

White House: Get new booster by Halloween for safer holidays

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White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator Ashish Jha speaks during the daily briefing at the White House in Washington, Tuesday, Oct. 11, 2022.

Credit: AP Photo/Susan Walsh

The White House on Tuesday said eligible Americans should get the

updated COVID-19 boosters by Halloween to have maximum protection against the coronavirus by Thanksgiving and the holidays, as it warned of a "challenging" virus season ahead.

Dr. Ashish Jha, the White House COVID-19 coordinator, said the U.S. has the tools, both from vaccines and treatments, to largely eliminate serious illness and death from the virus, but stressed that's only the case if people do their part.

"We are not helpless against these challenges," he said. "What happens this winter is up to us."

So far the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says only about 11.5 million Americans have received the updated shots, which are meant to provide a boost of protection against both the original strain of COVID-19 and the BA.5 variant that is dominant around the world. Jha said studies suggest that if more Americans get the updated vaccines, "we could save hundreds of lives each day this winter."

More than 330 people die on average each day of COVID-19, according to CDC data, with the U.S. death toll standing at over 1.05 million.

Jha acknowledged the slower pace of vaccinations, saying, "we expected September to be a month where it would just start picking up." He added that the White House expects more Americans to get the updated boosters this month around the time when they get their annual flu shots. He also emphasized that they should look to get them soon to be protected when they gather with family and friends.

"I think people should get vaccinated before Halloween," he said.

Jha criticized Congress, which has refused the White House's \$22 billion [budget request](#) for virus response, saying that has kept the U.S. from

building a stockpile of tests to use in the event of a new [winter](#) surge.

"You can't fight a [deadly virus](#) without resources," he said, "and congressional inaction is really costly."

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