cameras. Thomas said the videos made clear this was not a sudden death from a heart attack. She said the videos also did not show signs of a fentanyl overdose "where someone becomes very sleepy and then just sort of gradually, calmly, peacefully stops breathing."

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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

CORONAVIRUS DIARY

04/10/2021



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Volunteers Patrol On The Street



We really admire these young people. They all care about our community especially in this pandemic and anti-Asian hate crime period.

We really want to see all Americans to try and organize such volunteer groups to do the same mission.

Asian Americans are in fear, rage and anxiety these days. We need to help each other. We all hope we can make our stores and community safer.

In recent weeks a group of volunteers gathered in New York Queen's main street to patrol the street. A group led by Ms. Ting formed the group to watch anything happening on the street in order to help many seniors and to make sure they are safe when they crossed the street.

I remember many years ago my old classmate Mr. Chan did the same thing. He organized a group of volunteers to patrol Boston's Chinatown after dark. Because of their help, the safety of Chinatown was improved dramatically.



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Southern DAILY Make Today Different

Editor's Choice



A fire burns in front of the police on the Springfield Road as protests continue in Belfast, Northern Ireland, April 8, 2021. REUTERS/Jason Cairnduff



A model displays an outfit created by Agatha Ruiz de la Prada during the Mercedes Benz Fashion Week in Madrid, Spain. REUTERS/Sergio Perez



Rioters throw burning bottles at the police on Springfield Road as protests continue in Belfast, Northern Ireland April 8, 2021. REUTERS/Jason Cairnduff



Police vehicles are seen behind a hijacked bus burning on Shankill Road as protests continue in Belfast, Northern Ireland, April 7, 2021. REUTERS/Jason Cairnduff



Jockeys, owners and trainers stand during a minutes' silence after Buckingham Palace announced Britain's Prince Philip had died, at Aintree Racecourse in Liverpool, April 9. Pool via REUTERS/Scott Heppell



A man gestures in front of Buckingham Palace, April 9, 2021. REUTERS/Henry Nicholls

CDC: Variant Found In Britain Most Common Now In The U.S.



CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky speaks to the press after visiting the Hynes Convention Center FEMA Mass Vaccination Site in Boston, Mass., on March 30, 2021. (Photo/E. Clark-Pool/Getty Images)

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

WASHINGTON—A variant of the coronavirus first identified in Britain is now the most common strain circulating in the United States.

The director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, says the strain, formally known as B.1.1.7, is “now the most common lineage circulating in the United States.”

The strain has been shown to be more transmissible and infectious among younger Americans, which Walensky says contributed to rising case counts in recent weeks. Walensky says new outbreaks have been tied to youth sports and daycare centers. She particularly encouraged states with rising caseloads to curtail or suspend youth sport activities to slow the spread of the virus.

The United States leads the world with 30.8 million confirmed cases and more than 556,000 confirmed deaths.



Related

All Our Recent Progress With COVID-19 Could Be Wiped Out By Variants, CDC Director Says

(CNN)The US is at risk of losing all its recent gains in the battle against Covid-19 as highly contagious variants take advantage of Americans getting lax with safety measures.

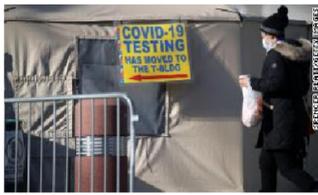
“Please hear me clearly: At this level of cases with variants spreading, we stand to completely lose the hard-earned ground we have gained,” said Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

After weeks of tumbling case numbers, new infections are on the rise again -- about 2% more this past week compared to the previous week, Walensky said Monday.

“Similarly, the most recent seven-day average of deaths has also increased more than 2% ... to nearly 2,000 deaths per day.”

Walensky also called out states that were easing up on Covid-19 safety mandates.

“I am really worried about reports that more states are rolling back the exact public health measures we have recommended to protect people from Covid-19,” she said.



“Please stay strong in your conviction. Continue wearing your well-fitting mask and taking the other public health prevention actions that we know work,” Walensky added.

“Ultimately, vaccination is what will bring us out of this pandemic. To get there, we need to vaccinate many more people.”

New variants keep spreading

March will be a very important chapter in this pandemic. The CDC has predicted the highly contagious B.1.1.7 variant first detected in the UK will become the dominant strain in the US this month.

More than 2,460 infections involving variant strains have been reported, according to the CDC data. The vast majority of those cases -- at least 2,400 -- are of the highly contagious B.1.1.7 strain.

Those counts are probably much lower than the actual number of people infected by variants. The numbers represent only those variant cases found through genomic sequencing, the CDC has said.

The US has lagged behind dozens of other countries in the proportion of cases tested for variants, but the CDC said it's working to scale up those efforts.



Can vaccines fend off the new variants?

Johnson & Johnson, Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech are trying to make sure their vaccines get ahead of the variants.

The B.1.351 strain first detected in South Africa has the most worrying effects on the ability of vaccines to produce an immune response, Dr. Heather Scobie said at the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) meeting on Monday.

She also said two doses of the Covid-19

vaccine protect people better than just one dose.

“Five studies have shown that postponing the second mRNA dose may leave some people less protected against the SARS-Cov-2 variants,” Scobie told the ACIP meeting.

The Moderna and Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines are mRNA vaccines.

“All of the studies showed improved neutralization of B.1.1.7 and B.1.351 after the second vaccine dose,” she said. “In a few studies, people who had recovered from Covid-19 and received one vaccine dose had moderate protection against B.1.351.”



Johnson & Johnson is working on a booster to help its Covid-19 vaccine deal with new strains of coronavirus variants, CEO Alex Gorsky said Monday.

“While we're encouraged and we're confident in the current vaccine that we have, you've always got to be preparing for the future and frankly for the unknown,” Gorsky said.

Last week, Moderna said it has designed a booster shot to help stave off the B.1.351 strain, which has worried scientists because it has a mutation that might affect the efficacy of vaccines.

That shot would serve as a booster for people who have already been vaccinated and as a primary vaccine for people who haven't had coronavirus and have not yet been vaccinated.

Moderna is also testing a third, lower dose of its current vaccine in trial participants to see if that would protect against troubling variants.

Pfizer and BioNTech said last week that they've started testing how well a third dose of their authorized vaccine stacks up against new variants.



On Monday, BioNTech CEO Ugur Sahin said

it will take another six to eight weeks to get real-world data that shows how effective the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is against the B.1.351 variant.

Many more need vaccine before herd immunity

While news of third Covid-19 vaccine is worth celebrating, the US is still a long way off from herd immunity. That's when enough people are protected against a virus that it cannot spread through the population.

About 15.3% of the US population has received at least one shot of their two-dose Moderna or Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, according to CDC data available Monday.

About 7.7% of Americans have been fully vaccinated with both doses.

Vaccines will be tested in children

Now that the Johnson & Johnson vaccine has proven to be safe and effective in adults, the company will begin studies with children, said Dr. Macaya Douoguih, head of clinical development and medical affairs with J&J's vaccine arm, Janssen.

“We will conduct several immunogenicity and safety studies in children from 17 years of age down to neonates,” Douoguih told a CDC advisory committee Sunday.

“The study in adolescents, we hope, will open next week. We are also anticipating a study in pregnant women in the second and third trimesters toward the end of March, early April,” Douoguih said.



Johnson & Johnson also plans to begin study in immunocompromised people in the third quarter of this year, Douoguih said.

The FDA's emergency use authorization for the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is currently for use in adults 18 and older.

The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine has been authorized for people 16 and older, and the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine has been authorized for people 18 and older.

Both Moderna and Pfizer have started enrolling children in Covid-19 vaccine trials. (Courtesy cnn.com)

COMMUNITY

Variant Could Be Dominant Strain By Spring

U.K. COVID-19 Variant Cases Doubling Every 10 Days In U.S.



Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

LA JOLLA, Calif. — The highly contagious variant of COVID-19, first detected in the United Kingdom, is now tearing across the United States. That is the conclusion of a new report led by members of the Scripps Research Institute. Their study finds this rapidly spreading version of coronavirus may become the dominant strain of the illness by the spring.

Dubbed B.1.1.7, researchers say the variant may already be moving through at least 30 states as of January 2021. Although previous studies have determined B.1.1.7 is no more deadly than other strains of COVID-19, its ability to spread exponentially is the major concern. According to the findings of this pre-print study — meaning they have not been peer-reviewed yet — cases of the U.K. strain are doubling roughly every 10 days.

“We found that while the fraction of B.1.1.7 among SGTf samples varied by state, detection of the variant increased at a logistic rate similar to those observed elsewhere, with a doubling rate of a little over a week and an increased transmission rate of 35-45%,” researchers write in their report in MedRxiv.

U.K. COVID variant already reported

in 33 states

The origins of B.1.1.7 are still a mystery, but the first cases appeared in the U.K. before the new year. By November, the majority of all new cases of COVID-19 in that country were from the B.1.1.7 strain.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention add that the new variant contains several mutations, including one in the receptor binding domain of its spike protein. This spike has become infamous during the pandemic for attaching to human cells and then cutting into them to reproduce.



According to the CDC's latest figures,

there are at least 690 confirmed cases of the B.1.1.7 strain in America. Those infections come from 33 different states, including over 200 in Florida.

“U.S. on similar trajectory as other countries where B.1.1.7 became dominant variant”

A report in December, by researchers from Public Health England (PHE), discovered that the new strain does not appear to cause more serious infections than earlier ones. In comparison to the more common varieties of COVID, the death rate from B.1.1.7 remained virtually unchanged in a study of over 2,700 British patients.

Despite those earlier findings, the threat from the virus's higher transmission rates is worrying scientists. The report warns that the U.S. may soon look like Europe in terms of this COVID variant's widespread impact.

“Our study shows that the U.S. is on a similar trajectory as other countries where B.1.1.7 rapidly became the dominant SARS-CoV-2 variant, requiring immediate and decisive action to minimize COVID-19 morbidity and mortality,” the researchers conclude.

Related

New Coronavirus Variant Doesn't Cause Worse Infections Or Lead To More Deaths, Study Says

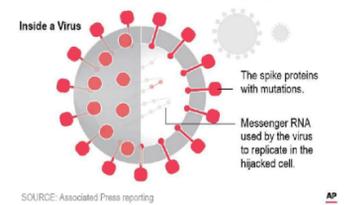
LONDON — As millions prepare to receive their coronavirus vaccine, fears are growing of a new variant strain of SARS-CoV-2 detected in the United States and England. This new variant, dubbed B.1.1.7, could be more contagious than previous strains of the coronavirus, but a new report is at least bringing some positivity into 2021. Researchers from Public Health England (PHE) find the variant is not likely to put more patients in the hospital or cause more deaths than other COVID strains. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, B.1.1.7 is responsible for 60 percent of the new infections in London since November. The origin of this variant remains a mystery, but the CDC says B.1.1.7 has several mutations, includ-

ing one in the receptor binding domain of its spike protein. This is the part of the virus which attaches to cells and cuts its way into them to reproduce.

A recent study by the Centre for Mathematical Modelling of Infectious Diseases also finds that the new coronavirus variant, which researchers call VOC 20212/01, is 56 percent more contagious than other COVID strains. Despite this, the team from PHE concludes it is not anymore dangerous to patients during the pandemic.

The new coronavirus variant

The new variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 has several mutations on its spike proteins. These spikes are used by the virus to attach to and infect cells. They also are what vaccines and antibody drugs target.



SOURCE: Associated Press reporting

“Preliminary results from the cohort study found no statistically significant difference in hospitalization and 28-day case fatality between cases with the variant (VOC 20212/01) and wild-type comparator cases,” study authors write in the report, Investigation of novel SARS-CoV-2 variant. **No serious differences in the new coronavirus variant**

The British study examined 1,769 patients with “wild-type” or common strains of SARS-CoV-2 and 1,769 people with the B.1.1.7 variant. The results reveal no major differences in the age of patients, their ethnicities, and living situations. Researchers discovered 16 COVID patients (0.9%) with the B.1.1.7 strain had to go to the hospital due to their illness. In comparison, 26 patients (1.5%) with a wild-type strain were hospitalized during the study. Although scientists did not have complete records on patient deaths, the report finds 12 of 1,340 patients with the new variant died — just under one percent. Only 10 patients out of 1,360 died of a wild-type of COVID-19 (0.73%). Study authors also report that the new coronavirus strain does not seem to raise the risk of contracting the illness a second

time.

“There was also no significant difference in the likelihood of reinfection between variant cases and the comparator group,” the report notes.

Only two people who had the B.1.1.7 strain ended up getting sick again within 90 days of their illness. The odds are just as rare among common forms of coronavirus, with only three people getting sick a second time. (Courtesy studyfinds.org)



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