

Government | COVID-19 | Health | Employment

OSHA chief says businesses sticking with workplace COVID policies

By Daniel Wiessner

April 27, 2022 7:11 PM EDT · Updated 2 years ago



(Reuters) - Doug Parker, the head of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, said on Wednesday that employers are largely maintaining workplace policies to stem the spread of COVID-19 even as many government restrictions have eased and Americans increasingly resume their normal lives.

Parker in an interview with Reuters said that, particularly in high-risk industries such as healthcare and meat processing, employers seem to be acknowledging that workplaces continue to pose an increased threat of COVID-19 transmission.

"We're not seeing any kind of mass exodus from basic precautions," he said.

OSHA's focus on the pandemic also has not waned, Parker said, as the agency [works to finalize, opens new tab](#) a permanent rule requiring healthcare employers to take various steps to protect their employees from COVID-19. An emergency version of the rule expired in December.

A group of unions [has sued OSHA, opens new tab](#) to expedite adoption of the healthcare rule, which the agency has said it needs more time to finalize. Parker said the process is well underway, noting that a four-day hearing on the rule kicked off on Wednesday.

During the Trump administration, OSHA faced criticism from worker advocates and Democrats who said the agency had not gone far enough to protect workers amid the pandemic.

The agency has taken more aggressive steps since last year, including adopting [the temporary healthcare rule, opens new tab](#) and unprecedented [mandates, opens new tab](#) that larger businesses and healthcare employers require workers to be vaccinated against COVID-19 or test regularly.

Bannon will be the second former top official from Trump's White House to go to prison for refusing to cooperate with the committee.

The U.S. Supreme Court in January [blocked the broader vaccine rule, opens new tab](#) while upholding the mandate for healthcare workers.

Parker said that in the wake of that decision, OSHA has pivoted to encouraging businesses to voluntarily adopt the requirements in order to protect workers and the public.

"The ruling was unfortunate but it's not stopping us from pressing employers to take adaptive measures to keep things in place," he said.

Parker and Christopher Williamson, the [newly confirmed, opens new tab](#) head of the Mine Safety and Health Administration, also spoke about various worker safety initiatives their agencies are pursuing to address the roughly 5,000 worker deaths in the U.S. each year. Thursday is Workers' Memorial Day, an annual commemoration of workers who died on the job.

Those policies include a MSHA proposal expected as soon as [next month, opens new tab](#) addressing miners' exposure to toxic silica dust, and [a proposed OSHA rule, opens new tab](#) to decrease risks associated with excessive heat.