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Biden administration will stop buying Covid-19 vaccines, treatments and tests as early as this fall, Jha says

By Brenda Goodman, CNN

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(CNN) — The Biden administration has been planning for how to get past the crisis phase of the Covid-19 pandemic and will stop buying vaccines, treatments and tests as early as this fall, White House Covid-19 Response Coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha said on Tuesday.

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“One of the things we’ve spent a lot of time thinking about in the last many months – and we’re going to continue this work, and you’ll hear more from the administration on this – is getting us out of that acute emergency phase where the US government is buying the vaccines, buying the treatments, buying the diagnostic tests,” Jha said at an event sponsored by the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

“My hope is that in 2023, you’re going to see the commercialization of almost all of these products. Some of that is actually going to begin this fall, in the days and weeks ahead. You’re going to see commercialization of some of these things,” he said.

Availability of those products would transition to the regular health-care system, Jha said, so if you need a vaccine or an antiviral treatment, you’d get it from your doctor or from a hospital.

Updated boosters available next month

In the spring, the Biden administration asked Congress for \$10 billion to fund continued pandemic response efforts, but a deal to pass the funding stalled.

Jha said the funding stalemate forced officials to repurpose money from other efforts, like

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Officials plan to use that money to buy updated vaccine booster shots that protect against the BA.4 and BA.5 coronavirus subvariants, which Jha said would be ready in early to mid-September.

“I would like to get to a point where every adult in America who wants a vaccine can get one. I’m hopeful we will be there. We’re not quite there yet in terms of how many vaccine doses we’ve been able to buy,” he said.

Jha said the transition to commercialization is complicated. It involves regulatory issues, market dynamic issues and equity issues, but the administration is working carefully and thoughtfully to get it right.

“Right now, everybody can walk into a CVS and get a vaccine. I want to make sure that when we make this transition, we don’t end up at a point where nobody can get a vaccine because we didn’t get the transition right,” he said.

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Jha said some of the commercialization would start in the fall, but most would be visible in 2023.

He said it would be important for the government to continue to make investments in the development of the next generation of vaccines and in pandemic preparedness.

“But this business of day-to-day running of a pandemic, that needs to transition, and we’re working very hard to make sure that transition is in a very orderly and transparent way so everybody sees it coming,” he said.

A bad flu season expected

Jha urged all Americans to get the new boosters once they become available.

He stressed that the fall and winter could be tough in the United States if the flu makes a

comeback, as is expected.

“These are substantial upgrades in our vaccines in terms of their ability to prevent infection to prevent transmission,” he said. “Those vaccines are coming very, very soon. And so it’s going to be really important that people this fall and winter, get the new shot. It’s designed for the virus that’s out there. And again, based on everything we’ve seen so far, all the data suggests it should be highly effective against the new variants.”

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The US has seen little to no flu transmission for the past two years largely because of Covid-19 mitigation measures like masking.

“I expect the fall and winter to look much more like the fall and winter of 2019, with a lot less mitigation,” Jha said.

“Under normal non-pandemic times, flu really stretches our health-care system,” he said. “Throwing Covid on top of that, our health-care system is going to get into serious trouble unless we are very proactive about preventing it, if we do nothing and just sort of hope for the best.”

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