

## ***CED Public Policy Watch***

**01.22.2021**

- 1. NUMBER OF THE WEEK: 1.4 MILLION—UNEMPLOYMENT REMAINS HIGH AS EXTENDED AND EXPANDED BENEFITS RESUME**
- 2. BIDEN EXTENDS MORATORIUMS ON EVICTION, FORECLOSURE, AND STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENTS**
- 3. COVID-19 NEW CASES BEGIN TO RECEDE**
- 4. VACCINE NEWS**
- 5. IMMIGRATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

- 1. NUMBER OF THE WEEK: 1.4 MILLION—UNEMPLOYMENT REMAINS HIGH AS EXTENDED AND EXPANDED BENEFITS RESUME**

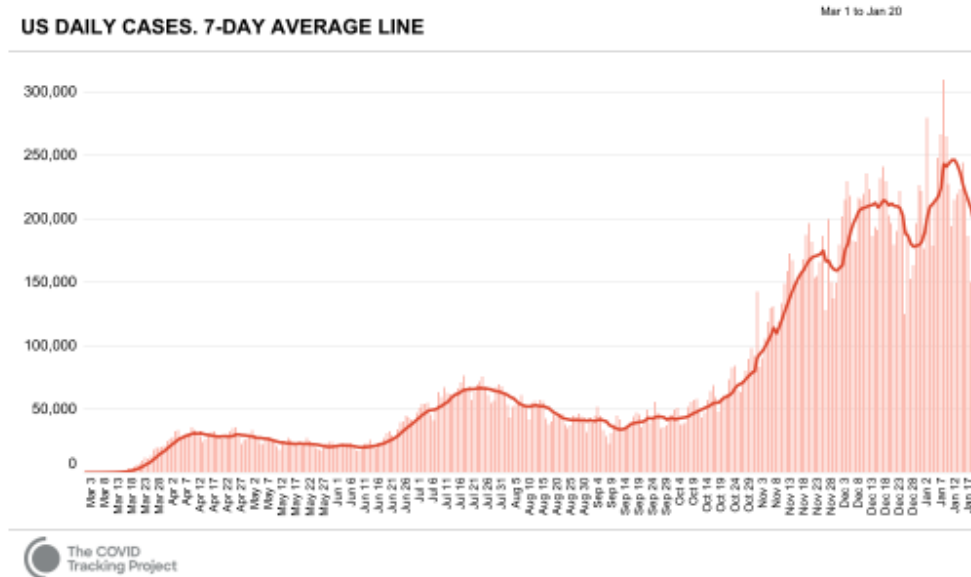
New applications for federal unemployment benefits remained steady (which is to say, high), at 1.4 million initial claims (combined regular state programs and federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, not seasonally adjusted), in the week ending January 16. The number of Americans receiving unemployment benefits at the end of 2020 sharply declined, by roughly 16 percent over the last two weeks of 2020, but that was almost surely owing to the temporary lapse in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation programs. An estimated 16 million Americans were receiving federal unemployment benefits in the week ending January 2, though that number is expected to climb as former recipients recertify onto the programs that are newly extended with the December 28<sup>th</sup> enactment of additional COVID relief.

- 2. BIDEN EXTENDS MORATORIUMS ON EVICTION, FORECLOSURE, AND STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENTS**

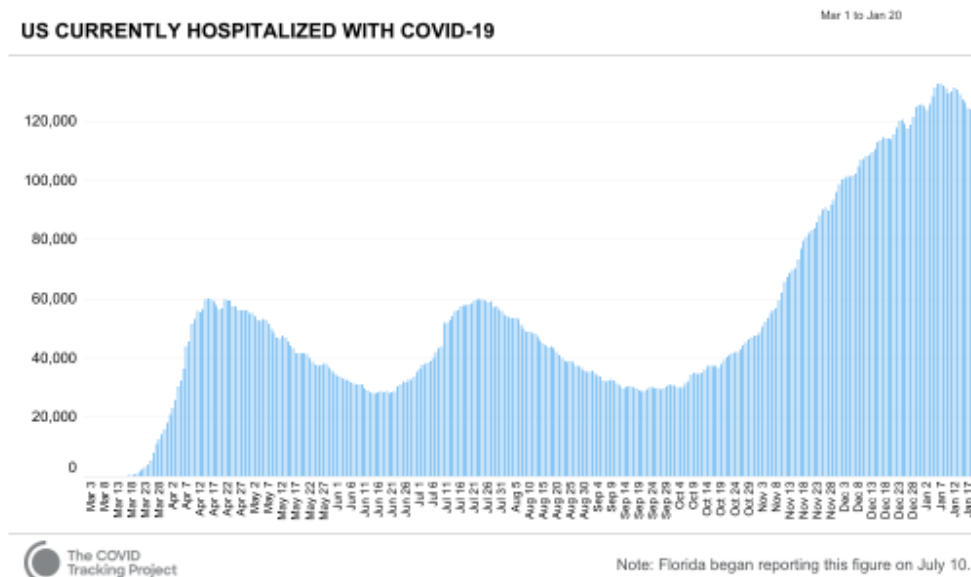
As part of a series of executive actions undertaken on Wednesday, the Biden Administration extended Trump Administration eviction, foreclosure, and loan forbearance policies further into 2021. Payments on federal student loans will be frozen until the end of September and an eviction moratorium, imposed for purposes of public health, will be extended from the end of January to the end of March. A federal moratorium on foreclosure for homes covered by Federally backed mortgages will also be extended through March. CED's 100 days plan called for block grant funds to states and localities that could be targeted to families most at risk of eviction or foreclosure.

- 3. COVID-19 NEW CASES BEGIN TO RECEDE**

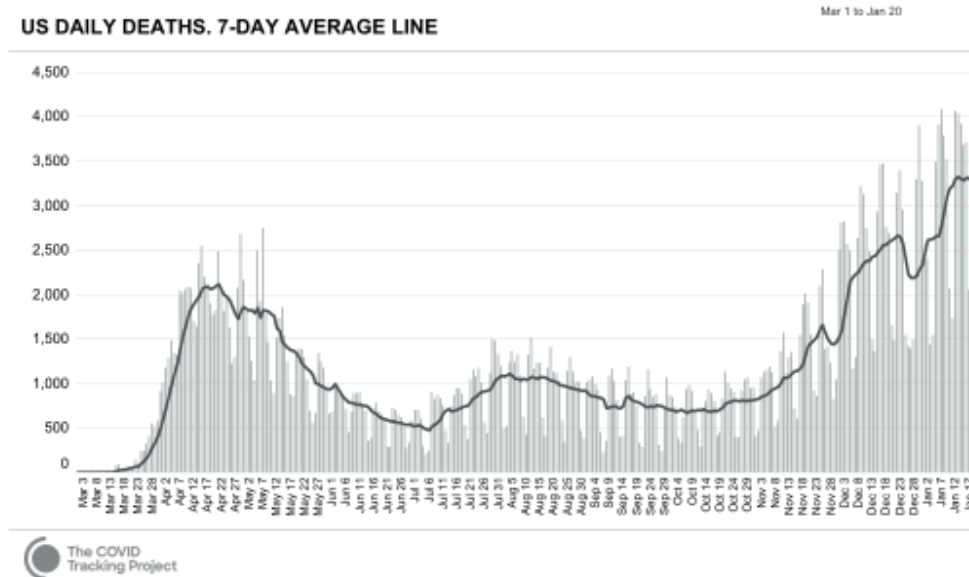
The reported new COVID-19 case count is beginning to hint that the worst of the burst of holiday infections may be past. The daily case count has fallen from its peak of over 300,000 to below 200,000, and the seven-day moving average is now below 200,000 as well.



The hospitalization count is back down to about 120,000, which unfortunately continues to challenge medical personnel in many regions of the country. We can only hope that further relief is on the way.



However, as the holiday cases recede, the death count is still high, with the daily figures still sometimes above 4,000. Total deaths now exceed 400,000, which is equal to total US military deaths (combat plus illnesses and accidents) in all of World War II.



#### 4. VACCINE NEWS

Late last week, there emerged a [misunderstanding](#) between the federal government and the state governments. Former Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar urged that the states accelerate the lagging pace of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout by loosening their prioritization of potential recipients and using their stockpiles of vaccines to deliver first doses. At the same time, he announced that the federal government would release all of its vaccine reserves, to ensure that doses would be available so that all of the two-dose regimens could be completed at the recommended three- or four-week interval. However, it subsequently emerged that the federal government had already distributed all of the vaccines it had received, and that the states therefore would not receive any additional doses before their expected distributions from new production. Several state authorities expressed surprise and disappointment. [Moderna](#) and the [CDC](#) announced that some delay from the scheduled second dose would be acceptable, but given the accelerated clinical trial schedules before the emergency use authorizations were announced, affording little testing of alternative dosing, the news of potential delays was not well received, including by Dr. Anthony Fauci.

Some [reports](#) from inside the new Biden Administration suggested that the pandemic team found no plan for the distribution of the vaccine, and indicated that an entirely new effort would need to be formulated. However, in a press briefing on Thursday, Dr. Anthony Fauci [disagreed](#), saying that the current activity can be “amplified” going forward.

Over that background noise, President Biden dedicated his day to the pandemic, [signing](#) multiple executive orders ramping up the vaccination effort as well as increasing supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) and testing activity. He created a National Pandemic Testing Board, and a COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force as part of his program. He issued specific tasks to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), HHS (to provide guidance for reopening schools), and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) (to develop workplace safety standards). He reversed the US withdrawal from the World Health Organization. He extended his requirement of mask wearing on federal property to interstate travel, and imposed a testing requirement on international travelers.

## **5. IMMIGRATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

President Biden also signed executive orders on immigration, an issue on which CED has expressed views (oriented toward the workforce implications). The new executive orders have reinstated the forbearance in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program (relating to the “Dreamers”), negated the previous Administration’s exclusion of noncitizens from the census count, ended the so-called “Muslim ban,” and halted the construction of the border wall with Mexico, among other actions.

Another executive decision has reinstated US membership in Paris climate accords.