

# Tom Tiffany: Federal Health officials' lack of transparency leads to confusion among Americans

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We are all familiar with the recurring scene in Charles Schulz's iconic Peanuts cartoon in which Lucy yanks the football away just as Charlie Brown is about to kick it. It's a good metaphor for the reality we've all been living the last 18 months, trying to make sense of the conflicting and often contradictory pandemic "guidance" formulated by Washington bureaucrats.

On everything from mask mandates to the possible origins of the Wuhan coronavirus, Americans have been subjected to a dizzying array of flip-flops – as well as an unfortunate, knee-jerk tendency on the part of the White House to label anybody who dares to ask questions as a "conspiracy theorist." This has turned Americans against one another, chips away at the credibility of our public health agencies and contributes to growing skepticism about what is true and what is not. The latest reversal by the Biden administration's CDC on the use of masks by people who have already been vaccinated against Covid-19 is just the latest installment in the ongoing coronavirus saga.

The lack of transparency by the highest-ranking medical officials in our federal government has created confusion and uncertainty. Americans have faithfully followed public health directives and recommendations for eighteen months, based on the premise that compliance would result in the resumption of normalcy. It seems now that guidance was illusory.

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As recently as this week the CDC guidance on masking has changed once again, resulting in city and county mask mandates going back into effect throughout the country. Americans are working hard to rebuild their lives following more than a year of oppressive lockdown measures, school closures and masking policies – restrictions that inflicted immense damage on our economy while fueling a spike in suicides, drug overdoses and other social problems. Worse, these measures were largely ineffective. And yet, we now find ourselves on the cusp of going back down that dangerous road as officials contemplate a return to these failed policies.

Americans have seen this movie before. In March 2020 Anthony Fauci, the Director of National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) told us, “there’s no reason to be walking around with a mask.” Just a month later, he called for Americans to wear “some sort of facial covering.” By February of this year, Fauci was calling for Americans to wear two masks instead of just one. In every case, it was unclear what data Fauci was relying on to support these recommendations.

In May, the CDC lifted the mask mandate for all vaccinated people – creating an incentive for Americans to get the vaccine as an avenue to get back to normal life. Yet now, scarcely two months later, Fauci has publicly backed the new guidance – and declared that he was in discussions with federal officials about recommended mask mandates for vaccinated people in certain situations.

In addition to the constant contradictions coming out of the CDC regarding masks, officials still appear hamstrung when it comes to tracing the origin of the virus – and specifically whether it resulted from “gain-of-function” experiments in a Wuhan, China laboratory. Fauci stated last year the research being funded in the lab was intended to analyze the sources of SARS CoV-1, yet during a Senate hearing last month he claimed it was “molecularly impossible” COVID-19 could have resulted from those experiments. Eighteen months later we, the American people, are still waiting for a credible and transparent investigation into what really happened in that Chinese facility.

This latest CDC flip-flop has created uncertainty, fatigue, and frustration. It is important that policymakers continue to encourage individuals to make their own decisions about wearing a mask and getting a vaccine based on their own unique circumstances, and in consultation with their doctors. If we have learned anything over the last year-and-a-half, it is that one-size fits all solutions are no solution at all. CDC guidance is simply that: A recommendation, not a hard-and-fast directive. And I encourage people to engage with their county public health offices and local

officials, to determine what approach makes the most sense for your individual community.

Americans must demand transparency from their local officials and ask tough questions about the data they are relying on to back up their public policy choices. And in Washington, where policymakers who have arguably done more harm than good over these last several months, it is time to stop the endless cycle of yanking the football away, and time to start empowering individuals to chart their own course out of this pandemic.

- *Tiffany, R-Minocqua, represents the 7th Congressional District.*