COVID-19: Efforts to Increase Vaccine Availability and Perspectives on Initial Implementation

What GAO Found

The federal government has taken several actions to increase the availability of COVID-19 vaccine doses and indicated it expects to have enough doses available for all adults in the United States by the end of May. As of April 1, 2021, the government had purchased 1.2 billion doses of one- and two-dose regimen vaccines. Also, vaccine companies reported making additional manufacturing sites operational, among other actions to expand capacity and mitigate challenges.

Federal officials said projecting future availability of vaccine doses can be difficult, in part because of uncertainty surrounding complex manufacturing processes. Given this uncertainty, coupled with the significant manufacturing and distribution increases needed to have enough vaccine doses available for all adults, managing public expectations is critical. GAO’s prior work has found that timely, clear, and consistent communication about vaccine availability is essential to ensure public confidence and trust, especially as initial vaccine implementation did not match expectations.

COVID-19 Vaccination Site

Stakeholders GAO interviewed identified challenges with initial COVID-19 vaccine implementation. For example, some stakeholders said states often did not have information critical to distribution at the local level, such as how many doses they would receive and when. The federal government has begun initiatives—outlined in a national response strategy—to improve implementation, such as creating new vaccination sites. In its March 2021 distribution strategy, CDC provided a high-level description of its activities and noted that more details would be included in future reports to Congress. To meet the expectations set by recent announcements, such as the planned expansion of vaccine eligibility to all adults and the introduction of tools to help individuals find vaccines, it will be imperative that the federal government effectively coordinate and communicate its plans, as GAO recommended in September 2020.