

New CDC guidelines set off rush to reimpose mask mandates

July 28 2021, by Philip Marcelo



People wearing masks wait to board a Southwest Airlines flight at Kansas City International airport in Kansas City, Mo., in this May 24, 2020, file photo. Governments and businesses are scrambling to change course following new federal guidance calling for the return of mask wearing in virus hot spots amid a dramatic spike in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations nationwide. Nevada and Kansas City were among the locations that moved swiftly to re-impose indoor mask mandates following Tuesday's, July 27, 2021, announcement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Credit: AP Photo/Charlie Riedel,

File

New guidance from the federal government set off a cascade of mask rules across the nation Wednesday as cities, states, schools and businesses raced to restore mandates and others pushed back against the guidelines at a time when Americans are exhausted and confused over constantly shifting pandemic measures.

Nevada and Kansas City, Missouri, were among the locations that moved swiftly to re-impose indoor mask requirements following Tuesday's announcement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But governors in Arizona, Pennsylvania and South Carolina said they would resist reversing course.

The federal recommendations quickly plunged Americans into another emotionally charged debate over the face coverings meant to curb easy transmission of the deadly coronavirus.

In Florida, a Broward County School Board meeting devolved into a screaming match between irate parents and board members on Tuesday. Some protesters even took to burning face masks outside the building.

In suburban Atlanta, Jamie Reinhold said she would pull her kids from school if the district stuck to the CDC's guidance, which the 52-year-old believes takes the country "backward" and damages confidence in the vaccines.

"If you believe in the masks, go ahead, but don't try to tell me what to do for my child's health and safety and immune system," she said. "It's my child. It's my choice."

And in New Orleans, Lisa Beaudean said she was not convinced mask mandates would inspire the unvaccinated—who account for most new infections—to take the virus seriously and get inoculated.

"I'm very frustrated," the St. Louis woman said as she strolled the French Quarter without a mask. "For the last 18 months, I've done everything I'm supposed to do, and there are no repercussions for those who haven't done what they're supposed to do."

Elsewhere, Ford Motor Co. said it would reinstate mask protocols for all employees and visitors at its Missouri and Florida facilities. The two states are among the hardest hit by the summer surge in which the U.S. is now averaging more than 60,000 new cases a day, driven by the highly contagious delta variant.

Google also postponed a planned Sept. 1 return to the office for most of its more than 130,000 employees until mid-October, following a similar move by Apple. Google said Wednesday that it will also eventually require everyone on staff to be vaccinated, a mandate that President Joe Biden said he's also weighing [for federal employees](#).



Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, adjusts her face mask during a Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing on the federal coronavirus response on Capitol Hill in Washington, in this Thursday, March 18, 2021, file photo. Walensky says new mask-wearing guidance, coupled with higher rates of vaccination against COVID-19, could halt the current escalation of infections in "a couple of weeks." The director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told "CBS This Morning" she hopes more stringent mask-wearing guidelines and other measures won't be necessary as the country heads into the fall. Credit: AP Photo/Susan Walsh, Pool, File

Other government leaders, meanwhile, said they will hold off reinstating mask rules for now.

Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf said he's not considering imposing a mask mandate in schools or statewide, arguing that such orders were necessary before there was a vaccine.

"People have the ability to make the decision to get a vaccine," the Democrat told a Pittsburgh radio station Tuesday. "If they do, that's the protection."

The CDC's new guidance applies to places with at least 50 new cases per 100,000 people in the last week, which is roughly 60% of all U.S. counties, federal officials said. Nearly all of the South and Southwest is subject to the guidance, but most communities in the Northeast—with the exception of major metro areas like New York City and Boston—are exempt for now, according to the [CDC's COVID tracker](#).

The stark partisan divide over mask wearing set up the potential for a patchwork of regulations within states and counties.

In Florida's Miami-Dade County, Mayor Daniella Levine Cava imposed an indoor mask mandate Wednesday at county facilities.

The Democrat's announcement, which does not apply to businesses or restaurants, comes after Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a new law in May giving the state the power to invalidate local pandemic measures, including mask mandates and limits on business operations.

"We have all come too far. We have all sacrificed too much in this past almost year and a half. We cannot turn back now," Levine Cava said.

In Missouri, the St. Louis County Council voted Tuesday to reverse the county's mask mandate, just a day after it became [one of the first](#) reinstated in the country.

But Democratic County Executive Sam Page insisted Wednesday that the mandate remained in effect and blamed the pushback on politics.



Dealers in masks wait for customers before the reopening of the D Las Vegas hotel and casino in Las Vegas, in this Wednesday, June 3, 2020, file photo. Governments and businesses are scrambling to change course following new federal guidance calling for the return of mask wearing in virus hot spots amid a dramatic spike in COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations nationwide. Nevada and Kansas City were among the locations that moved swiftly to re-impose indoor mask mandates following Tuesday's announcement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Credit: AP Photo/John Locher, File

On the other side of the state, Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas, a

Democrat, reinstated a similar indoor mask mandate for Missouri's largest city.

State Attorney General Eric Schmitt, who is running for the U.S. Senate as a Republican, has sued to block the St. Louis-area mandate and has vowed to do the same for Kansas City's requirement, saying on Twitter that the mandates are "about politics & control, not science."

The CDC's updated guidance was prompted by new data suggesting vaccinated people can pass on the virus in rare cases.

But the agency's director, Rochelle Walensky, stressed that the vaccines are working by preventing greater levels of hospitalization and death. Unvaccinated people account for the vast number of new infections. Two-thirds of the vaccine-eligible population in the U.S. has received at least one dose.

"I know this is not a message America wants to hear," Walensky told CNN on Wednesday. "With prior variants, when people had these rare breakthrough infections, we didn't see the capacity of them to spread the virus to others, but with the delta variant, we now see that you can actually now pass it to somebody else."

In Provincetown, Massachusetts, where officials earlier this week re-imposed an indoor mask requirement following a surge in COVID-19 cases this month, store owner Patrick Patrick says he doesn't mind asking customers to mask up once more.

The owner of Marine Specialties, a long running Army-Navy store, had been leery of the decision to drop nearly all virus safety mandates ahead of the busy summer season. He even tried to impose his own in-store mask mandate before relenting last month.

"If we'd stuck with masks all along, I don't think we'd be having this conversation," Patrick said. "We wore them all last summer, and we didn't have a single case in Provincetown. Now see where we're at."

As of Wednesday, the town had reported more than 800 cases associated with the most recent cluster, which started around the busy July 4th holiday.

The business drop-off has been significant, Patrick said. But he hopes the return of masks helps brings visitors peace of mind.

"I don't see masks as bad for business," he said. "If it gets people back out and feeling safe, it's worth it. We take care of public health and safety, the dollars and cents will take care of themselves."

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