

Top US health official says not time to end COVID-19 curbs

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A top US health official warned Wednesday that measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 had to stay in place if the pandemic is to be beaten, after Texas dropped its mask-wearing mandate.

The United States has recorded over 500,000 deaths from the coronavirus, but has recently made progress with its vaccination plan and some states are easing controls—triggering alarm from health experts and the federal government.

"Now is not the time to release all restrictions... the next month or two is really pivotal in terms of how this pandemic goes," said Rochelle Walensky, the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"Every individual is empowered to do the right thing here regardless of what the states decide... I would still encourage individuals to wear a mask, to socially distance."

Biden has hailed recent success in distributing vaccines but stressed that Americans should continue to wear [masks](#) as his administration tries to quell the soaring death toll and the risk posed by new virus variants.

"The president is 100 percent behind Doctor Walensky and the CDC's recommendations," White House coronavirus advisor Andy Slavitt said, speaking after Walensky at a coronavirus briefing.

"I don't think you could possibly be any clearer about the importance and the need for masks. As a leader, it's probably one of the topics he talks about most frequently."

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