

January 21, 2021

President Takes Executive Actions Aimed at Containing COVID-19 Pandemic

Actions relate to testing, vaccines and supplies, among other areas

President Biden today took a number of actions, including signing a series of executive orders (EOs), aimed at addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. The actions focus on expanding testing, administering vaccines and advancing racial equity, among many other areas.

Today's actions follow actions President Biden took yesterday on rejoining the World Health Organization, encouraging masking, creating a White House COVID-19 Response Team and implementing a "whole of government approach" to examining and addressing inequities.

Many of the executive actions are part of the Administration's National Strategy for the COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness, which was released today. See the nearly 200-page strategy document, which also contains the text of the executive actions, by [clicking here](#).

AHA Take: In a [statement](#), AHA President and CEO Rick Pollack said, "America's hospitals and health systems commend President Biden and his Administration for acting swiftly to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Ending this virus and returning to normal life are among the highest priorities we share with the Administration.

"In particular, we are pleased that the Administration will use all the tools at their disposal, including increased use of the Defense Production Act (DPA), to accelerate the availability of the supplies and equipment needed to fight COVID-19. This includes PPE for our heroic front-line caregivers and supplies needed to ramp up testing and vaccinations. We know the DPA may not be able to solve all equipment shortages, but it will certainly help.

"The directives issued by the Administration will also help increase coordination and communication among all stakeholders involved in vaccination efforts and increase access to COVID-19 vaccines, treatments and care. Importantly, they will lead to more adherence to the public health measures we know work, especially mask wearing.

"We also applaud the Administration for implementing a government-wide approach to examining and addressing inequities affecting racial and ethnic groups, religious

minorities, the LGBTQ community, rural Americans and others facing economic insecurity and inequality. This new approach includes reversal of the executive order the AHA opposed during the previous administration that prohibited federal agencies from conducting and funding diversity, inclusion and racial reconciliation trainings. We also support today's move to restore non-discrimination protections based on gender identity or sexual orientation.

"We are pleased to see increasing federal leadership, support and resources to fight this pandemic that has devastated countless families and communities. The AHA looks forward to continuing to work with President Biden and his new Administration in addressing all aspects of COVID-19."

Highlights of some of the executive actions follow.

Exercising the Defense Production Act to Expand Supplies. This EO directs relevant agencies, including the Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services and Homeland Security, to exercise all appropriate authorities, including the Defense Production Act, to accelerate manufacturing, delivery, and administration to meet shortfalls in equipment and supplies needed for the COVID-19 response. This will include action to increase the availability of critical supplies such as N95 masks, isolation gowns, nitrile gloves and testing and other supplies, as well as necessary equipment and material to accelerate the manufacture, delivery and administration COVID-19 vaccines. To achieve this goal, the EO directs the agencies to review and assess the availability of critical materials, treatments and supplies and develop a revised course of action to increase supply availability where necessary. This EO also requires each affected agency to produce a report providing current supply numbers, the agency's ability to procure additional supply, and whether any gaps in the ability to procure those supplies exist. Further, the EO discusses steps to be taken to manage the price of supplies, as well as the requirement that agencies have an emergency plan of action and prioritization process to ensure those most in need of supplies receive them as quickly as possible, including use of the strategic national stockpile. Additionally, the federal agencies are directed to develop a set of recommendations that will enable the United States to have adequate access to necessary supplies in the event of future pandemics.

Reimbursing States for Personnel and Supplies. This Presidential Memorandum directs the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to increase federal reimbursement to states and Tribes from 75% to 100% of the cost for National Guard personnel and emergency supplies, such as personal protective equipment (PPE), cleaning and sanitizing efforts, and the personnel and equipment needed to create vaccination centers.

Expanding Testing. This EO establishes the COVID-19 Pandemic Testing Board to bring the full force of the federal government's expertise to expanding testing supply and increasing access to testing. The federal government will increase testing capacity by directing the use of the Defense Production Act and other authorities to procure more

tests, expand manufacturing capacity where possible and provide more testing locations. In addition, the EO directs several agencies to coordinate an approach to ensure that testing is provided free-of-charge to those individuals who lack comprehensive health insurance. Lastly, the EO calls for a plan to ensure for surveillance tests at locations, like schools, while also focusing on the expansion of equitable access to COVID-19 testing.

Mounting a Comprehensive Vaccination Campaign. Yesterday, President Biden directed FEMA to begin standing up the first federally-supported community vaccination centers, with the goal of standing up 100 centers in the next month. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also will launch the federal pharmacy program to make vaccines available to communities in their local pharmacies beginning next month. In addition, President Biden tasked the U.S. Public Health Services Commissioned Corps with expanding its workforce and preparing for deployment. Central to this effort will be expanded support and collaboration with state, local, Tribal and territorial governments, including the establishment of COVID Response Liaisons for each state.

Bolstering Access to Treatment and Clinical Care. This EO directs studies to identify treatments for COVID-19 and to ensure that such studies address the needs of diverse populations. The EO also outlines steps to improve clinical care, provide assistance to long-term care facilities and intermediate care facilities for people with disabilities, increase health care workforce capacity, expand access to programs designed to meet long-term health needs of patients recovering from COVID-19, and support access to safe and effective COVID-19 therapies for those without health coverage.

Improving Data. This EO will enhance the United States' collection, production, sharing, and analysis of data to support an equitable COVID-19 response and recovery. The federal government will create publicly available dashboards with national and state-by-state level information, consistent with privacy protections, on cases, testing, vaccinations, and hospital admissions to make real-time information available to policymakers and the public.

Establishing OSHA Workplace Safety Guidance. This EO calls on the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to immediately release clear guidance for all employers to help keep workers safe from COVID-19 exposure. It also asks OSHA to determine whether to establish emergency temporary standards that require employers to take additional steps to keep workers safe from COVID-19, especially in organizations at greatest risk for COVID-19 transmissions. It directs OSHA to enforce worker health and safety requirements, targeting the worst violators. The EO also calls on OSHA to coordinate with states with state OSHA plans to seek to ensure that covered workers are adequately protected from COVID-19, consistent with any revised guidance or emergency temporary standard issued by OSHA.

Creating a Health Equity Task Force. This EO establishes a COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force to provide specific recommendations to the President for allocating resources and funding in communities with inequities in COVID-19 outcomes by race, ethnicity, geography, disability, and other considerations. The federal government will

expand equity data collection; increase access to PPE, testing, therapies, and vaccines in underserved communities and high-risk settings; and assess and update pandemic response plans to ensure equity. Relatedly, the administration yesterday issued executive orders that would [implement](#) a “whole of government approach” to examining and addressing inequities, and [address](#) discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation.

Promoting Safe Travel. This EO will require mask-wearing in airports, on certain modes of public transportation, including many trains, airplanes, maritime vessels and intercity buses.

Supporting Students and Safely Reopening Schools. This EO directs the departments of Education and HHS to provide guidance on safe reopening and operating for schools, child care providers, and institutions of higher education.

Restoring U.S. Support to International Response to Pandemic. This presidential directive restores U.S. leadership and seeks to support the international health and humanitarian response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its secondary impacts, global health security and diplomacy, and better biopreparedness and resilience for emerging and future biological threats.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

If you have questions, please contact AHA at 800-424-4301.