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mid vaccine

Biden slams Texas for optimism

By [Natalie O'Neill](#) and [Steven Nelson](#)

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President Biden on Wednesday slammed the “neanderthal thinking” of Republican governors who [lifted COVID-19 mask mandates](#) in Texas and Mississippi — as the CDC stressed that highly-contagious new COVID-19 variants threaten the fight against the virus.

“The last thing, the last thing you need is neanderthal thinking that in the meantime everything is fine, take off your mask,” Biden told reporters when asked about scrapped mask orders in Texas and Mississippi.

“It’s critical, critical, critical, critical that they follow the science. Wash your hands, hot water. Do it frequently. Wear a mask and stay socially distanced. And I know you all know that I wish the heck some of our elected officials knew it,” he said.

His comments came a day after Texas lifted its mask order amid approval of Johnson and Johnson’s single-dose vaccine — and the announcement of an amped-up federal plan to get every adult in the US vaccinated by the end of May. Soon after, Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves said he too would end a statewide mask order.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki also criticized the move Wednesday while imploring Americans to ignore science-snubbing elected officials.

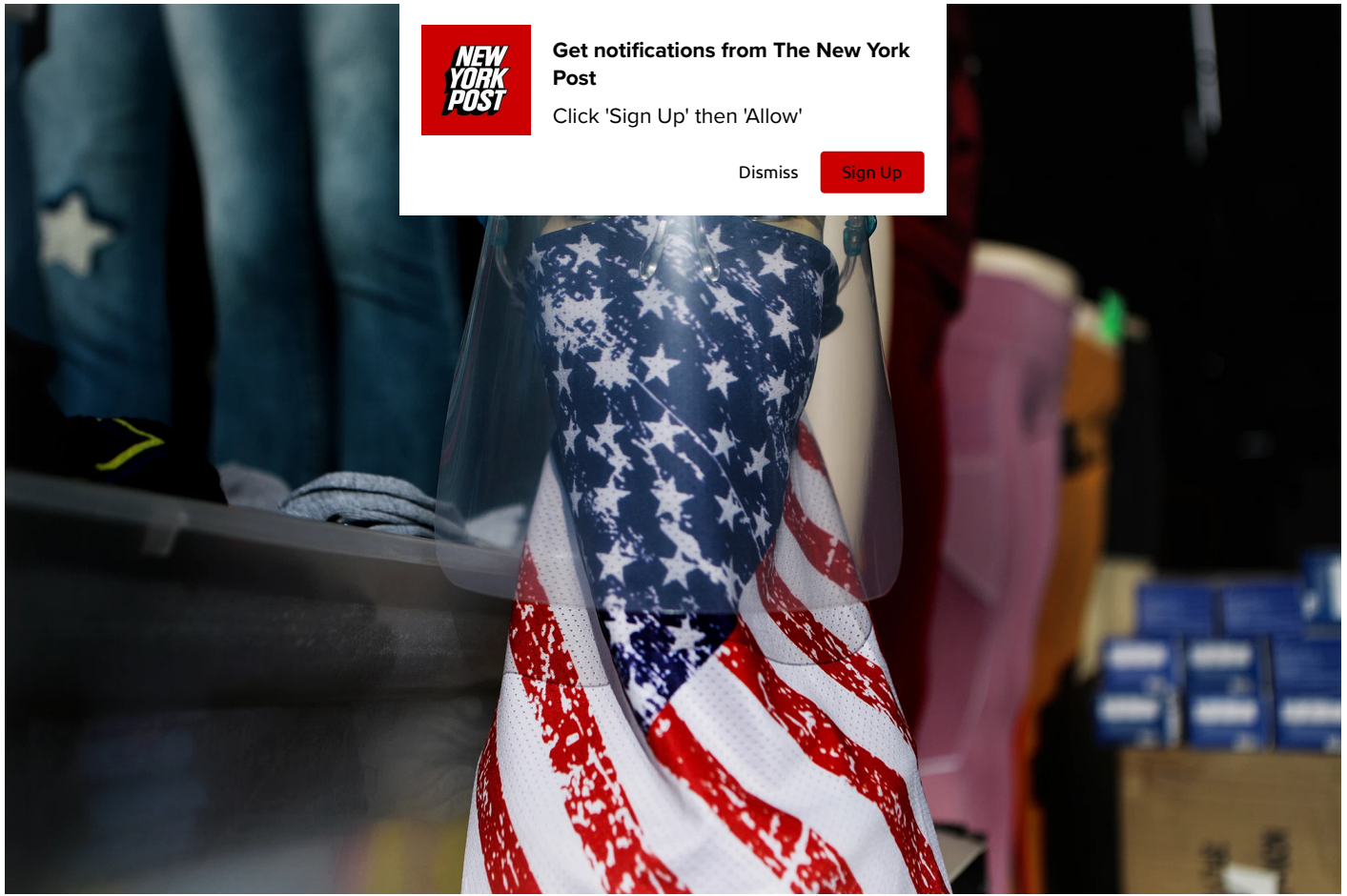
“This entire country has paid the price for political leaders who ignored the science when it comes to the pandemic,” White House press secretary Jen Psaki said at a press conference when asked about Texas and Mississippi. “We need to remain vigilant.”

The CDC echoed the White House’s concerns, warning that masking up is needed as the US reaches a “critical nexus” in the pandemic — despite vaccine progress.

“We have been very clear that now is not the time to release full restrictions,” CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky at a White House briefing Wednesday in reference to Texas.

“Every individual is empowered to do the right thing here, regardless of what the states decide — for personal health, for public health, for the loved ones in their communities.”

She added, “I would still encourage individuals to wear a mask.”



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An American flag face covering is displayed for sale amid a surge of coronavirus cases in El Paso, Texas, on Nov. 18, 2020.

Getty Images

Walensky urged people not to let pandemic “fatigue” cloud their judgment when it comes to safety precautions.

“Today we are at a critical nexus in the pandemic,” she said. The [UK variant] looms ready to hijack our successes to date... all the while we are just on the verge of capitalizing on historic scientific success,” she said.

“Fatigue is winning and the exact measures we have taken to stop the pandemic are now too often being flagrantly ignored.”

“How this plays over the next three months is up to us,” she said, urging Americans to continue to, “wear a well-fitting mask, avoid travel in crowds, and practice social distancing.”

On Tuesday, while announcing that Texas would scrap its mask order, Gov. Abbott said, “It’s time to reopen Texas 100 percent.”

North Dakota, Montana and Iowa have also lifted mask mandates in recent weeks.

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