

Federal Agency Responds to Rumors of Coming COVID-19 Lockdown

By [Jack Phillips](#)

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The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) on Friday responded to social media-driven claims the federal government is looking to re-impose mask mandates, vaccine mandates, and lockdowns.

Earlier this week, InfoWars host Alex Jones claimed that a TSA manager informed him that COVID-19 lockdowns and mandates would be returning. The worker said that on Aug. 15, TSA managers were told that by mid-September, mask mandates would return at airports, and by December, lockdown measures would return.

"BREAKING: Alex Jones says a TSA whistleblower has told him TSA employees were instructed on Tue that masks are coming back by October for travelers & full Covid restrictions/lockdowns by December due to a new 'dangerous variant' out of Canada," said a post on X, with the video of Mr. Jones earlier this week.

The TSA told The Epoch Times the claims are not true and that the agency "does not have any new requirements and there has not been any meeting on the topic." It further noted that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is the federal agency that makes public health determinations, including whether masking is needed.

Meanwhile, the "TSA has authority to impose mask-related requirements to implement mask orders from the CDC related to transportation systems. TSA is not imposing mask-related requirements at this time," the agency said. It later pointed to CDC recommendations that people get "up to date" on COVID-19 vaccinations and "consider wearing a mask in crowded or poorly ventilated indoor areas, including on public transportation and in transportation hubs."

Benjamin Haynes, a spokesperson for the CDC, told The Associated Press that any reports of

upcoming lockdowns are “utterly false.” The Epoch Times has contacted the agency for comment on Friday.

Mr. Jones, of InfoWars, has not responded to a request for comment.

Last week, COVID-19 hospitalizations rose across the country, according to data from the CDC. Hospitalizations rose by 21.6 percent, to 12,612 new admissions from 10,370, according to the data ending Aug. 12.

Despite the increase, it’s among the lowest levels of hospitalization recorded since the start of the pandemic in early 2020.

“An upswing is not a surge; it’s not even a wave,” Dr. Shira Doron, the chief infection control officer for Tufts Medicine, told ABC News this week. “What we’re seeing is a very gradual and small upward trajectory of cases and hospitalizations, without deaths really going along, which is great news.”

On Jan. 29, 2021, the CDC issued an order requiring people to wear masks on public transportation, including airplanes, and in transportation hubs, that was implemented and enforced by the TSA. A federal judge in Florida struck down the mandate on April 18, 2022, finding that the CDC failed to justify the order and that it did not follow proper rulemaking procedures.

Mandates Returning Elsewhere?

It comes as Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.) sounded the alarm that a small number of offices, hospitals, and schools reinstated mask mandates in recent days. A college in Atlanta, Lionsgate’s office in Santa Monica, and a handful of hospitals in San Francisco and New York have reimposed mandates.

Describing the mandates as “alarming,” Mr. Johnson told the Moms for Liberty group on Aug. 23 that they are ineffective and said he would keep fighting them.

“It’s alarming that the mandates are kicking in again,” he told the group. “It’s like, OK, we noticed masks didn’t work, particularly for children. We always knew they didn’t work for kids.”

As for Lionsgate, a Hollywood film studio, a manager released a memo to employees saying that employees on certain floors will have to wear masks. The memo, however, did not explain why other floors don’t have the mask mandate.

“Employees must wear a medical grade face covering (surgical mask, KN95 or N95) when indoors except when alone in an office with the door closed, actively eating, actively drinking at their desk or workstation, or if they are the only individual present in a large open workspace,” a Lionsgate manager said in a memo, reported by Deadline Hollywood.

In Santa Rosa, California, a Kaiser Permanente Hospital location brought back the mask rule for visitors, patients, nurses, and doctors this week. And Upstate Community Hospital in Syracuse, New York, did the same.

“To ensure that we are helping protect the health and safety of our patients, our workforce, and our community, we have reintroduced a mask mandate for physicians, staff, patients,

members, and visitors in the hospital and medical offices in the Santa Rosa Service Area," Kaiser Permanente said in a statement.

At the same time, there appears to be an uptick in alarmist media coverage of the increase in COVID-19 cases as well as several new variants. For example, multiple doctors appeared on CNN this week to issue warnings about wearing masks.

"It's riskier that you will get infected now than it was a month or two ago, without question, probably twice as risky," Dr. Bob Wachter, chair of medicine at the University of San Francisco, told CNN. "If you're trying to be careful, it's time to whip out the mask again."

In response, some Republicans and conservative social media influencers called on their supporters not to comply.

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Jack Phillips is a senior reporter for The Epoch Times based in New York. He covers breaking news.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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