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Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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Biden keeps Aug. 31 deadline to complete Afghan evacuation

U.S. President Joe Biden on Tuesday told Group of Seven (G7) leaders that the United States aimed at completing Afghan evacuation by Aug. 31, while asking for contingency plans to adjust the timeline if necessary.

Biden attended a virtual G7 summit over Afghanistan earlier in the day, during which "he confirmed we are currently on pace to finish by August 31st," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said in a statement.

"He also made clear that with each day of operations on the ground, we have added risk to our troops with increasing threats from ISIS-K," she said, referring to the local affiliate of the Islamic State. "And that completion of the mission by August 31st depends on continued coordination with the Taliban, including continued access for evacuees to the airport."

"In addition, the President has asked the Pentagon and the State Department for contingency plans to adjust the timeline should that become necessary," she added.

The statement came as multiple U.S. news outlets reported that Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns held a secret meeting with Taliban senior leader Abdul Ghani Baradar on Monday in Kabul, which likely covered the Aug. 31 deadline issue.

Earlier on Tuesday, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid made it clear that the United States should withdraw all troops and contractors from the country before the deadline and no extension for the ongoing evacuation process would be possible.

Biden is facing pressure from allies and lawmakers to extend the ongoing evacuation beyond Aug. 31. According to media reports, Britain and France had expected Biden to leave U.S. troops in Kabul for additional days for the evacuation.

In a Tuesday interview with FOX News, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell urged the president to "forget about the August 31st deadline" and to continue the evacuation.

Some congressional Democrats also questioned whether the evacuation could be completed in days. "It's hard for me to imagine all of that can be accomplished between now and the end of the month," House Intelligence Committee Chair Adam Schiff told reporters on Monday after receiving a classified briefing on Afghanistan.



Afghan president vows to prevent instability in country

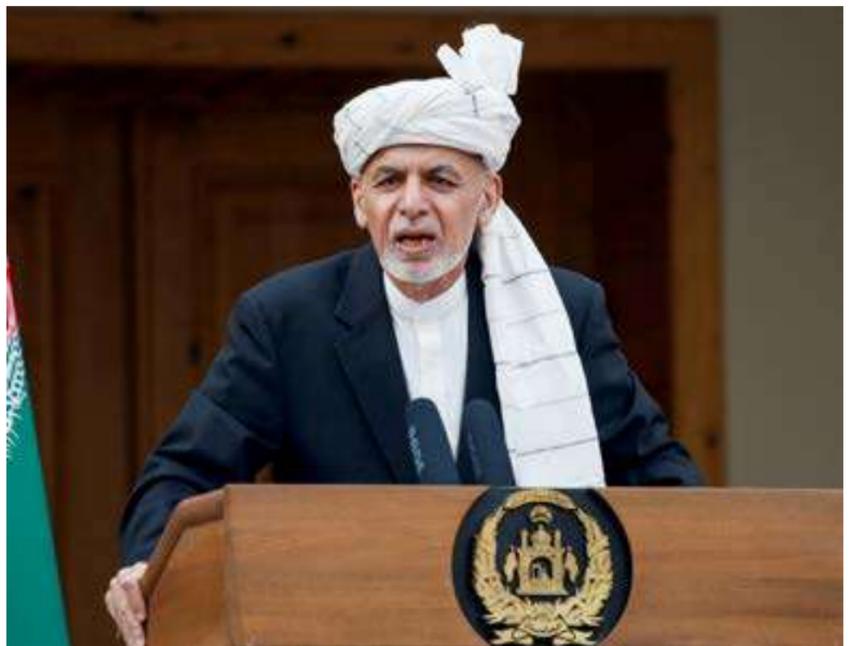
KABUL, Aug. 14 (Xinhua) -- Afghan president Mohammad Ashraf Ghani on Saturday vowed to prevent instability in his war-battered country amid the intensified fighting and Taliban's advance towards major cities.

"It is a matter of pride that the security and defense forces of Afghanistan have defended the country and ensuring harmony among the forces is my priority," Ghani said in his short televised address to the nation.

The president pledged that he would not allow further instability in his country.

"The Afghans are suffering due to the imposed war and I assure you to prevent the further suffering of the people of Afghanistan and this is my historic responsibility."

President Ghani also said that he has initiated "consul-



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08/25/2021

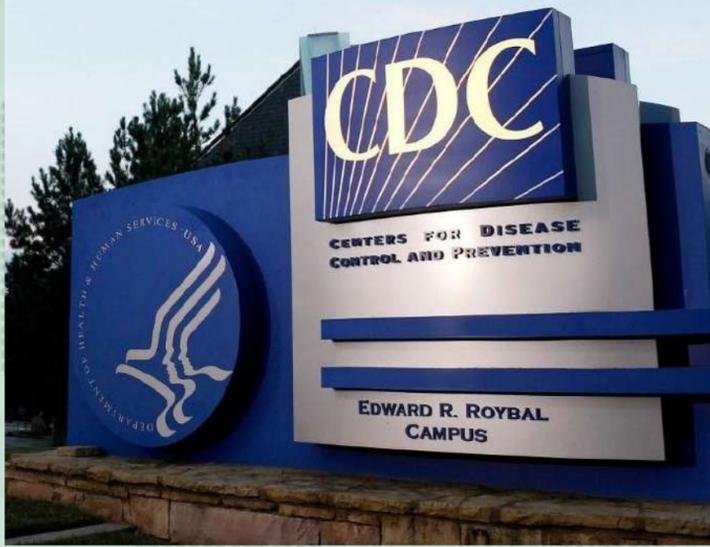


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FDA Gives Pfizer Vaccine Full Approval



The Food and Drug Administration gave full approval to the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine and claimed it is a key achievement for public health.

The approval means the public can be very confident that this vaccine meets the high standards for safety, effectiveness and quality. Back in December 2020, the FDA allowed the Pfizer vaccine to be used under an emergency use authorization.

The final approval also means that the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine gets a brand name and will be marketed as Comirnaty. The FDA still does not recommend that children under the age of 12 get the Pfizer vaccine.

Now all the schools are open and all the kids have gone back to school. Without

vaccinations, this is the biggest challenge for the schools. The American Academy of Pediatrics also warned doctors not to give the vaccine to children under the age of 12 until the FDA gives its approval.

The Biden administration also faces the question right now of whether having the full approval makes a difference in terms of legal authority to issue a vaccination requirement.

Today even the school kids need to wear masks to not become a political issue.

We urge all adults to be vaccinated as soon as possible. Our community needs the protection to recover and return to a normal life.

The Pfizer vaccine's full approval from the FDA should give many reasons to those people who still refuse to be vaccinated to reconsider their thinking.



Southern DAILY Make Today Different

Editor's Choice



The cauldron is lit during the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Paralympics. REUTERS/Athit Perawongmetha



People who have been evacuated from Afghanistan arrive at Melsbroek military airport after Taliban insurgents entered Afghanistan's capital Kabul, in Melsbroek, Belgium. REUTERS/Johanna Geron



An employee of RS No. 9 Carnaby, a Rolling Stones branded shop, places a tribute to Rolling Stones drummer Charlie Watts on the window of the store following the death of the drummer, in London, Britain. REUTERS/Henry Nicholls



A girl helps secure her family's tent at an encampment set up on a soccer field after the August 14 earthquake in Les Cayes, Haiti. REUTERS/Ralph Tedy Erol



U.S. President Joe Biden gives a statement about the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. REUTERS/Leah Millis



Evacuees wait to board a Boeing C-17 Globemaster III during an evacuation at Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan. U.S. Marine Corps/Sgt. Isaiah Campbell

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

BUSINESS

How COVID-19 Is Affecting The Globe And The Future

COVID-19: Coronavirus Pandemic Review



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

Confirmed cases of COVID-19 have passed 208.6 million globally, according to Johns Hopkins University. The number of confirmed deaths stands at more than 4.38 million. More than 4.76 billion vaccination doses have been administered globally, according to Our World in Data. Sydney residents must brace for more deaths, authorities said on Wednesday, as the city continued to break records for new daily infections despite a nearly two-month lockdown. The state of New South Wales reported its biggest daily rise of 633 new cases, including 545 in Sydney. New Zealand has returned to life in lockdown for the first time in six months in a bid to halt any spread of the infectious Delta variant of the coronavirus. The number of COVID-19 cases had risen to 10 on Wednesday, but modelling suggested numbers could rise to 50-100. Japan on Tuesday extended its state of emergency in Tokyo and other regions and announced new measures covering seven more prefectures to counter a spike in COVID-19 infections that is threatening the medical system.



Cuba has turned to the military to provide oxygen after its main oxygen plant broke down. The country is in the midst of a Delta variant-driven coronavirus surge that has resulted in record numbers of cases and deaths, swamping some provincial health systems. South-East Asian countries need more help securing COVID-19 vaccines, as the region struggles to contain record infections and deaths driven by the Delta variant, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said. Botswana needs to budget an extra 1.13 billion pula (\$100 million) to help secure COVID-19 vaccines and equipment as the southern African country battles a third wave of infections, Finance Minister Peggy Serame told parliament on Tuesday. British inflation fell to the Bank of England's 2% target last month in an unexpectedly sharp slowdown that economists said was most likely a blip as the reopening of the economy after lockdown drives prices higher.



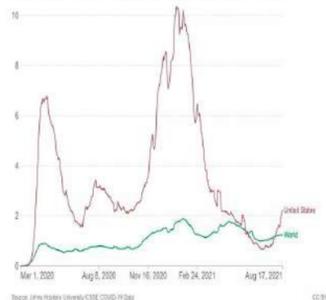
The U.S. records more than 1,000 COVID-19 deaths in 24 hours

The United States reported more than 1,000 COVID-19 deaths on Tuesday, equating to around 42 fatalities an hour, according to a Reuters tally, as the Delta variant continues to ravage parts of the country with low vaccination rates.

Coronavirus-related deaths have spiked in the US over the past month and are averaging 769 per day, the highest since mid-April, according to the Reuters tally.

President Joe Biden's administration confirmed on Tuesday evening it planned to extend requirements for travellers to wear masks on planes, trains and buses and at airports and train stations until mid-January.

Daily new confirmed COVID-19 deaths per million people. Shows a striking 3-day average. Latest testing and challenges in the attribution of the cause of death means that the number of confirmed deaths may not be an accurate count of the true number of deaths from COVID-19.



COVID-19 deaths in the US are rising.

Image: Our World in Data

As in many other countries, the Delta variant has presented a major challenge.

The Reuters tally from state data on Tuesday showed 1,017 deaths, taking the US death toll from the pandemic to just under 623,000 people, the highest number of deaths officially reported by any country in the world.

The last time the US recorded more than 1,000 deaths on a daily basis was in March.

3. Pope Francis: Get vaccinated as a 'gesture of love'

Pope Francis issued an appeal on Wednesday urging people to get inoculated against COVID-19, saying the vaccines could bring an end to the pandemic, but needed to be taken by everyone.

"Thanks to God's grace and to the work of many, we now have vaccines to protect us from COVID-19," the pope said in a video message made on

behalf of the non-profit US group the Ad Council and public health coalition COVID Collaborative.

"They grant us the hope of ending the pandemic, but only if they are available to all and if we work together." Vaccines are widely available in mainly wealthier nations, but mistrust and hesitancy over the newly developed shots have meant that many people are refusing to take them, leaving them especially vulnerable as the Delta variant spreads.



By contrast, poorer nations still do not have access to large-scale vaccine supplies.

Medical experts have warned that ever-more dangerous variants might develop if the virus is allowed to circulate in large pools of non-vaccinated people.

Pope Francis was himself vaccinated in March, saying at the time that it was an ethical obligation.

"Vaccination is a simple but profound way of promoting the common good and caring for each other, especially the most vulnerable. I pray to God that everyone may contribute their own small grain of sand, their own small gesture of love," the pope said in his latest video message. (Courtesy weforum.org)

Related Has COVID-19 Pandemic Created An "Immunization Renaissance?"

Key Points The COVID-19 vaccine effort has been remarkable – and it may have a lasting legacy for the way in which vaccines are developed and deployed in future.

The response to the pandemic has triggered remarkable innovations. The development of COVID-19 vaccines was the fastest in history; and its rollout is the largest public health effort ever in peacetime. However, it's also true that, despite multiple warnings, including other epidemics, the world was largely ill-prepared for COVID-19.

These three factors – the lack of preparation for the pandemic, speedy vaccine development, and a global deploy-

ment effort (albeit with varied success) – could be the foundation for an "immunization renaissance."

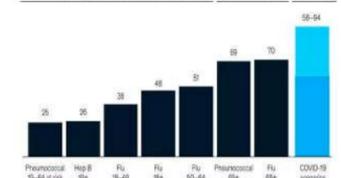
Applying novel vaccine technologies to other diseases

The effort against COVID-19 resulted in the largest and most diverse vaccine pipeline for any disease in history. As of early August 2021, there were 21 vaccines in use around the world and 294 candidates in research and development. Moreover, new technology platforms have been validated, such as mRNA and viral-vectors, enabling new immunological approaches and demonstrating unprecedented speed and scalability: the first mRNA drug product was available 42 days after the SARS-CoV2 sequence was published. These technologies could be used to develop treatments against other intractable diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, and cancer while also making vaccines more easily deployable, for example by being effective at room temperature. Other platforms in development could provide additional options, particularly if public and private investment in R&D is reinvigorated.

Ending the pandemic could require COVID-19 vaccination uptake in the range of between 58% and 94%, higher than most adult vaccine benchmarks.

Overall COVID-19 vaccine rates may be lower than flu or pneumococcal rates for seniors.

% of US population vaccinated by disease and age group



Adults 18-64 Average vaccination rate of between 35% and 40%

Elderly 65+ Average vaccination rate of <10%

COVID-19 uptake needed at 58% to reach herd immunity

58-94

Pneumococcal 18-64 at risk

Hep B 18+

Flu 18-49

Flu 50-64

Pneumococcal 65+

Flu 65+

COVID-19 seniors

Source: CDC

Public attitudes towards health interventions have been a huge challenge historically and have often taken decades to change, be it polio vaccination or campaigns against smoking or for seat-belts. So the current trend towards more positive public attitudes on vaccination is a significant gain. The public is also more engaged than ever: discussions on vaccine efficacy have moved from scientific conference podiums to household dinner tables. This is a unique moment to foster continued engagement on the broader benefits of vaccinations to increase awareness and vaccination rates against other diseases. (Courtesy weforum)

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

COMMUNITY

Threat Of A Vaccine-Proof Variant Only 'A Few Mutations Away?'



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

July 30, 2021 – CDC Director Rochelle Walensky, MD, made a dire prediction during a media briefing this week that, if we weren't already living within the reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, would sound more like a pitch for a movie about a dystopian future. "For the amount of virus circulating in this country right now largely among unvaccinated people, the largest concern that we in public health and science are worried about is that the virus...[becomes] a very transmissible virus that has the potential to evade our vaccines in terms of how it protects us from severe disease and death," Walensky told reporters on Tuesday. A new, more elusive variant could be "just a few mutations away," she said. "That's a very prescient comment," Lewis Nelson, MD, professor and clinical chair of emergency medicine and chief of the Division of Medical Toxicology at Rutgers New Jersey Medical School in Newark, tells Medscape Medical News. "We've gone through a few mutations already that have been named, and each one of them gets a little more transmissible," he says. "That's normal, natural selection and what you would expect to happen as viruses mutate from one strain to another." "What we've mostly seen this virus do is evolve to become more infectious," says Stuart Ray, MD. "That is the remarkable feature of Delta – that it is so infectious." He says that the SARS-CoV-2 has evolved largely as expected, at least so far. "The potential for this virus to mutate has been something that has been a concern from early on." "The viral evolution is a bit like a ticking clock. The more we allow infections to occur, the more likely changes will occur. When we have

lots of people infected, we give more chances to the virus to diversify and then adapt to selective pressures," says Ray, vice-chair of medicine for data integrity and analytics and professor in the Division of Infectious Diseases at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore, Maryland.



"The problem is if the virus changes in such a way that the spike protein – which the antibodies from the vaccine are directed against – are no longer effective at binding and destroying the virus, and the virus escapes immune surveillance," Nelson says. If this occurs, he says, "we will have an ineffective vaccine, essentially. And we'll be back to where we were last March with a brand-new disease."

Technology to the Rescue?

The flexibility of mRNA vaccines is one potential solution. These vaccines could be more easily and quickly adapted to respond to a new, more vaccine-elusive variant. "That's absolutely reassuring," Nelson says. For example, if a mutation changes the spike protein and vaccines no longer recognize it, a manufacturer could identify the new protein and incorporate that in a new mRNA vaccine.

"The problem is that some people are not

taking the current vaccine," he adds. "I'm not sure what is going to make them take the next vaccine."

Nothing Appears Certain

When asked how likely a new strain of SARS-CoV-2 could emerge that gets around vaccine protection, Nelson says, "I think [what] we've learned so far there is no way to predict anything" about this pandemic.

"The best way to prevent the virus from mutating is to prevent hosts, people, from getting sick with it," he says. "That's why it's so important people should get immunized and wear masks."



Both Nelson and Ray point out that it is in the best interest of the virus to evolve to be more transmissible and spread to more people. In contrast, a virus that causes people to get so sick that they isolate or die, thus halting transmission, works against viruses surviving evolutionarily.

Some viruses also mutate to become milder over time, but that has not been the case with SARS-CoV-2, Ray says.

Mutations Not the Only Concern

Viruses have another mechanism that produces new strains, and it works even more quickly than mutations. Recombination, as it's known, can occur when a person is infected with two different strains of the same virus. If the two versions enter the same cell, the viruses can swap genetic material and produce a third, altogether different strain. Recombination has already been seen with influenza strains, where H and N genetic segments are swapped to yield H1N1, H1N2, and H3N2 versions of the flu, for example.

"In the early days of SARS-CoV-2 there was so little diversity that recombination did not matter," Ray says. However, there are now distinct lineages of the virus circulating globally. If two of these lineages swap segments "this would make a very new viral sequence in one step without having to mutate to gain those differences."

"The more diverse the strains that are circulating, the bigger a possibility this is," Ray says.



Protected, for Now

Walensky's sober warning came at the same time the CDC released new guidance calling for the wearing of masks indoors in schools and in any location in the country where COVID-19 cases surpass 50 people per 100,000, also known as substantial or high transmission areas.

On a positive note, Walensky says: "Right now, fortunately, we are not there. The vaccines operate really well in protecting us from severe disease and death." (Courtesy weforum.org)

Related

Is The Lambda Variant Vaccine Resistant?

KEY POINTS Japanese researchers found the lambda variant could be resistant to COVID-19 vaccines. Three mutations in the lambda variant's spike protein allow the variant to resist antibodies.

As the delta variant surges across the United States, there is a new COVID-19 variant that is just as transmissible, but could also be more resistant to vaccines. The lambda variant, first detected in Peru in August 2020 and spreading through South America, made its way to the U.S. for the first time on July 22 in a Houston hospital.

There are 1,053 cases of the lambda variant in the U.S. since the first case was detected, according to GISAID, an initiative dedicated to promoting COVID-19 data through genomic sequencing. The U.S. ranks second in cases behind Chile, and 41 countries have reported at least 1 lambda case.

The threat of lambda comes as the delta variant is the dominant variant of COVID-19 in the U.S. – it now accounts for 93% of cases, up from the previous rate of 83%, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



Houston Methodist Hospital, which operates eight hospitals in its network, said the first lambda case was confirmed last week. Here's what we know about the lambda variant so far.

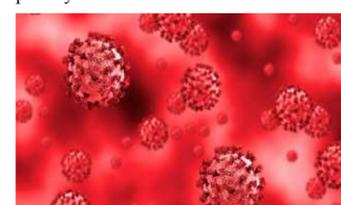
Japanese researchers at the University of Tokyo posted a lambda variant study that shows it is highly infectious and more resistant to COVID-19 vaccines. This study posted on July 28 on bioRxiv, a database for unpub-

lished preprinted studies, has not been peer reviewed or published.

The study shows three mutations in the lambda variant's spike protein – RSYLT-PGD246-253N, 260 L452Q and F490S – which allow for the variant to resist vaccine-induced neutralizing antibodies. Two other mutations – T761 and L452Q – are responsible for making lambda highly infectious. Spike protein is the part of the virus that helps it penetrate cells in the human body – which is what vaccines target.

How does the lambda variant compare to delta?

The lambda variant isn't showing signs to spark concern about it becoming the dominant strain of COVID-19 in the United States like delta, said Dr. Abhijit Duggal, a staff ICU physician and director for critical care research for the medical ICU at the Cleveland Clinic. Since the lambda variant was first detected in Peru, it hasn't spread globally at the same pace as the delta variant. It has, however, become widespread in South America, but this could be due to the "founder effect," according to Dr. S. Wesley Long, medical director of diagnostic biology at Houston Methodist, where the case was identified in the U.S. The founder effect means the variant first took hold in a densely populated and geographically restricted area, making it the primary variant over time.



How concerned should you be about the lambda variant?

On June 14, the World Health Organization flagged the lambda variant as a "variant of interest" versus a "variant of concern." A variant of interest depends on evidence about a unique outbreak cluster or limited expansion in the U.S. or other countries, according to the CDC. A variant of concern shows widespread evidence of treatments, vaccines and transmissibility.

The University of Tokyo study said, "Because the Lambda variant is a (variant of interest), it might be considered that this variant is not an ongoing threat compared to the pandemic (variants of concern). However, because the Lambda variant is relatively resistant to the vaccine-induced (antibodies), it might be possible that this variant is feasible to cause breakthrough infection." (Courtesy https://www.tennessean.com/news/)