

White House press briefing
July 29, 2021
2:59 p.m. Eastern

PETER DOOCY: So, President Biden says that we are not returning to lockdowns, shutdowns, and school closures, but he also once said that we didn't have to wear masks anymore once we were vaccinated, so why should Americans trust him now?

KARINE JEAN-PIERRE: Well, because we listen to the sciences. We listen to the expert [sic]. This is a public health situation. This is not about politics at all. This is about saving lives, and this is what the President is all about. He wants to make sure that we are saving lives. If you look at, Peter, the last six months, that's what he's done. Every day, and we — and you see that in the numbers now we're at a point where we have to double down and make it very, very clear to people that we can't — we can't let the pandemic win. We have to continue to fight.

DOOCY: So if you're listening to the science — if scientists come to you at some point down the line and say, it is our opinion that there should be shutdowns and there should be school closures, you would do that?

JEAN-PIERRE: Well, we listen to — like I said, we listen to the CDC and the expert [sic] and the — their guidance. Our — you know, our — the CDC is a — is a body that is very well respected and we follow — again, we follow their guidance.

DOOCY: And after this new guidance came out, the American Federation of Teachers Randi Weingarten came out to say “we are going to try to open up schools. Is that good enough for the President? Just trying?”

JEAN-PIERRE: Well, the President and the Secretary of Education has [sic] been very clear. By this fall, they — they would want to see all schools open. They've been very clear about that the last six months. That's why, in the historic American Rescue Plan that he signed into law in April, there are resources in that plan to make sure that schools are — are able to open up safely, that schools are — have the resources to get to have the PPE, to get that ventilation, and so the President had that in mind when he signed — when he put together that plan and signed it.

DOOCY: But now that — after the plan was out, now — after this new guidance, the teachers say they're just going to try? That — is that okay?

JEAN-PIERRE: Well, we're going to continue to work closely as we have with local governments, with the teachers as we've done and have been — continuing to have those conversation [sic]. I want to add, though, that nearly 90 percent of teachers are currently vaccinated. That's a good sign. Now, we just have to make sure we also protect our kids, right, in school. We protect their — we protecting the other administrators at school, people who have — who are immunocompromise [sic] and that's why the CDC put out that guidance in making sure that people are wearing masks in schools.

DOOCY: And last one. Just because you talked about this administration having a priority of protecting the American people, can you help us understand why is it that the federal government is asking vaccinated Americans to wear masks to stop the spread of Covid-19 at the same time that federal agents are also releasing Covid-19-positive border crossers into small towns in Texas? How is that stopping the spread?

JEAN-PIERRE: Well, let's stop back for a second because I've, you know, this is — [REPORTER'S EMERGENCY ALERT GOES OFF ON THEIR PHONE] — um, okay. Very interesting. I'm sure everything is fine. [REPORTERS LAUGH]

DOOCY: Something I said?

JEAN-PIERRE: It could be or may — [REPORTERS LAUGH] — But you know, you did laugh at my jokes, so maybe it's a reaction to laughing at my joke. Okay. So — I just want to be very clear here. I do want to answer your question, Peter. First, just to step back and do this 30,000 foot view, there's been no change in Title 42. Families and single adults are expelled if possible when apprehended at the southern border. The majority of apprehensions that we saw at the border in June were expelled. Those who can't be expelled are or are awaiting processing are often placed in altern — alternatives to detention programs while their cases are being reviewed. CBP provides migrants with PPE from the moment — from the moment they are taken into custody and migrants are required to keep masks on at all times, including when they are transferred or are in the process of being released. If anyone exhibits signs of illness in CPB custody, they are referred to local health systems for appropriate testing, diagnosis, isolation, and treatment. CPB takes its responsibility to prevent the spread of communicable diseases very, very seriously. We value our partners in local communities whose work is critical to moving individuals safely, out of custody and through appropriate immigration pathway and assist in mitigating Covid-19 and isolating — quarantine when needed. That's what I have for you, Peter.

Biden press conference
July 29, 2021
4:51 p.m. Eastern

PETER DOOCY: If vaccinations are so affected, why do vaccinated people still need to mask up?

[REPORTERS SHOUTING]

STEVE HOLLAND: Mr. President, how long do you think it might be necessary to wear a mask, and at what point do you think people might have to have a booster shot?

JOE BIDEN: I said in my talk the booster shot is not needed now. It is possible that it'll be needed later. I don't know. They don't — science hasn't dictated that yet, and the first part of your

question?

HOLLAND: How long do you think people might have to wear masks again?

BIDEN: Well, if you notice, a lot of places people don't have to wear masks. Let's get that straight. The places where people have gotten vaccinated, where we have a high vaccination rate, people do not have to wear masks at all. Like some of you who were with me yesterday when I was up in Lehigh Valley, didn't have to wear masks there. Don't have to mask if you come home to Delaware with me. I know you love doing that. But you don't have to wear a mask. The places people are probably going to have to wear masks in those communities where the high rate of unvaccinated stays high, and they don't move. They don't move to getting vaccinated, but I think you're going to find the patience of businesses and the patience of a lot of other people running thin because the fact is if you had high vaccination rates, we wouldn't be in this spot right now. Yes, sir.

KELLY O'DONNELL: Mr. President, will this set up an American workplace for federal workers and private sector that really is the vaccinated versus the unvaccinated, and is that a pressure you're trying to harness now?

BIDEN: Well, I'm not — look. What I'm trying to do is keep people safe. I mean that sincerely, so if, in fact, you're unvaccinated, you present a problem to yourself to your family, and to those with whom you work. Because as pointed out, I was asked a question why would people who have already been vaccinated get it? Well, you've got anywhere from two to three percent on average the last study done that can still get Covid. They don't get very sick. They don't get hospitalized, it's not serious, but they can catch it, and the concern is they may be able to pass it on and so that's all being studied right now. But the important thing is if people are vaccinated, the transmission rate drops through the floor, and that's all we're trying to do. Yes.

YAMICHE ALCINDOR: Mr. President, thank you. Why not push for vaccine mandates in states, private companies, schools? Do you want to see those entities pass vaccine mandates?

BIDEN: Well, I'd like to see them continue to move in that direction and that's why I pointed out I asked the Justice Department to determine whether that is — they're able to do that legally, and they can. Local communities can do that, local businesses can do that. It's still a question whether the federal government can mandate the whole country. I don't know that yet.

RACHEL SCOTT: Mr. President, you said earlier this week that we are not headed back towards lockdowns, but if the science is evolving, how can you be so confident in that? We heard you saying weeks ago that the virus was on the run, but Dr. Fauci has also indicated that we are heading in the wrong direction.

BIDEN: You're take — you're literally correct on everything you said, but it doesn't come to the conclusion you're implying. It is clear that if everybody's vaccinated, the existing vaccines work to prevent deaths, serious illness, hospitalization. Okay? So, if tomorrow I could wave a wand and every American was vaccinated, then, in fact, we'd be out of the woods. Now, can something

else happen a year from now? Can there be a different virus? Can there be something? It's possible, but I'm talking about Covid and the existing variants that have come forward so far. So it makes a — it's a simple proposition. If you're vaccinated, you find yourself in a situation where you are highly unlikely, even if you somehow get the virus, very small percentage do, that you are not going to be hospitalized. You're not going to be on a ventilator, you're not going to be sick, but you could be in a position to possibly spread it to someone who wasn't, if you have it in you. Yes.

FRANCO ORDOÑEZ: Mr. President, thank you. I wanted to ask why not require that people show proof that they're vaccinated and also, if you could just — with the four million, how much of an impact do you think this will have? Do you have a projection, sir?

BIDEN: A projection on what?

ORDOÑEZ: On how many people will get vaccinated by putting in this system.

BIDEN: No. I'm not going to get in the business of projecting exactly how many people are likely. All I know is that we go through these periods, and then we run up against a wall, and then something happens where people realize, oh, my Lord, this is really a problem and they begin to see things. Look, the fact that a lot of your friends are now saying get vaccinated who before were saying this is not a problem. This is a democratic thing, with a small D and a capital D. I mean, there's a lot changing. People are becoming aware, the more aware they become, then we have these surgeries of people going out and getting vaccinated. And it just keeps building.

ORDOÑEZ: I'm sorry. What about requiring proof, sir?

BIDEN: Well, that is — there's two ways to do it. And I think you're going to see some institutions doing that, like you're going to fly abroad, you're going to have to have proof you're not just going to be able to say, yeah, I got tested. You got to provide proof. My guess is if we don't start to make more progress, a lot of businesses and a lot of enterprises are going to require proof for you to be able to participate.

[REPORTERS SHOUTING]

BIDEN: In the back and then I'm going to take off shortly here.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER: What actions are you going to take to encourage private business to follow this type of model to either require vaccines or require testing or other preventative procedures?

BIDEN: I just did. I'm going to keep at it. I'm going to be talking about it around the country.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER: Are you going to reach out to private business, meet with them, try and actively encourage them to follow this model?

BIDEN: Well, I have. That's why we have folks from — everyone from the chamber of commerce from the manufacturers, et cetera. So, you know, I am — am I going to call a meeting of every, you know, business in the country to come to Washington or go on — I have made the case repeatedly. I doubt whether there's a single solitary business that doesn't understand that I think it's smart for them to require testing, require — and if you can't demonstrate, you can't prove you've been vaccinated, you have to be tested.

[REPORTERS SHOUTING]

WEIJIA JIANG: Secretary Austin said he was already considering mandating —

BIDEN: Yep.

JIANG: — the vaccine after it was fully approved. Would you like to see the mandate go into effect before full approval, and do you think he's open to that?

BIDEN: I know he's open to it, and the question is when is the right time to get the most bang for the buck when you do it? A lot of this is timing. And so, I think it's going to happen. Look, the one thing that you all are being — politely and appropriately referencing is that it's still a temporary approval. So when does the final approval come? It usually takes a lot of — a lot of work to get there. I made a commitment I would not tell anyone in the Justice Department who they should prosecute, and I would not tell the health industry that — excuse me — the government health entities what they should say and do, but my expectation is they're going to reach that conclusion in the early fall. Thank you very much.

[REPORTERS SHOUTING]

DOOCY: Mr. President you said if you were fully vaccinated, you would no longer need to wear a mask, and it seems —

BIDEN: No I didn't say that.

DOOCY: You did.

BIDEN: I said if fully vaccinated in an area where you do not have — well, let me clarify that.

DOOCY: In May, you made it sound like —

BIDEN: Oh, in May. That's true.

DOOCY: — a vaccine was the ticket to losing masks forever and —

BIDEN: That — that is true at the time because I thought there were people who were going to understand that getting vaccinated made a gigantic difference and what happened was the new variant came along, they didn't get vaccinated, it was spread more rapidly, and people — more

people were getting sick. That's the difference.

[REPORTERS SHOUTING]