



Students Advocated, Biden Delivers: Millions Authorized as COVID-19 Vaccinators, Including Health Students Tackling Key Workforce Bottlenecks to Equitable Herd Immunity

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WASHINGTON, DC - On March 12, 2021, President Biden authorized “medical students, nursing students, and other health care students” to administer COVID-19 vaccinations by ordering an amendment to the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act (PREP Act) via HHS,¹ first announced by the White House on March 11. “As we fight against centuries of structural inequities, we must be intentional about making vaccination easy and convenient for everyone, and key to that effort is having enough vaccinators to deliver shots in arms,” said COVID-19 Task Force Co-Chair and Assoc. Dean at Yale School of Medicine Dr. Marcella Nunez-Smith while presenting the PREP Act amendment at the White House press briefing on March 12.² With the country “on track to have enough vaccine supply for every adult in America by the end of May,”³ the vaccination workforce is quickly overtaking vaccine supply as the most pressing bottleneck to accelerating vaccinations. In fact, Dr. Vivek Murthy predicted as much on January 26, 2021 in an appearance on The Ezra Klein Show.⁴ President Biden’s recent order to amend the PREP Act paves the way for states to enlist millions more in the COVID-19 vaccination workforce now that federal liability protections have been extended to health students and additional groups of health professionals.

“Health students are an eager, altruistic, and largely untapped workforce that can administer vaccinations, as they did for H1N1 and influenza, and communicate accessibly to accelerate equitable COVID-19 vaccination. Today’s PREP Act amendment overcomes a key liability barrier and builds on President Biden’s call for states to provide temporary vaccination licenses to clinical students,” said Apurv Hirsh Shekhar, a Yale medical student and co-founder of S-PHASEC Emergency Response. He leads the National Student Response Network (NSRN), a grassroots network of 6,000+ health professions students nationwide, who have volunteered in roles including COVID-19 testing, contact tracing, and more since April 2020. NSRN has advocated for health student service in the COVID-19 vaccination campaign to government, industry, and academic leaders since November 2020. On January 12, 2021, Shekhar and NSRN’s Chief of Staff Camryn Thompson wrote to the Biden-Harris COVID-19 Task Force advocating for a PREP Act amendment to include health students.⁵ The letter received a warm reception from Dr. Nunez-Smith and Dr. Michael Osterholm. Two days after the NSRN letter was sent to a coalition of 11 health school associations, all eleven (e.g., AAMC, AACN) came out in support of the PREP Act amendment.

With President Biden’s goal of “getting the nation closer to normal by July 4th,”⁶ expanding vaccination and public health workforces is essential in accelerating toward herd immunity and normalcy. Mobilizing students supports our overburdened healthcare heroes, who are “working sixteen hour shifts, day after day,” per Dr. Osterholm, a University of Minnesota infectious disease expert who served on the Biden-Harris COVID-19 Task Force.⁷ Trained health students, who have themselves been vaccinated, represent a low risk workforce due to their age, which may reduce the need for retired health workers and older adults to serve on the frontline of vaccination efforts. Many experts, including Dr. Osterholm, believe eradicating COVID-19 is “unrealistic” and annual vaccinations may be needed as variants spread.⁸ Systematizing student mobilization would support yearly COVID-19 vaccinations and response to future pandemics, especially with new students joining health professions programs regularly. Further, variant spread highlights global interdependence, and replication of successful models for health student deployment beyond the US may accelerate progress toward worldwide herd immunity.

While the PREP amendment is an important step forward, student advocacy continues through S-PHASEC and NSRN to realize Pres. Biden’s call for states to provide temporary vaccination licenses for clinical students. This may further accelerate vaccination efforts, according to NSRN’s on-the-ground reports. “Mobilizing a grassroots volunteer workforce enables us to identify and advocate ways to improve the COVID-19 response,” said Thompson, an incoming medical student and Duke senior. With encouragement from Dr. Osterholm and help from a Clinton Foundation accelerator, S-PHASEC and NSRN are mobilizing health students for hyperlocal COVID-19 vaccination and communication campaigns nationwide. The very day Biden ordered the PREP Act amendment, student volunteers from these organizations helped GOTVax canvass and vaccinate 200+ public housing residents in Boston, providing easy and convenient vaccination in public housing lobbies. “Health students through NSRN have been an incredible resource for GOTVax in helping to promote vaccine access to those most in need,” said Dr. Alister Martin, a Harvard Medical School physician who leads GOTVax. “Our generation of future healers feel called to serve,” said Shekhar. “We’re grateful for the PREP amendment, and we’re ready to answer the call of duty.”

Please see the second page for a timeline of student-led advocacy efforts toward a PREP Act amendment for students.

Below is a timeline of advocacy efforts encouraging health student roles and a PREP Act amendment for students.

11/11/2020	Dr. Nunez-Smith asks NSRN National Director for policy ideas enabling student roles in COVID-19 vaccination
12/11/2020	NSRN National Director presents on obstacles to student roles at MIT Vaccines for All, featuring global leaders ⁹
12/21/2020	CVS representatives meet with NSRN National Director and posit patchwork liability agreements as main hurdle
01/12/2021	NSRN and S-PHASEC leaders write and send a letter ⁵ to the Biden-Harris COVID-19 Task Force advocating (a) <u>PREP Act amendment</u> for health students, and (b) two roles for health students: <u>Vaccinating & Communicating</u>
01/13/2021	Dr. Nunez-Smith and Dr. Osterholm respond warmly and receptively and confirm internal circulation of this letter
01/21/2021	In the National Strategy for the COVID-19 Response, Pres. Biden explicitly endorses two roles for health students: <u>Vaccinating</u> (encouraging state policymakers to provide "temporary vaccination licenses for clinical students"), and <u>Communicating</u> ("students... may also serve as trusted messengers on vaccine education for their... communities") ¹⁰
01/22/2021	Dr. Osterholm meets with NSRN National Director, shares that NSRN letter helped inform text in the Biden-Harris National Strategy, and encourages national replication of S-PHASEC's PIECE model aided by a large foundation
01/25/2021	Eleven health school associations receive NSRN letter proposing <u>PREP Act amendment</u> via NSRN emailing SAA
01/27/2021	Eleven health school associations back the health student <u>PREP Act amendment</u> via Students Assist America (SAA)
Feb. 2021	Health professions associations (e.g., ADA, APhA) call for <u>PREP Act amendment</u> to include more professions
03/01/2021	Clinton Foundation program accepts Shekhar, Danielle Miyagishima (S-PHASEC Co-founder, NSRN Research Advisor, & Yale MD/PhD student), and Thompson to help scale S-PHASEC's PIECE model for equitable outreach, accelerate advocacy enabling health student roles in COVID-19 vaccination, and mobilize health student vaccinators
03/11/2021	Pres. Biden announces he will order a <u>PREP Act amendment</u> authorizing health students as COVID-19 vaccinators
03/12/2021	Pres. Biden orders <u>PREP Act amendment</u> via HHS, overcoming key liability barrier for health student vaccinators

For Students and Allies Interested in Joining or Supporting Mobilization of Health Student Vaccinators:

Health students, please consider [joining NSRN](#). Please also contact students@s-phasec.org if interested in COVID-19 vaccination efforts. Allies, please consider [supporting NSRN by donating](#). As a student-led 501(c)(3), we need your help to sustain and grow our operations.

National Student Response Network (NSRN) builds a network of health students across the US for mobilization by state and local public health departments and hospitals to support them in COVID-19 response and beyond. Since April 2020, NSRN has mobilized student volunteers to support COVID-19 vaccination, testing, contact tracing, PPE distribution, telehealth, healthcare worker support, patient education and support, logistics, and much more. As a centralized network for grassroots health student service with national and local coordination, NSRN aspires to create an enduring network that enables health student mobilization to support local and national crisis response. NSRN was founded by Harvard medical student Jalen Benson and has been led by Shekhar as National Director since July 2020.

S-PHASEC (Students Promoting Health Advocacy and Synchronized Engagement with Communities) empowers students to aid health campaigns and serve in emergency response through advocacy, community-academic partnership, and open innovation. Founded by Yale medical students Miyagishima, Shekhar, and Haleigh Larson, S-PHASEC leads several campaigns for COVID-19 response. Public Immunization Education and Community Effort (PIECE) mobilizes student-led, hyperlocal vaccine communication campaigns nationwide, scaling and adapting from our model in Connecticut, GOTVax's model in Boston, and ProCuro's model in Florida. Student Tools for Emergency Policy Engagement (STEP-E) organizes students to advocate for public health, emergency response, and health equity. SpikeSupport (SS) delivers and makes accessible the latest information on COVID-19 vaccines, vetted by expert immunologist Dr. Iwasaki.

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