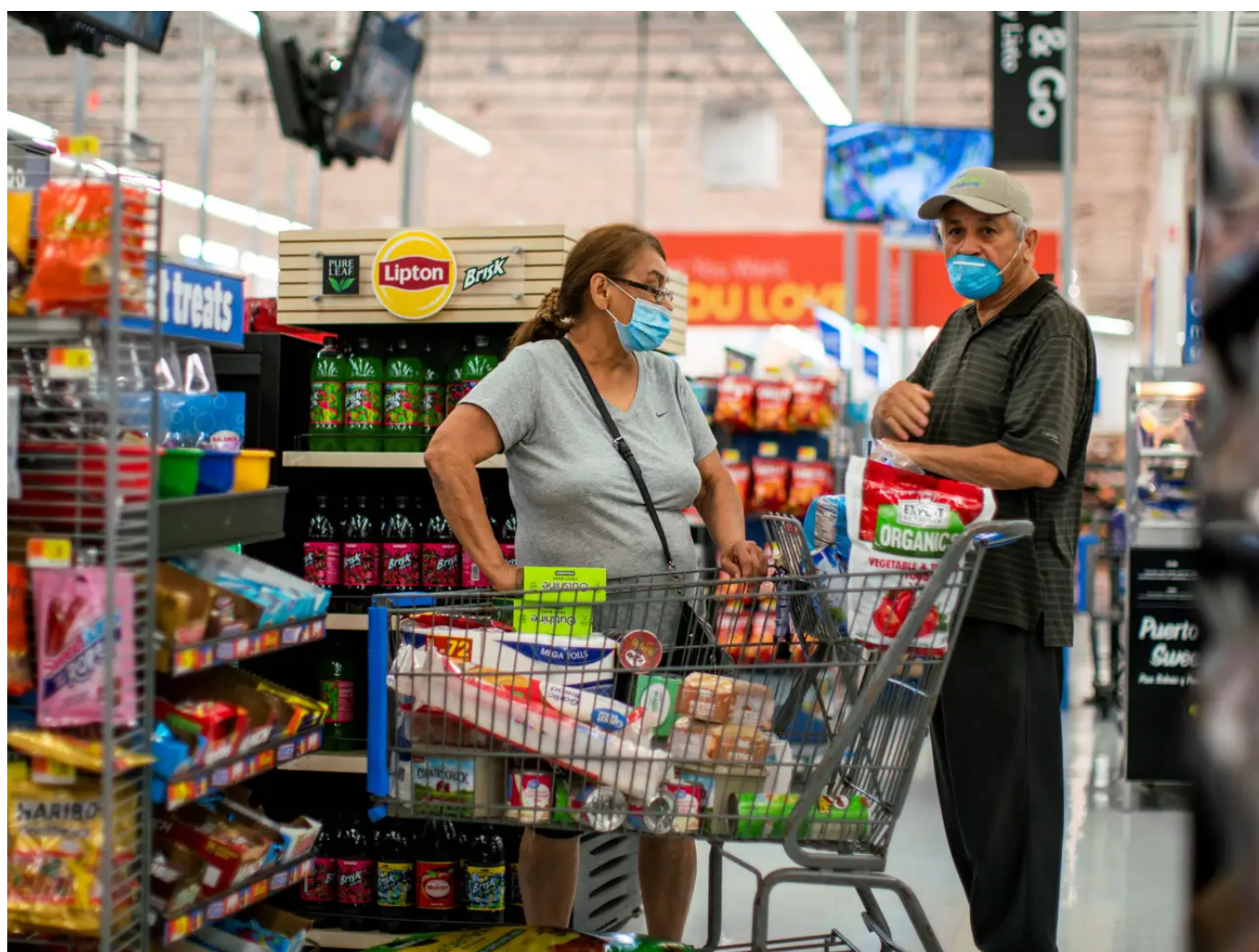


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Target, Starbucks, and other retailers may face a 'horrible' new wave of confrontations over masks following updated CDC rules

Mary Hanbury 17 hours ago



Shoppers are seen wearing masks while shopping at a Walmart store, in North Brunswick, New Jersey, on July 20, 2020. REUTERS/Eduardo Munoz

The CDC relaxed its guidelines for wearing masks indoors and outdoors for fully vaccinated people.

Critics say the new guidelines are a headache for retail businesses and workers.

We can expect a summer of "verbal altercations" because of this, one expert said.

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [relaxing of rules](#) around wearing masks to slow the spread of the coronavirus is likely to create an ugly situation for retail businesses and workers in the US this summer, critics say.

As per the new guidance, the CDC recommended that fully vaccinated Americans can go mask-free in most indoor and outdoor spaces. Unvaccinated (or partially vaccinated) people should still wear a mask, and ultimately, it is up to the individual states to decide if they want to follow any of these recommendations or not.

Critics say the announcement presents a host of challenges. Because

the CDC guidance doesn't align with local and state mandates, the enforcement of mask rules could fall on store workers, and that could lead to a rise in altercations between customers and these workers.

Retail businesses are put in a "horrible situation"

Enforcing masks mandates in stores has been a complex issue over the course of the pandemic and one that, at best, has been an added stress to retail workers' jobs. At worst it has been [a risk to their lives](#).

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Under the new guidelines, retailers and their employees are put in a position where they don't know who is and who is not vaccinated and whether that person should be wearing a mask.

"Essential workers are still forced to play mask police for shoppers who are unvaccinated and refuse to follow local COVID safety measures. Are they now supposed to become the vaccination police?" Marc Perrone, president of The United Food and Commercial Workers International (UFCW), said in a statement emailed to Insider on Thursday.

The guidance is "confusing," he said, and "fails to consider how it will impact essential workers who face frequent exposure to individuals who are not vaccinated and refuse to wear masks."

Since stores will have no way to discern whether someone has been vaccinated or not, "management should insist or require that their associates are vaccinated so as to be protected from likely unvaccinated unmasked customers," Mark Cohen, director of Retail Studies at Columbia Business School, told Insider.

"It will only lead to trouble if stores' management is foolish enough to expect stores' associates to try to play a public health enforcement role which they will be unable to do," Cohen said.

Larry Barton, a professor of crisis management and public safety at the University of Central Florida, said that conflicts are inevitable.

"The business owner is expected to be referee, pseudo police, and mask enforcer- just as they're trying to rebuild rapport with customers," Barton wrote in an email to Insider. It puts businesses in a "horrible situation," he said, especially as they are grappling with labor shortages and trying to attract new workers that have been put off by demanding customers and low pay.

We can expect a summer of "verbal altercations, snarky people challenging one another," Barton said.

"It's my view that the CDC should have stuck to mandated masks until infection rates were lower, variants were better understood and the medical community could celebrate a victory of sorts-- we're simply not there," Barton said.

While some [states have been quick to implement the CDC's guidelines](#), others haven't, which makes it more complicated for retailers that have stores in multiple locations across the US to put across a consistent message to their customers when rules differ in each region, critics say.

"Today's CDC announcement on masks creates ambiguity for retailers because it fails to fully align with state and local orders," Lisa LaBrun, senior executive vice president of The Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA), said [Thursday](#).

"It is critical for customers to remember the CDC announcement is guidance and that many state and local jurisdictions still have mask mandates in place that retailers must follow," she added.

Some stores have already spoken out on this topic and confirmed that they won't be amending their policies on masks to follow the CDC's guidelines. [Macy's, JCPenney, Target, and Starbucks](#) are among those who will still require customers and workers to wear masks in store, vaccinated or not.

Others, including Walmart and CVS, are still contemplating what to do.

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