

Coronavirus - ‘Tragic and completely avoidable’: US hits 700,000 Covid-19 deaths

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Joe Biden laments ‘astonishing death toll’ as 100,000 die since June despite the availability of vaccines

The Covid-19 death toll in the US has now surpassed 700,000, despite the Covid-19 vaccines’ wide availability, in what one expert called a “tragic and completely avoidable milestone”.

[Data](#) from Johns Hopkins University shows that the US went just past 700,000 deaths on Friday; the US had previously [reached](#) 600,000 deaths in June. The country has had a total of 43.6m confirmed cases of Covid-19 since the start of the pandemic, according to Johns Hopkins.

Over the last few months, the overwhelming majority of people who died from Covid were unvaccinated. A [study](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published last month found that after the Delta variant became the most common variant in the US over the summer, unvaccinated Americans were 10 times more likely to be hospitalised and die because of the virus compared with vaccinated Americans.

In a statement on Saturday, Joe Biden said: “To heal we must remember, and as our nation mourns the painful milestone of 700,000 American deaths ... we must not become numb to the sorrow. On this day, and every day, we remember all those we have lost to this pandemic and we pray for their loved ones left behind who are missing a piece of their soul.

“As we do, the astonishing death toll is yet another reminder of just how important it is to get vaccinated.”

Recent deaths have primarily been in southern states that have lagging vaccine rates, including Florida, Texas, Mississippi and Louisiana. Nationally, about 65% of people 12 and older who are eligible to receive the vaccine have been fully vaccinated, according to the CDC.

With a slight majority of the population fully vaccinated, the Covid death rate has significantly decreased compared with the death rate during previous surges of the virus, when the vaccine was unavailable. Following the surge in cases seen last winter, 100,000 people [died](#) in a 34-day period between January and February. Comparatively, it took over three months for the US to see another 100,000 deaths this summer.

Public health experts attribute the slowed death rate to the effectiveness of the vaccine but say that the milestone could have been avoided altogether with a higher vaccination rate.

“Reaching 700,000 deaths is a tragic and completely avoidable milestone. We had the knowledge and the tools to prevent this from happening, and unfortunately politics, lack of urgency and mistrust in science got us here,” John Brownstein, an epidemiologist at Boston children’s hospital,

told [ABC News](#).

Experts are hoping that hospitalizations and deaths will decrease as the surge in cases due to the Delta variant seems to be decreasing and vaccine mandates are starting to roll out.

Without a winter surge, which experts say is still possible, [statistical modeling](#) has shown that the Covid-19 cases can continue to decline into 2022, providing some much-needed relief to hospital systems across the country that have been overwhelmed by Covid-19 cases.

One hospital in rural Washington state is still dealing with a surge of patients, with 15 of its 20 intensive-care unit beds being occupied by Covid patients. The hospital has had to delay more than two dozen heart surgeries because of its shortage of ICU beds.

“We’ve got a backup of like 30 cases that need to be done,” Jackie Whited, director of intensive care at Central Washington hospital in Wenatchee, Washington, told the Seattle Times. “I have no beds, I will have one clean bed in the ICU.”

In an effort to get more people inoculated, vaccine mandates have been rolling out across the country, to some success.

Major health systems in California, where healthcare workers have been required to get vaccinated, have reported an uptick in vaccination rates among staff members. New York, which has a similar mandate, has seen similar results with thousands of healthcare workers [getting vaccinated](#) before the state’s vaccination deadline.

United Airlines had said it would fire the nearly 600 employees out of its workforce of about 67,000 employees who refused to be vaccinated. On Thursday, the company said that nearly 250 of those employees ultimately decided to get vaccinated.

“Our vaccine policy continues to prove requirements work - in less than 48 hours, the number of unvaccinated employees who began the process of being separated from the company has been cut almost in half, dropping from 592 to 320,” the company said in a [statement](#).

Adding to further optimism that the virus’s hold on the country is waning was the drug manufacturer Merck’s [announcement](#) on Friday that research found its Covid-19 treatment pill reduced hospitalizations and death to the virus by half. The company said it was seeking emergency use authorization from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for distribution of the pill.

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P.S.

• The Guardian. Sat 2 Oct 2021 20.20 BST:
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