

The shots-in-arms race is getting intense

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With Rachel Roubein and Susannah Luthi

*Editor's Note: POLITICO Pulse is a free version of POLITICO Pro Health Care's morning newsletter, which is delivered to our subscribers each morning at 6 a.m. The POLITICO Pro platform combines the news you need with tools you can use to take action on the day's biggest stories. **Act on the news with POLITICO Pro.***

Quick Fix

— Ohio's \$1 million sweepstakes is the latest wild tactic state officials have deployed to persuade residents to get vaccinated against the coronavirus.

— The Biden administration is making a concerted effort to get children vaccinated, after the CDC endorsed Pfizer's shot's use in young teens.

— Pfizer is aiding India's Covid response by sending medicine, but the company has not yet increased its global vaccine commitments.

WELCOME TO THURSDAY PULSE —and for a glimpse at how museums are adapting to the pandemic, [here you Van-go](#). Tips to acancryn@politico.com and sowermohle@politico.com.

SUBSCRIBE TO "THE RECAST" TODAY: Power is shifting in Washington and in communities across the country. More people are demanding a seat at the table, insisting that politics is personal and not all policy is equitable. The Recast is a twice-weekly newsletter that explores the changing power dynamics in Washington and breaks down how race and identity are recasting politics and policy in America. Get fresh insights, scoops and dispatches on this crucial intersection from across the country and hear critical new voices that challenge business as usual. Don't miss out, SUBSCRIBE. Thank you to our sponsor, Intel.

Driving the Day

THE SHOTS-IN-ARMS RACE IS GETTING INTENSE —Minor-league baseball tickets. Free beer. Even a \$100 savings bond. For a brief period, as Americans first began rolling up their sleeves, offering a reward for getting vaccinated seemed like a fun and breezy way to nudge people to do their pandemic duty.

But in Ohio, getting a shot could now also mean getting serious cash.

The Buckeye state is giving away \$1 million each to five vaccinated adults, an incentive that GOP Gov. Mike DeWine hopes will spark a surge of vaccinations as people vie for the big bucks.

And that's not all: Ohio will also hold a separate drawing for teenagers, including those newly eligible for the Pfizer vaccine, to encourage a demographic that might otherwise be slower to get in line. Their prize: a full-ride four-year scholarship to an Ohio public university.

The announcements came as a shock, and even DeWine acknowledged it was a bit out there.

But his move illustrates the competing pressures and sense of urgency that's taken hold amid a slowdown in demand for the vaccine. The U.S. is vaccinating just over 2 million people a day, its lowest average since early March. And many states – Ohio included – still have a ways to go to hit the 70 percent threshold that President Joe Biden is pushing for by July 4.

At the same time, governors have been hearing increasingly loud calls from constituents to lift Covid restrictions, making it untenable for them to simply maintain the status quo as the vaccination rate ticks up. Before his giveaway announcement Wednesday, DeWine said Ohio will lift nearly all of the state's pandemic restrictions on June 2.

The reaction across the public health world has been largely positive. Studies show incentives work — and this is certainly a big one.

But a backlash is inevitable. DeWine likely hasn't pleased too many other governors by setting the bar so high for future incentives. (West Virginia's \$100 vaccine bond might be guaranteed to qualified patients, but it's less exciting than a shot at \$1 million.)

The sweepstakes won't do much on its own to fix the equity issues that have resulted in far fewer Black and Latino people getting the vaccine. And already, it's invited attacks from conservatives, who see it as a waste of money.

Still, it's a recognition that it's going to take a bit more than the simple promise of not dying to convince a critical mass of Americans to get vaccinated.

WITH PFIZER SHOT OK'D FOR KIDS, VACCINATION RACE RAMPS UP —The CDC's support Wednesday for giving the Pfizer vaccine to adolescents 12 to 15 years old has kicked off a new stage in Biden's vaccination campaign, Sarah and Katherine Ellen Foley report.

Roughly 15,000 pharmacies will begin vaccinating these younger patients today, and doses are also being distributed to school-based clinics and family health centers. Getting kids inoculated is key to fulfilling President Joe Biden's vision of widespread American immunity to Covid by summer — and to letting in-person schooling resume in fall.

In a speech Wednesday afternoon, President Joe Biden vowed a “fast and efficient” pediatric rollout. And in a televised town hall on vaccine hesitancy later that night, his top health officials urged people to get their children vaccinated as soon as possible.

Still, the logistics will add another layer of complexity to the adult-focused vaccine drive. States and localities will need to prioritize Pfizer's vaccine for patients between 12 and 15, since no others are authorized yet for those ages. And kids in hard-to-reach communities could still have trouble getting access to the shot, since its deep-freeze storage requirements make it difficult to transport.

PFIZER TELLS SENATORS IT'S RUSHING MEDICINE TO INDIA —The pharmaceutical giant is donating enough medical products to India to ensure that “every COVID-19 patient in every public hospital across India can have access to them for 90 days free of charge,” but has not upped its worldwide vaccine allotment just yet, a top executive wrote in a letter to Democratic senators obtained by POLITICO.

Pfizer penned the letter, in which the company also lays out global distribution efforts and pricing plans for its Covid-19 vaccine, after Massachusetts Democratic Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey, along with Sens. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.) and Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) urging the company last month to expand access to its vaccine worldwide.

The drugmaker committed 40 million doses to global vaccine equity effort COVAX, through which doses have already been sent to parts of Africa, South America and Asia, Pfizer wrote. Forty million sounds like a lot, but by comparison, other vaccine makers have pledged hundreds of millions of shots to the effort: Moderna, a latecomer to COVAX, pledged 500 million doses last week.

The company also said in its letter that it is employing a “tiered” system, whereby lower-income countries pay lower prices for its Covid vaccine. At roughly \$19.50 per dose, Pfizer’s vaccine is on the pricier end of the spectrum; AstraZeneca’s, for instance, is about \$4 a dose.

Building the Biden Administration

SENATE ADVANCES BIDEN’S CMS PICK —Chiquita Brooks-LaSure is one step closer to becoming Biden’s Medicare and Medicaid chief after the Senate on Wednesday narrowly agreed to advance her nomination in a 51-48 procedural vote, POLITICO’s Rachel Rouben writes.

Republican Sens. Susan Collins of Maine and Jerry Moran of Kansas joined Democrats to back a discharge petition bringing Brooks-LaSure’s nomination to the floor, after it was held up by a deadlocked vote in the Senate Finance Committee.

— **The tally signals that Brooks-LaSure is likely to be confirmed**, despite widespread GOP opposition to her nomination that emerged in recent weeks, a protest of a Biden administration decision on Texas’ Medicaid waiver. The Senate will have to take another procedural vote before it gives Brooks-LaSure a final thumbs-up or thumbs-down.

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Public Health

POLL: AMERICANS FAVOR BIG INVESTMENTS IN PUBLIC HEALTH —An overwhelming majority of Americans believe the government should be spending substantially more on public health programs, according to a new survey from the Harvard Opinion Research Program and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

More than 70 percent of respondents supported boosting public health spending, with a similar proportion rating public health agencies as either “extremely” or “very” important to the nation’s overall health.

But respondents had diverging views on how well public health agencies are performing. Just 54 percent approved of the CDC’s job performance, including just 32 percent of Republicans. The FDA fared even worse, with less than half rating its performance positively. Just 34 percent of respondents said the nation’s broader public health system had done a good job.

Regulatory Corner

FRONT GROUP FIGHTING TRUMP INSURANCE REGS ADDS ALLIES —Six advocacy organizations are joining forces with Keep US Covered, a mysterious interest group formed to oppose a pair of Trump-era rules, POLITICO’s Susannah Luthi reports.

AIDS United, the American Psychiatric Association, Business Forward, Community Catalyst, Little Lobbyists and Small Business Majority are the first other groups to publicly align with Keep US Covered, which has run a campaign backed so far by just a single anonymous donor.

Keep US Covered is focused specifically on a Trump administration rule that created health reimbursement arrangements and expanded short-term plans. But it’s unclear who would be so passionate about taking the HRA rule down that they would fund a whole front group. The policy has its share of critics, but it’s had little overall impact.

Sonia Nesbit, an Obama administration alum charged with running the campaign, has warned the rule could prompt employers to push high-cost workers into the Obamacare markets, saddling the sickest workers with greater responsibility for their health expenses.

What We're Reading

Pressure is mounting on the CDC to [end indoor mask-wearing guidance](#) for vaccinated people, ABC News’ Cheyenne Haslett writes.

Wealthy nations like South Korea and New Zealand that won praise for their coronavirus response [are now lagging behind](#) in getting residents vaccinated, The Associated Press’ Nick Perry reports.

For Bloomberg Businessweek, Joe Nocera revisits [the last time](#) a country tried to override pharmaceutical patents: a bid by South Africa to make high-cost AIDS drugs more accessible.

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