# Sen. J.D. Vance is fighting against mask mandates, but they're unlikely to return in Ohio

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As Sen. J.D. Vance rails against mask mandates in Washington, Gov. Mike DeWine said Thursday that Ohio is unlikely to reinstate rules in place at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"People have asked me, 'Are we going to see masks come back in Ohio?' I don't think that's going to happen," DeWine told reporters in Columbus on Thursday. "We're at a very different stage. We would still encourage people who have not been vaccinated to get vaccinated and keep their vaccinations up, whether it is in regard to COVID or whether it's flu. We have the flu season coming. So these all continue to be important things."

The governor's comments came hours before Vance unsuccessfully tried to push a vote on legislation that would ban federal officials from issuing mask mandates for schools, domestic air travel or public transit for 15 months. The Ohio Republican, who lives in Cincinnati's East Walnut Hills neighborhood, introduced the bill earlier this week with several GOP colleagues.

"We are going to have people who get sick from viruses. It has always been thus," Vance said on the Senate floor. "The way to respond to it is with calmness, resolve and strategic thinking, not by pretending the world is ending because what has always happened is going to happen once again. We cannot repeat the anxiety, the stress and the nonstop panic of the last couple of years."

When asked about Vance's bill on Wednesday, Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, dismissed the idea that mask mandates are returning. Some New York hospital systems and a Maryland elementary school recently implemented mask requirements, but Ohio schools, hospitals and businesses have largely abandoned them.

"We're on the other side of the pandemic," Brown said. "We don't need mask mandates."

# Debate over mask mandates heats up − again

The debate over masking has resurfaced nationwide as COVID-19 cases tick back up and new variants emerge. The number of cases in Ohio climbed steadily over the past month, and the Ohio Department of Health on Thursday reported a two-week statewide average of 129.6 cases per 100,000 residents. Health officials also identified a new COVID variant, BA.2.86, in Lorain County late last month.

Multiple studies have suggested masks are effective at preventing the spread of COVID-19, particularly N95s and other medical-grade masks. A study of community masking in Bangladesh saw a nearly 12% decline in COVID symptoms with 42% of the population using masks provided to the villages for free.

Critics seized on a Cochrane Library review published earlier this year that examined whether interventions to promote masking helped slow the spread of respiratory viruses and determined the results were "inconclusive." Researchers issued a subsequent statement saying it was "inaccurate and misleading" to use the paper as evidence that masks don't work.

"When you're talking about the effect on the epidemic or the pandemic as a whole, the data are less strong," Dr. Anthony Fauci told CNN when asked about the Cochrane review. "But when you talk about as an individual basis of someone protecting themselves or protecting themselves from spreading it to others, there's no doubt that there are many studies that show there is an advantage."