

NBC's *Today*

04/21/22

7:03:47 a.m.

1 minute and 20 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Mask Battle Heats Up]

TOM COSTELLO: Let's be clear here. While Justice is, in fact, appealing this lone federal judge's decision to wipe out the mask mandate for the entire country, Justice is not asking for a stay. It's not asking to reinstate the mask order. What it's trying to do is preserve the integrity and the authority of the CDC to act in the event of a public health emergency going forward [sic] — forward rather. So if you're confused by the mask mandate, you're not alone. Even as travelers are starting to lower their masks in some modes of public transportation —

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE #1: We can breathe.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE #1: Yep.

COSTELLO: — the Justice Department is appealing the ruling by a federal judge who found the mandate exceeded the CDC's authority. Just hours before DOJ filed, the White House said any appeal would be about preserving the CDC's ability to respond to health crises.

JEN PSAKI [on 04/20/22]: We expect there to be ups and downs in the pandemic, and we certainly want the CDC to continue to have this authority.

COSTELLO: Public health experts say that authority is critical to keeping the public safe.

DR. ESTHER CHOO: When we under power public health decision-making, we put ourselves at risk, our families, our communities at risk in the long-term.

COSTELLO: But the DOJ's move follows days of confusion for passengers nationwide as the TSA and most local transit systems made masks optional.

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7:05:30 a.m.

39 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Mask Battle Heats Up]

COSTELLO: While average daily COVID deaths have been trending down since a spike in February, we are still losing nearly 400 people a day. That's why some travelers say they'll keep masking up. Gerja Muahajen [sp] says it's frustrating for parents like her with kids under five who can't yet get vaccinated.

GERJA MUAHAJEN [sp?]: We can continue to mask, but it also makes us very nervous to travel with individuals who may not be vaccinated and who are additionally not required to wear a mask.

COSTELLO: For now in most places, the decision to mask up is up to each individual passenger.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE #2: You know, I'm comfortable, so I choose not to wear one, but it's completely up to you as you want to move forward.

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7:07:26 a.m.

1 minute and 56 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: United CEO on Mask Mandate Ruling]

UNITED CEO SCOTT KIRBY: I think it's very unlikely that a mask requirement is going to come back anytime in the foreseeable future.

CRAIG MELVIN: On the plane, yes, perhaps, but what about when you're, you know, you're waiting in line at the airport? I was at an airport yesterday, packed, probably the most packed I've seen it over the last two and a half years, and now you've got a lot of folks walking around those airports unmasked, cases up as you know, 50 percent over the last two weeks. Is this the best time to do this?

KIRBY: Yeah, look, I think broadly, in society, almost everywhere we go, restaurants, sporting events, everywhere we go because of the availability of vaccines, the efficacy of treatments and the way the numbers have come down, broadly everywhere indoors, we're getting back to living life as normal. COVID is going to be with us. It's going to be endemic. It's going to be here for a long time, but we're learning to live with that, including in airports or in restaurants, or at sporting events. And by the way, the airports actually wind up being one of the safer places as well because the standards for air filters are higher. While they're not HEPA grade filters, they're much higher than in most buildings. So, I look at it compared to other indoor locations —

MELVIN: Right.

KIRBY: — and an airport is safer than most of the other indoor locations where you'll be.

MELVIN: What about the immunocompromised? What about children under five?

KIRBY: Yeah, so as a father of seven, I have two children under five, and am really confident in — in having them out both at airports or taking them to restaurants. We took them to a sporting event — to a Mavericks playoff game. Really confident in being able to be there. But the important point is all of our customers should feel free to wear a mask, and many of them are. Employees and customers should feel free to wear a mask if they want, and for customers like

that — that are immunocompromised or that have other concerns or issues, Tom talked about it before, we are working with those customers if they really don't want to fly to find another option, give them a credit, or if they really never wanted to fly again, actually willing to give them a refund.

(...)

8:02:47 a.m.

1 minute and 30 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: News at 8; Mask Battle Heats Up]

COSTELLO: The bottom line, don't expect any change if you go to the airport. You can go without the mask. The mask — the — the judge's order that essentially kills the mask order, that remains in place. Justice is, in fact, appealing that order, but it is not requesting a stay. It acknowledges that, in fact, everybody has now dropped the mask order. What Justice is really doing and the Biden administration is trying to preserve the integrity and the ability of the CDC to issue public health orders going forward in the event of another health emergency that would require that kind of action. We can tell you that 56 percent of the American public supports wearing masks on planes and trains and buses, and so while the country is more leaning towards having masks than not, there is still an awful lot of confusion out there because while the mask mandate is dropped on the federal level, local cities, in fact, still do in some cases require masks in Philly, for example, in New York, in San Francisco, depending on the transit system, and that's led to confusion across the country. The bottom line, say the experts, if you would like to wear a mask, if you feel like you need that for protection for yourself, your family, somebody who's immunocompromised, then you should go ahead and mask up, but at the moment, it is not required if you are to fly. I think you will find if you do fly that about 75 percent of the people inside the airport are still wearing masks. As we said, polls suggest most Americans still support masks in some form.