

Making Sense of...The U.S. Vaccine Distribution

Overview:

- Infectious diseases have been [part of the human experience](#) for thousands of years. [The first vaccine](#) (designed to combat smallpox) wasn't developed until the late 1700s, a breakthrough that would eventually transform infectious disease research.
- After the success of [Louis Pasteur's](#) work, progressions in research led to the widespread development of vaccines to [both treat and eliminate certain infectious diseases](#).
- From a historical perspective, the distribution of the [newly created polio vaccine](#) in the late 1950s experienced a similar roll-out effect to [the current COVID-19 vaccine](#). There was an initial shortage of the polio vaccine in the U.S. because the administration relied on private pharmaceutical companies for vaccine distribution and production. While the U.S. was able to recover, the structure for vaccine distribution has ultimately [remained the same](#).
- In the present day of the COVID-19 pandemic, the [United Nations drafted a coalition of countries](#) to equitably produce and distribute a vaccine globally, but the U.S. opted out. Currently, the U.S. is operating through [purchasing stockpiles of the vaccine from various companies](#) and then [distributed to individual states](#) for public allocation.

Readings:

- [Understanding How Vaccines Work](#), Center for Disease Control & Prevention
- [A Quick Breakdown of the 3 Different COVID Vaccines](#), Hackensack Meridian Health
- [Vaccine Distribution-Equity Left Behind?](#), JAMA Network
- [COVID Data Tracker](#), Center for Disease Control & Prevention
- [America's Messy COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout, Explained](#), Vox
- [President-elect Biden Outlines COVID-19 Vaccination Plan](#), The White House

Questions for discussion:

- What do you think most people find confusing about vaccine programs, and who holds responsibility for helping disseminate correct information?
- What are the advantages of a vaccine rollout program managed in large part by the national government versus state governments versus private companies?
- What obligation does the U.S. (along with other wealthy countries) have in making sure the COVID-19 vaccine is fairly distributed?
- What are the ethical considerations for a company charging for the vaccine given the global impact of the pandemic and this public health breakthrough?
- What policies could be put in place in order to help for current and future vaccine distribution?