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Covid-19: CDC says vaccine is coming before November US election

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has told public health departments in all 50 US states and five large cities to get ready to distribute a covid-19 vaccine by 1 November, two days before the US presidential election on 3 November.

President Donald Trump said on 27 August during the Republican convention that a vaccine might well be ready by the end of October. On the same day Robert Redfield, head of the CDC, sent the letter alerting public health departments.^{1 2}

Health and human services secretary Alex Azar said in a television interview, “It has nothing to do with elections. This has to do with delivering safe, effective vaccines to the American people as quickly as possible and saving people’s lives.”³

Several public health experts, including Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, previously said that it was more likely that a vaccine would be available in 2021. However, Fauci said on 1 September that a vaccine might be available earlier if the independent Data and Safety Monitoring Board decides that the ongoing clinical trials show overwhelmingly positive results.⁴

On 3 September Moncef Slaoui, the White House’s chief vaccine programme adviser, said it was “extremely unlikely but not impossible” that a vaccine would be available by late October.⁵

McKesson Corporation will distribute the vaccines under a contract with CDC. Two vaccines will be available, referred to as A and B, which seem to be those being developed by Pfizer and Moderna. Both must be kept at very low temperatures and must be administered in two doses about a month apart. They would be given first to healthcare workers, including those in nursing homes, other essential workers, and national security employees. Other early recipients would be people over 65, Native Americans, racial and ethnic minorities, and people in prisons.³

Distribution and administration of millions of vaccine doses create considerable logistic challenges for city and state health departments that have been underfunded for years. Health departments would need to set up warehouses to store the vaccines and refrigeration systems to keep them extremely cold, hire additional workers to administer the vaccines, acquire personal protective equipment for the workers, purchase syringes, and establish systems to record who received what vaccine and when.⁶

Only about half of Americans have said they are willing to get a covid-19 vaccine and there is considerable anti-vaccination sentiment. Many Americans don’t trust the US government or believe what it is telling them about covid-19, particularly as government messages have changed and Trump has repeatedly said the virus would “just disappear” and he does not wear a mask himself.

1 Blake A. 3 takeaways from the final night of the Republican national convention. *Washington Post*. 27 August 2020. www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/08/27/takeaways-republican-convention-night-4.

2 Kaplan S, Wu KJ, Thomas K. CDC tells states how to prepare for covid-19 vaccine by early November. *New York Times*. 2 September 2020. www.nytimes.com/2020/09/02/health/covid-19-vaccine-cdc-plans.html.

3 Lovelace B Jr. HHS secretary Azar says Nov. 1 coronavirus vaccine deadline has “nothing to do with elections.” *CNBC*. 3 September 2020. www.cnbc.com/2020/09/03/hhs-azar-says-nov-1-coronavirus-vaccine-deadline-has-nothing-to-do-with-election.html.

4 Szabo L. Fauci says covid vaccine trials could end early if results are overwhelming. *Kaiser Health News*. 1 September 2020. <https://khn.org/news/dr-fauci-says-covid-vaccine-trials-could-end-early-if-results-are-overwhelming>.

5 *New York Times*. Covid-19 live updates: Trump administration vaccine chief casts doubt on vaccine by election day. 3 September 2020. www.nytimes.com/2020/09/03/world/covid-coronavirus.html.

6 Szabo L. Lack of staff, funds, and tools: health officials worry the US isn’t ready for covid vaccines. *Guardian*. 2 September 2020. www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/02/us-health-officials-covid-19-coronavirus-vaccine.