

# Fauci says relaxed indoor masking rules could be on the way

10 May 2021, by Ernie Mundell and Robin Foster



Dr. Anthony Fauci on Sunday opened the door to the possibility of relaxing indoor masking rules as more Americans are vaccinated against the coronavirus.

As immunizations climb, "we do need to start being more liberal" in terms of rules for wearing masks indoors, though the nation is still averaging about 43,000 cases of the virus a day, Fauci told *ABC's* Sunday program "This Week." "We've got to get it much, much lower than that," he added.

Fauci's comments came in response to a question about recent statements made by Dr. Scott Gottlieb, the former head of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *The New York Times* reported. Gottlieb said that relaxing indoor mask mandates now—"especially if you're in environments where you know you have a high level of vaccination"—would give [public health officials](#) "the credibility to implement them" again in the fall or winter if cases surged again.

Asked whether he agreed with that assessment, Fauci said, "I think so, and I think you're going to probably be seeing that as we go along, and as more people get vaccinated."

"The CDC [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] will be, almost in real time... updating their recommendations and their guidelines," Fauci added. "But yes, we do need to start being more liberal as we get more people vaccinated."

Over a third of the U.S. population—more than 114 million people—is fully vaccinated and another 45 million people have received the first dose of a two-dose protocol, according to the CDC.

Right now, the agency says that even vaccinated people should still wear masks in indoor public spaces, including restaurants when they are not actively eating and drinking.

In an interview on *CNN's* "State of the Union," Jeffrey Zients, President Joe Biden's COVID response coordinator, was more circumspect than Fauci about Gottlieb's comments.

"I think everyone is tired, and wearing a mask is—it can be a pain," Zients said. "But we're getting there. And the light at the end of the tunnel is brighter and brighter. Let's keep up our guard. Let's follow the CDC guidance. And the CDC guidance across time will allow vaccinated people more and more privileges to take off that mask."

Zients also suggested that instead of reaching herd immunity, the goal should be getting 70 percent of Americans immunized, the *Times* reported. Biden has called for 70 percent to have at least one dose by July 4.

Reaching 70 percent will create "a pattern of decreasing cases, hospitalizations and deaths and take us down to a sustainable low level," Zients said, pointing to Israel as a model.

In that country, vaccinations have reached almost 60 percent of the population since they began on Dec. 19 last year, and the seven-day average of new cases has dropped from a high of more than 8,600 on Jan. 17 to fewer than 60 as of Saturday, the *Times* reported.

### **Only a third of parents will get shots for their younger kids right away**

As U.S. health officials prepare to authorize Pfizer's coronavirus [vaccine](#) for emergency use in [younger children](#) this week, a new poll shows that less than a third of parents would get their child vaccinated as soon as the shots are approved for kids.

Only 29% of parents of children under age 18 said they would get their child vaccinated "right away," according to data published last Thursday by Kaiser Family Foundation.

Another 32% said they would wait to see how the vaccine is working before getting their child a shot, while the remaining parents said their child would be vaccinated only if their school requires it (15%) or they definitely wouldn't be vaccinated (19%).

Public health experts have said that vaccinating children is key to ending the pandemic.

Pfizer's vaccine is already authorized in the United States for people ages 16 and up, while two others—from Moderna and Johnson & Johnson—are authorized for those 18 and older.

The survey percentages did not stray far from what was seen among American adults late last year in another Kaiser survey. In that survey, 34% of adults said they would get a vaccine as soon as possible, and 39% said they would wait and see.

Those attitudes have shifted over time. The latest data, from April, shows about 64% of American adults say they've either already gotten a vaccine or would get one as soon as possible, while a further 15% say they will wait and see.

"We're in a new stage of talking about vaccine demand," Mollyann Brodie, executive vice president of Kaiser's Public Opinion and Survey Research

Program, told the *Times*. "There's not going to be a single strategy to increase demand across everyone who is left. There will have to be a lot of individually targeted efforts. The people still on the fence have logistical barriers, information needs, and lots don't yet know they are eligible. Each strategy might move a small number of people to get vaccinated, but all together, that could matter a lot."

In Thursday's Kaiser survey, parents' intentions for their children typically mirrored their intentions for themselves. Among parents who have already received at least one dose or want it as soon as possible, three-fourths said they would get their children vaccinated right away (48%) or wait and see (29%).

The latest survey by the non-profit health research group was conducted April 15-29 among 2,097 adults.

Pfizer and Moderna are already testing their vaccines in children as young as 6 months old and expect to ask the FDA for emergency use authorization covering infants and children later this year. Pfizer expects to submit for emergency use authorization for children ages 2 to 11 in September, *CNN* reported.

### **Biden backs proposal to lift patent protections on vaccines**

The Biden administration last week announced that it will support a controversial proposal to waive patent protections for coronavirus vaccines, while the drug industry warned such a move would actually dampen the development of vaccines.

The United States had been a holdout at the World Trade Organization over the proposal, which could give drugmakers around the world a look at the trade secrets of how the viable COVID-19 vaccines have been made, the *Times* reported. But President Joe Biden has come under pressure to throw his support behind the proposal, the newspaper reported.

Katherine Tai, the United States trade representative, announced the administration's

support for the proposal last week.

"This is a [global health crisis](#), and the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic call for extraordinary measures," she said in a statement. "The administration believes strongly in intellectual property protections, but in service of ending this pandemic, supports the waiver of those protections for COVID-19 vaccines."

Tai said the United States would participate in negotiations over the matter, but that those talks would "take time, given the consensus-based nature of the institution and the complexity of the issues involved."

Shortly after the decision was announced, the pharmaceutical industry issued a statement that assailed the extraordinary decision. Stephen Ubl, president and chief executive of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, called the announcement "an unprecedented step that will undermine our global response to the pandemic and compromise safety."

"This decision will sow confusion between public and private partners, further weaken already strained supply chains and foster the proliferation of counterfeit vaccines," he said, adding that the move would have the effect of "handing over American innovations to countries looking to undermine our leadership in biomedical discovery."

But global health activists praised the administration's decision. It is "a truly historic step, which shows that President Biden is committed to being not just an American leader, but a global one," said Priti Krishtel, an executive director of the Initiative for Medicines, Access & Knowledge.

Still, the activists said a waiver alone would not increase the world's vaccine supply. It must be accompanied by a process known as "tech transfer," in which patent holders supply technical know-how and personnel.

"Handing needy countries a recipe book without the ingredients, safeguards and sizable work force needed will not help people waiting for the vaccine," Dr. Michelle McMurry-Heath, president and chief

executive of the Biotechnology Innovation Organization, told the *Times*. "Handing them the blueprint to construct a kitchen that—in optimal conditions—can take a year to build will not help us stop the emergence of dangerous new COVID variants."

As of Monday, the U.S. [coronavirus](#) case count passed 32.5 million, while the death toll topped 580,000, according to a tally from Johns Hopkins University. Worldwide, over 156.1 million cases had been reported by Monday, with more than 3.2 million people dead from COVID-19.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on the [new coronavirus](#).

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