

White House press briefing [via C-SPAN]

04/08/22

2:45:41 p.m.

2 minutes and 9 seconds

MARY BRUCE: Do you — this is the first time that we've heard a White House official sort of describe it as a certain possibility that the President could get COVID. Are you saying that you think it's more possible now, given sort of the little outbreak that we're seeing in D.C. right now?

JEN PSAKI: No. We're just saying that it is a possibility. Again, we are — cases are down 95 percent across the country since the height of Omicron. While cases are up in Washington, D.C., they're also far below the height of the cases and where they were in Omicron. But it is also the case that despite all the precautions we take and even with the President being double boosted, he could still test positive for COVID, just as people in the — many people in the White House have, many people in the press corps have. That is a possibility And we want to be transparent with the American public about that.

BRUCE: By our rough count here, you have at least 18 politicians and people close to the President who have now tested positive this week, though and you've reiterated all the extra precautions that you are taking to try and keep him safe — some of the extra masking and testing protocol, but just to be safe, have you considered maybe cutting down some of the big indoor events or scaling back any — or changing, sort of, your tactic with some of these events?

PSAKI: Well, clearly, we did the event — the historic event today outside. That was, in part, to ensure that we could have a huge number of people on the South Lawn celebrating the confirmation of Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson. But also, we know that having events outside is better for safety protocols. There's no question about that. But what's important for the American people to know and understand is that because of all the steps we've taken, because the President is double boosted, because of — you know, obviously he has access to the best healthcare in the world, but his doctors have assessed that these are risks that can be taken. We risk-assess just like everybody out in the country. And it's important for him to be able to continue his presidential duties now and even if he tests positive in the future, just like Americans out there in the country are taking their kids to school, they go to the grocery store, maybe they're making a decision to go to dinner. This is a time where we are certainly living with the virus, but we have a range of tools at our disposal to do that.

(...)

2:57:28 p.m.

3 minutes and 31 seconds

PETER DOOCY: Is there a carve-out in CDC regulations for COVID for the Vice President?

PSAKI: Tell me more, Peter. I'm sure this is going somewhere. Let's see.

DOOCY: Well, you know, the —

PSAKI: What do you got for me on a Friday?

DOOCY: The CDC says, for people exposed to COVID, up to date on their COVID-19 vaccinations: Do not go to places where you are unable to wear a well-fitting mask. So why is she here at the White House today giving the new Supreme Court justice a big hug with no mask?

PSAKI: You mean when she gave her a ma- — a hug outside?

DOOCY: Yes.

PSAKI: She was outside.

DOOCY: Does the CDC say that people who are close contact can give people hugs outside?

PSAKI: We know, Peter, that outside it is — it is — you are — you can benefit significantly being outside. That's why we have — we had the event outside today. I will tell you that the Vice President has been wearing a mask inside. When there was a private greet, they were all wearing masks, before they went out —

DOOCY: We saw she wasn't wearing a mask yesterday at the Senate.

PSAKI: She was playing an important role in confirming or overseeing the confirmation of the first Black woman to the Supreme Court. The vast majority, as was on camera, Peter —

DOOCY: Is there a public health carve-out for that?

PSAKI: — as was on camera. Let me finish my answer here. Because Fox and other — I don't know actually that Fox carried it, but others did — saw that she was socially distanced from people for the vast, vast majority of her time overseeing that confirmation yesterday.

DOOCY: So this is not a case of rules for thee but not for VP?

PSAKI: In fact, the Vice President wore a mask inside today when she was both with the President, with her staff, other people. She was outside at the event. She was socially distanced for 99.9 percent of the event today and she had an emotional moment, which is understandable.

DOOCY: Okay and one other topic. Following up on the smartphones that are being given to border crossers with technology so they can be tracked or so they can check in: Is there any plan to give free smartphones to U.S. citizens that want them?

PSAKI: Should we not be tracking migrants who irregularly cross the border?

DOOCY: I'm asking if the same —

PSAKI: Or do you have an alternative suggestion for how they should be tracked?

DOOCY: I, unfortunately, have not been asked to make U.S. immigration policy. That's not my —

PSAKI: Today's your moment. [LAUGHTER]

DOOCY: Well, it'd be great if anybody that wanted a free phone and a free monthly plan could get one. So, is that going to be an offer for everybody or just people that walk into the country illegally?

PSAKI: Well, Peter, as — when we talked about this the other day, what I noted to you is that we have a range of means of tracking individuals who irregularly migrate to the country, as — in order to ensure that they are meeting their Notice to Appear obligations and that they are appearing in court when they should appear in court. Phones is one of them. There are also ankle devices and a range of tracking devices. 80 percent of individuals have — of non-citizens released at the border from DHS custody under prosecutorial discretion have either received a Notice to Appear or are still within the window to report. So, yes, there is telephonic reporting. There is SmartLink, which enables participant monitoring via smartphone. There's the Global Positioning System. These are the range of means with modern technology that we monitor.

DOOCY: Last one on this: Does the President have any plans to figure out what these small towns who are bracing for a major influx in migrants next month need by making his first-ever trip to the border?

PSAKI: I have nothing to predict for you in terms of additional trips. The President will be traveling the country, but I don't have any more specifics for you at this point. Thank you for the question.

(....)

3:20:34 p.m.

23 seconds

ALEX THOMPSON: Then a follow-up: Yesterday, you said — when asked about Vice President Harris and the mask at the Senate — you said that she would follow CDC protocols at the event today. CDC protocols clearly say you should be wearing a mask. It doesn't distinguish between outside and inside. So why didn't she wear a mask?

PSAKI: And she was socially distanced for the vast majority of the event today.

THOMPSON: She was sitting — standing next to the President.

PSAKI: About six feet away.