



## ‘COVID isn’t gone’: Biden emerges from isolation to tout vaccines, treatments

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WASHINGTON (TND) — President Joe Biden tested negative for COVID-19 again Wednesday, ending a "strict isolation" after testing negative for the virus Tuesday night.

That's according to a letter the White House released Wednesday from Biden's physician, Dr. Kevin O'Connor. He hit the ground running midday Wednesday and addressed a crowd in the White House's Rose Garden, saying "COVID isn't gone" but serious illness can be avoided. Biden discussed his infection, the administration's fight against the coronavirus pandemic and encouraged eligible people to get their COVID-19 vaccinations and booster shots.

Biden also urged Americans to wear masks where appropriate and the antiviral drug Paxlovid.

*You don't need to be president to get these tools," he said.*

O'Connor wrote Biden completed his 5-day treatment with the drug and "remains fever-free." The drug is intended to reduce the severity of symptoms.

Dr. Jeffrey Singer, from the Cato Institute, told The National Desk that Paxlovid is "89% effective in preventing severe enough disease to go to the hospital or die in particularly high-risk people."

"It works by blocking an enzyme that the virus needs in order to replicate itself once it enters the host cell so it kind of arrests its progress," explained Singer. "In order for it to work, you have to take it within the first five days that symptoms develop, or else it's not as effective and it has very minor side effects."

O'Connor said those factors, the pair of negative tests and Biden's discontinued use of Tylenol in the past 36 hours have allowed him to end isolation measures.

"His symptoms have been steadily improving, and are almost completely resolved," O'Connor wrote in his latest daily update. "Acknowledging the potential for so-called 'rebound' COVID positivity observed in a small percentage of patients treated with Paxlovid, the president will increase his testing cadence, both to protect people around him and to assure early detection of any return of viral replication."

From the president's official Twitter account, Biden tweeted, "Back to the Oval. Thanks to Doc for the good care, and to all of you for your support," along with a picture of a negative rapid COVID test.

The 79-year-old president tested positive for COVID-19 on July 21. According to White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre, the president experienced "very mild symptoms." Opting to work in isolation, Biden held virtual meetings and addressed groups through recorded messages.

Biden is fully vaccinated and has received two booster shots since taking office – once in September and an additional dose at the end of March. Biden will "wear a well-fitting face mask for 10 full days anytime he is around others," O'Connor said.

***Biden ended his Wednesday speech by saying, "God bless you all, and now I get to go back to the Oval Office," and returned to the West Wing.***

The Democratic president had defied the odds until last week, showing no signs of contracting the virus despite routine testing and waves of the virus sweeping over the nation's political class, including Vice President Kamala Harris, Cabinet members, White House staff and lawmakers.

And after more than two years and over a million deaths in the U.S., the virus is still killing an average of 367 people a day in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The unvaccinated are at far greater risk, more than two times more likely to test positive and nine times more likely to die from the virus than those who have received at least a primary dose of the vaccines, according to the public health agency.

The highly transmissible omicron variant is the dominant strain in the U.S., but scientists say it poses a lower risk for severe illness to those who are up to date on their vaccinations. The BA.5 sub-strain, believed to be even more contagious, now makes up more than 65% of U.S. cases.