



FDA panel approves Johnson & Johnson vaccine; Merck will partner on manufacturing

Following the approval by an FDA advisory panel of the new COVID-19 vaccine, [Johnson & Johnson will begin shipping 3.9 million doses today](#). The company has promised an additional 16 million doses by the end of March and a total of 100 million doses by the end of June. Production will ramp up in weeks ahead, with [Johnson & Johnson partnering with Merck to increase the production of the vaccine](#) to guarantee adequate supplies are available. The U.S. now has three vaccine options. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine requires one dose and can be stored at warmer temperatures than the other approved vaccines, making it easier to distribute.

CDC Director warns against relaxing restrictions as variants spread

Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the Director of the CDC, has [warned states not to relax coronavirus restrictions as transmission plateaus and new variants spread](#). She said that new data about the rapid spread of new COVID-19 variants is extremely concerning, adding [emerging variants appear more transmissible, deadlier, and more resistant to approved vaccines](#). Case rates had been falling steadily for weeks but declines recently stalled. Walensky and other medical experts fear that the U.S. could face another surge in cases and death during the spring as states begin to lift restrictions that have been critical in controlling the great spread of the virus. This afternoon, [Texas announced it was lifting all restrictions, removing the mask mandate, and allowing businesses to open at 100% capacity](#).

Confirmed COVID-19 cases, deaths, vaccinations in Tennessee

Yesterday, the [Tennessee Department of Health](#) reported 689 new cases, bringing the total to 775,693 confirmed cases. More than 11,421 people have died, including at least 10 people on Sunday. There are approximately 871 people currently hospitalized with the virus statewide. There have been 6,789,970 tests statewide, more than 9,109 since the day before, with a 6.15% positivity rate. As of today in [Davidson County](#), there are 90,089 confirmed cases, and 638 deaths.



As of March 1, [1,393,334 vaccinations have been administered in Tennessee](#), using roughly 71% of the 1.97 million vaccine doses that have been delivered to the state. Currently, 13% of Tennesseans have received at least one dose and 6.9% have received a second dose and are fully vaccinated.

Not including the newly distributed Johnson & Johnson vaccine, 102 million doses of vaccine have been delivered and 78.6 million shots have been given nationwide. [Approximately 16% of Americans have received at least one dose and 7.9% have received two doses](#). The White House announced today that states would be receiving 2.8 million doses this week of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine based on population. [Tennessee is currently ranked as one of the lowest states for their vaccine roll-out](#). You can visit the CDC's Vaccine Tracker here: <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccinations>

To find out your phase and book your appointment for a vaccine visit covid19.tn.gov or covid19.nashville.gov or call 615-862-7777. There are now over 700 locations in Tennessee administering vaccines visit: <https://covid19.tn.gov/covid-19-vaccines/vaccination-locations/> or the CDC's <https://vaccinefinder.org/>.

Nashville underreports COVID-19 deaths due to backlog of cases

Earlier today, [Metro Public Health Department \(MPHD\) announced that the number of deaths from COVID-19 has been underreported by 228](#), a discrepancy with the number reported by the states. The total number of deaths in Davidson County is 861. According to the MPHD, the lower number is the result of a backlog in deaths reported by the medical examiner. They will work over the next ten days to guarantee that deaths are reported in a more timely manner.



Supreme Court hears arguments on Voting Rights Act

Today, the Supreme Court heard a case that could [weaken a key provision of the Voting Rights Act](#) prohibiting voting laws that discriminate based on race. *Brnovich v. DNC* concerns a challenge brought by the Democratic National Committee against two Arizona laws that disproportionately affect communities of color. [One limits who is allowed to collect absentee ballots on behalf of another voter, including family members and neighbors; the other requires election officials to throw out all ballots cast in the wrong precinct](#). Voting rights advocates fear the Court's conservative majority could use this case to change the standards for proving a racially discriminatory voting law, allowing state legislatures to set new, stricter voting restrictions. Following the false claims of massive voter fraud during the 2020 elections, state legislators are considering at least 253 bills to restrict voting access in 43 states. In Arizona and Georgia, Republican legislators are attempting [to strip the Governor and other state officials of powers to change election procedures during emergencies](#).



Cardona confirmed as Secretary of Education; Raimondo approved as Commerce Secretary

[The Senate has confirmed Miguel Cardona in a 64-33 vote as President Biden's Secretary of Education](#). Cardona, a former public schools teacher, will oversee the agency's \$1.5 trillion student loan portfolio and will also [lead the effort to reopen schools](#) during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. During his confirmation hearings, he emphasized the need to focus on civil rights and the rights of LGBTQ+ students. Cardona, who is originally from Puerto Rico, previously served as Commissioner of Education in Connecticut.

Rhode Island Governor [Gina Raimondo was confirmed by the Senate with a vote of 84-15 to serve as President Biden's Commerce Secretary](#). In her role, Raimondo will work to improve commercial relationships with China and to better protect U.S. supply chains from interference and disruption. She was in her second term as Governor and previously worked in venture capital firms.