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Atlanta, March 12 (RHC)-- The United States had its deadliest year in its history in 2020 after the COVID-19 pandemic caused a 15 percent increase in the country's death rate. The Atlanta-based Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, the CDC, made the announcement, noting that more than 334,000 people died from the coronavirus in 2020.

The CDC said that COVID-19 was the third leading cause of death behind heart disease and cancer. The report, issued in Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, marks the first time the CDC has publicly acknowledged that the U.S. death rate spiked last year and that COVID-19 played a role in the increase.

The 2020 increase in the U.S. fatalities is the largest since 1918 — when, in the midst of World War I, hundreds of thousands of people died of a flu.

Former President Donald Trump was under fire for publicly downplaying the threat of the pandemic when it broke out in the U.S. in late February 2020, and his handling of the COVID-19 crisis. More than 529,000 people have died of COVID-19 in the U.S. as of Thursday morning. About 128,000 of those deaths occurred after President Joe Biden took office.

This week, Wyoming has become the latest U.S. state to end mandatory face coverings, joining many Republican-led states whose governors have defied President Joe Biden's administration's COVID-19 guidelines.

Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon announced that as of March 16 the statewide mask mandate will end, and restaurants, theaters and gyms will resume operations. Masks will continue to be required in schools.

Gordon followed other Republican governors of Mississippi, Texas, Alabama, Arizona, West Virginia and Connecticut in rolling back the COVID-19 restrictions.

Biden ripped the loosening of restrictions, saying> “The last thing we need is Neanderthal thinking.”

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