

# Ohio offers \$1 million weekly prize as vaccine incentive

By **ANDREW WELSH-HUGGINS**  
Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine has made many newsworthy statements in his long political career, but perhaps none has generated such an immediate and intense response as announcing a weekly \$1 million prize and full-ride college scholarships to entice more Ohioans to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

The plan the Republican governor unveiled May 12 drew criticism from some Democratic and GOP lawmakers who said it isn't appropriate to use federal pandemic dollars for a contest. But Andy Slavitt, President Joe Biden's senior COVID-19 adviser, said anything that draws attention to vaccines is a good thing.

"In general, I think we like the idea of contests," Slavitt told CNN.

DeWine says he understands people may think he's crazy and consider the concept a waste of money. But he said Wednesday the real waste is a loss of life to the virus now that the vaccine is available.

Beginning May 26, the lottery will provide



Phil Long/Associated Press, File

Kent State University student Regan Raeth, of Hudson, Ohio, looks at her vaccination bandage as she waits for 15 minutes after her shot April 8, 2021, in Kent, Ohio. Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine on Wednesday, May 12, announced a weekly \$1 million prize and full-ride college scholarships to entice more Ohioans to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

a \$1 million prize each Wednesday for five weeks.

How will the Ohio vaccine incentive work?

DeWine said details are still being ironed out, but in short, Ohioans age 18 and older who have received at least one dose of the vaccine can get into the drawing one of two ways. Those who are registered voters in the Secretary of State's database will be entered automatically. A website will be

available for people to enter if they're not in the elections system.

Each week, names of potential winners will be drawn and their eligibility verified, including whether they've been vaccinated, DeWine spokesman Dan Tierney said. Then their names will be announced during the Ohio Lottery Wednesday evening broadcast, he said.

Vaccinated Ohioans under 18 will be entered

into a similar drawing for full college scholarships, including tuition and room and board.

The state Health Department will administer the drawings with help from the Ohio Lottery Commission. Winners will pay taxes.

The money will come from the Health Department's unspent coronavirus relief funds. Ohio already distributed \$5.9 billion in federal pan-

demio funds, and is now in line to receive nearly \$5.4 billion in aid from Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package, amounts dwarfing the lottery payouts.

Can the prize work to boost vaccinations?

The lottery is unlikely to change the minds of those who question the vaccine's safety or are adamantly against getting the shot, said Jane Risen, a behavioral science professor at the University of Chicago who studies judgment and decision-making.

But for those who are worried about side effects or don't want to take time off work, a \$1 million prize could be persuasive, she said.

"We know people pay attention to lotteries and big prizes," she said. "Even though the chances are small, people focus on the prize rather than the probability of winning."

There's also the fear of missing out, Risen said.

"When we get into these giant jackpots, you see people who would never buy a lottery ticket buying them," she said.

What do lawmakers

think of the vaccine incentives?

In the past year, DeWine faced intense criticism from members of his own party over Ohio's continued health orders. While they welcomed the tandem news Wednesday that the state's mask mandate and other orders would end June 2, they also expressed skepticism at the lottery announcement.

"I do not support using gameshow gimmicks with our federal tax dollars," said Rep. Jon Cross, a Republican from Kenton in northern Ohio.

On the other side of the aisle, Rep. Emilia Sykes of Akron, the top House Democrat, questioned the use of federal funds for the lottery.

"Using millions of dollars in relief funds in a drawing is a grave misuse of money that could be going to respond to this ongoing crisis," she said.

In Washington, Biden press secretary Jen Psaki said: "The Department of Treasury has comprehensive guidelines, but does not typically opine on each individual program or creative approach by different states."



Khalil Hamra/Associated Press

Palestinians rescue a survivor from under the rubble of a destroyed residential building following deadly Israeli airstrikes in Gaza City, Sunday, May 16, 2021. The Israeli airstrikes flattened three buildings and killed at least 26 people May 16, medics said, making it the deadliest single attack since heavy fighting broke out between Israel and the territory's militant Hamas rulers nearly a week ago.

## Israeli strikes hit Gaza tunnels

Attacks have killed at least 200 Palestinians, wounded 1,300 people

By **FARES AKRAM** and **JOSEPH KRAUSS**  
Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — The Israeli military unleashed a wave of heavy airstrikes on the Gaza Strip early Monday, May 17, saying it destroyed 9 miles of militant tunnels and the homes of nine Hamas commanders, as international diplomats worked to end the weeklong war that has killed hundreds of people.

The latest attacks killed a top Gaza leader of the Islamic Jihad militant group whom the Israeli military blamed for some of the thousands of rocket attacks launched at Israel in recent days.

Israel has said it intends to press on for now with its attacks against Hamas, the militant group that rules Gaza, and the United States signaled it would not pressure the two sides for a cease-fire.

At least 200 Palestinians have been killed in the strikes, including 59 children and 35 women, with 1,300 people wounded, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. Eight people in Israel, including a 5-year-old boy and a soldier, have been killed in ongoing rocket attacks launched from civilian areas in Gaza toward civilian areas in Israel.

Violence also erupted between Jews and Arabs inside Israel, leaving scores of people injured. On May 17, an Israeli man attacked last week by a group of Arab citizens in the central city of Lod died of his wounds, according to police.

The overnight airstrikes in Gaza on May 17 hollowed out one

## CDC says mask turnaround based on science

By **KIMBERLEE KRUESI**  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Sunday, May 16, defended the decision to ease mask-wearing guidance for fully vaccinated people, stressing that increasing political pressure had nothing to do with the abrupt shift in guidelines.

"I'm delivering the science as the science is delivered to the medical journals. And it evolved," CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said on FOX News Sunday. "I deliver it as soon as I can when we have that information available."

Under the new guidelines released last week, fully vaccinated people — those who are two weeks past their final dose of a COVID-19 vaccine — can quit wearing masks outdoors in crowds and in most indoor settings and give up social distancing.

However, partially vaccinated or unvaccinated people should continue wearing masks, the agency said. The guidance also still calls for masks in crowded indoor settings including buses, airplanes, hospitals, prisons and homeless shelters.

The sudden change sparked praise from those eager to return to pre-pandemic life, particularly those who see the new guidelines as a way to reopen workplaces, schools and other venues that went dark during the pandemic.

Yet concerns have been raised from those who say there's no easy way for businesses and others to determine who is fully vaccinated and who is not. Instead, many will have to rely on an honor system as many states and communities have already been lifting mask mandates amid improving virus numbers and as more Americans have been shedding face coverings after getting shots.

"I would imagine within a period of just a

couple of weeks, you're going to start to see significant clarification of some of the actually understandable and reasonable questions that people are asking," Dr. Anthony Fauci, the face of the U.S. government's pandemic response, said on Face the Nation.

The timing of the change has also faced questions. Just days earlier, Walensky had defended the agency's strict mask guidance in front of a Senate committee where some Republicans on the panel described the CDC's guidance as "unworkable."

When pressed about the quick turnaround on the agency's stance on mask wearing, Walensky said the agency was not

giving in to pressure but instead needed time to review evolving science.

"I can tell you it certainly would have been easier if the science had evolved a week earlier and I didn't have to go to Congress making those statements. But I'm delivering the science as the science is delivered to the medical journals," she said.

To date more than

156 million Americans, or more than 47% of the population, have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, and more than 121 million are fully vaccinated.

Walensky cautioned that even with the new guidelines, it was still too early to "declare victory," but added that she was "cautiously optimistic" about the pandemic.

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