

Texas, Mississippi abandon coronavirus restrictions as CDC warns of variant-induced surge

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Texas Governor Greg Abbott announced Tuesday that he will end a statewide mask mandate on March 10 and will simultaneously lift all coronavirus-related restrictions on business operations. Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves followed suit, declaring that as of March 3, all restrictions in the state are now “recommendations.”

“It is now time to open Texas 100 percent,” Abbott declared, asserting that “people and businesses don’t need the state telling them how to operate.” He continued that he was rescinding “most of the executive orders” regarding the pandemic and that “all businesses of any type are allowed to open 100 percent.”

At the same time, Abbott menaced any counties who planned on continuing with COVID-19 mitigation efforts, warning that “under no circumstances” can a person be jailed or fined for violating county-level public safety measures. Similarly, workplaces cannot be penalized for ignoring such measures and must be allowed to operate at 50 percent capacity at a minimum, regardless of the case counts and death rates in a given county.

The move by Abbott is all the more outrageous coming in the aftermath of the recent deadly snowstorm across the entire state, which scientists have warned will likely be a super-spreader event, the result of people being forced to huddle in the few places that had warmth to survive the frigid onslaught. There have been nearly 2.7 million cases of the pandemic in Texas since March 2020 and more than 44,000 recorded deaths. An average of 7,000 new cases and 230 new deaths are still being reported each day, making it the state with the second worst outbreak in the country.

One can thus only assume that Abbott’s policies are

designed to deliberately spur on a third wave of the pandemic in Texas and help galvanize a fourth wave nationally as part of the ruling elite’s “herd immunity” strategy. In the fall, the national third wave was fueled largely by partial relaxations of business operations and the resumption of some in-person learning at schools. Those actions *tripled* the number of new cases and daily deaths, causing an additional 250,000 deaths in just three months. Now, one can only imagine the scale of the pandemic as all restrictions are dropped in schools and workplaces, especially when multiplied by the spread of more contagious variants.

A recent report from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that all five of the major coronavirus variants—those originating from Brazil, Britain, California, New York and South Africa—have all been identified in Houston, the largest city in Texas and the fourth largest city in the United States. If they spread, and there are no indications they will be stopped, the case counts in the state will skyrocket beyond anything seen so far in the pandemic, stressing hospital systems past the breaking point.

The presence of the Brazilian variant is especially worrying. A recent study conducted by the Imperial College London and the University of São Paulo found that the mutation that emerged in Brazil (formally known as the P.1 variant) is between 1.4 and 2.2 times more contagious than the other variants. It is also capable of evading immunity because it mutated from another variant and does not respond to the current suite of vaccines.

In light of such dangers, the CDC is now warning that a new surge is on the horizon as the variants continue to spread. CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky stated at

a press briefing on Monday, “At this level of cases with variants spreading, we stand to completely lose the hard-earned ground we have gained.” She continued, “These variants are a very real threat to our people and to our progress. Now is not the time to relax the critical safeguards that we know could stop the spread of COVID-19 in our communities, not when we are so close.”

Abbott faced immediate criticism from state Democrats, such as party chairman Gilberto Hinojosa, who called his actions “extraordinarily dangerous” and warned that they “will kill Texans.” These statements are true, but at the same time they hide the fact that the Democrats are pursuing essentially the same pandemic strategy as the Republicans.

At the national level, one of the highest priorities of the Biden administration is to open schools, even though that has been proven to be a driver of the pandemic. And in states such as Illinois, New York and California, state Democratic administrations have been working with the teachers unions to enforce unsafe reopenings even as the new variants spread.

The justification for the reopenings and lifting of restrictions is that, as Abbott claims, local, state and federal agencies are “far better positioned now” than they were at the beginning of the pandemic to handle the crisis. Elected officials point to the fact that case counts and death rates have come down sharply from their early January highs.

Despite the downward trends with daily new cases having plateaued at about 70,000, last summer’s level, daily new deaths are still at about 2,000 each day. Whatever Abbott and his ilk in both parties claim, the pandemic is far from over.

Nor will the proliferation of vaccines necessarily be as effective as one might hope. Both the Brazilian and South African variants have shown to be resistant to different vaccines, which means that booster shots must be developed and distributed, which takes time and resources. It is a race against the constantly mutating virus, which has hundreds of thousands of new chances around the world each day to become partially or totally immune to the vaccines.

In contrast to the actions of Abbott, Reeves, Biden and the entire US political establishment, the real solution to the pandemic is to tighten restrictions, not loosen them. Online learning and remote work must be

more completely implemented to give the virus as few chances as possible to spread, and those who work in essential industries must be given even greater protections.

As the cases and deaths drop, such a scenario argues for even more stringent lockdowns, to bring the numbers to zero and end once and for all a pandemic which has already killed more than 529,000 Americans and 2.5 million globally.



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