

COVID Update Sept 17 2021

As of Friday Sept. 17, the coronavirus has killed 669,000 people and over 41, 697,000 cases are confirmed. More than 10,000 people died in the past week of COVID-19 in the U.S.

Vaccinations: 75% of adult Americans are now at least partially vaccinated. In SC, 49.1% of the total eligible population is fully vaccinated, and 58% have received at least one dose.

As of today, Monday Sept 13, rolling cases over 7 days per 100k population have declined 9% in the US and 25% in SC in the past week, raising hope that the surge is coming to an end. Hospitalizations and deaths continue to rise but will hopefully decline soon, as well. SC is now ninth in the country in new cases per capita, down from first place the week before.

Abrupt retirements of top FDA vaccine review officials last week raised concern about the booster approval process. The retirements of Dr. Marion Gruber, director of the Office of Vaccines Research and Review at FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, and Dr. Philip Krause, deputy director of the office, were announced in an internal agency email sent on Tuesday and shared with CNN by the FDA. Meanwhile, the booster vaccine for all has not been FDA or CDC approved. The FDA committee is meeting Friday September 17 to issue a final decision.

SC State supreme court heard evidence Tuesday August 31 regarding the challenge to the budget proviso that prohibits public schools from requiring masks.

SC is now one of 5 states being investigated by the US Department of Education regarding indoor masking bans and whether they discriminate against students with disabilities

President Biden on Thursday September 9 issued two executive orders mandating vaccines for federal workers and contractors and announced new requirements for large employers and health care providers that he said would affect around 100 million workers, more than two-thirds of the U.S. workforce. Biden also announced that he asked the Department of Labor to issue an emergency rule requiring all employers with 100 or more employees to ensure their workforce is fully vaccinated or require any unvaccinated workers to produce a negative COVID test at least once a week. The requirement could carry a \$14,000 fine per violation and would affect two-thirds of the country's workforce, a senior administration official said. Employees working in health care facilities that receive Medicare or Medicaid reimbursement will also be required to be vaccinated, Biden said, a move that will impact 7 million workers at 50,000 health care providers. As of July, 27% of the country's health care workers were unvaccinated, according to a study by the COVID States Project.

To make testing more accessible, Biden announced that Walmart, Amazon, and Kroger will start selling at-home rapid tests for no profit for the next three months, resulting in a 35 percent price cut by the end of the week. Medicaid will also cover at-home tests for free for beneficiaries, and the federal government will expand a free testing program to 10,000 pharmacies.

He also encouraged large entertainment venues, like sports arenas and concert halls, to require proof of vaccination in order to enter and said that Transportation Security Administration will double fines on travelers who refuse to wear a mask on airlines and other modes of transportation.

To help address surging cases in schools that have resulted in hundreds of closures over the past month, the president called on all schools to set up regular testing and plans to make additional funding available for local school districts that have had their funding cut by state governments for implementing COVID safety measures, such as mask requirements.

Biden also announced that 30,000 Head Start teachers will be required to get vaccinated and called on governors to require vaccinations for teachers and school staff. Biden also directed the Transportation Security Administration to double fines for travelers who refuse to wear masks in airports, increasing fines to \$500 to \$1,000 for first-time offenders and \$1,000 to \$3,000 for repeat offenders.

In response to Biden's initiatives, SC government leaders announced plans to oppose the vaccine mandates, which they perceive to be a violation of personal freedom and medical autonomy

