

# Biden's war on weapons

The president, Democrats have become increasingly emboldened in pushing for stronger gun controls.

BY COLLEEN LONG, MARY CLARE JALONICK AND LINDSAY WHITEHURST  
*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — When President Joe Biden speaks about the “scourge” of gun violence, his go-to answer is to zero in on so-called assault weapons.

America has heard it hundreds of times, including this week after shootings in Colorado and Virginia: The president wants to sign into law a ban on high-powered guns that have the capacity to kill many people very quickly.

“The idea we still allow semi-automatic weapons to be purchased

is sick. Just sick,” Biden said on Thanksgiving Day. “I’m going to try to get rid of assault weapons.”

After the mass killing last Saturday at a gay nightclub in Colorado Springs, he said in a statement: “When will we decide we’ve had enough? ... We need to enact an assault weapons ban to get weapons of war off America’s streets.”

When Biden and other lawmakers talk about “assault weap-



President Joe Biden

ons,” they are using an inexact term to describe a group of high-powered guns or semi-automatic long rifles, like an AR-15, that can fire 30 rounds fast without reloading. By comparison, New York Police Department officers carry a handgun that shoots about half that much.

A weapons ban is far off in a closely divided Congress. But Biden and the Democrats have become increasingly emboldened in pushing for stronger gun controls — and doing so with no clear electoral consequences.

See GUNS, 3A



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI | Associated Press

Dallas Dutka prays by a makeshift memorial for the victims of a mass shooting at a gay nightclub in Colorado Springs, Colo.

## Be wary: Airborne illnesses spiking

Experts offer advice for steering clear. For the most vulnerable, time again for masks.

BY SAM OGOZALEK  
*Times Staff Writer*

COVID-19 cases are low in Florida — and deaths remain steady — but scientists warn that an uptick in infections is likely after the holidays.

Other respiratory illnesses also are spiking, including the flu.

The Tampa Bay Times asked infectious disease experts and hospital leaders for tips on how area residents can keep themselves and others safe from the swarm of viruses.

Here's what they said.

### Be mindful of your “social bubble”

“It’s unrealistic to think everybody’s going to exercise every mitigation,” said Jason Salemi, a University of South Florida epidemiologist. People are tired of masks and social distancing.

But even if someone is at low risk for serious COVID-19 complications — a healthy young adult, for example — they should plan their holidays around the dangers that others face, Salemi said.

“Maybe I’m not concerned about me personally,” Salemi said, “but I’m certainly concerned about the higher-risk people in my family who I might be interacting with.”

Seniors, individuals with underlying conditions such as heart or lung disease, and those with weakened immune systems are more likely to become seriously ill from cases of COVID-19, flu and respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, a common infection that causes symptoms resembling a cold.

Young children are also prone to flu and RSV complications.

“Just know that your risk tolerance is not in isolation,” Salemi said. “It’s the risk tolerance for you and your social bubble.”

See VIRUSES, 4A



Photos by LUIS SANTANA | Times

Shoppers had space to maneuver as the traditional Black Friday sales were evident at the Westfield Brandon mall Friday.

## Ghosts of Black Fridays past fade from memory

At Westfield Brandon on Friday morning, the post-holiday shopping scramble was not what it used to be. But for many spenders, tradition still rules the day.

BY CHARLIE FRAGO  
*Times Staff Writer*

BRANDON — The line outside Target near Westfield Brandon mall dissolved as soon as the doors opened at 7 o’clock Friday morning.

Down the street in the mall itself, a steady, if unremarkable, flow of customers lined up at Starbucks, stocked up on Legos and picked over Christmas-themed clothing. The mall was luring shoppers with promotions. The parking lot was half-filled. The food court empty. Shoppers had plenty of space to stroll.

Relaxing in a pair of massage chairs near the Macy’s entrance, Vicki Maclin and her daughter, Teresa Hunter, thought back to each Black Friday they’ve attended for more than 20 years.

But, as time has passed, the trek to Westfield Brandon has come to mean more to Maclin than to Hunter.

“I’m fine just ordering online,” said Hunter, 48.

But Maclin, 66, said brick-and-mortar stores and the opportunity to shop in person appealed to her.

“I’d rather touch and see,” said the Riverview resident.

Both agreed that Black Friday — at least at Westfield Brandon — isn’t what it used to be. They were disappointed in some the selection of bedding and glassware and, also, nostalgic about the mobs of people they used to have to jostle. When they arrived at 6:30 a.m., it wasn’t



Parking at Westfield Brandon lots filled in later in the day on Friday.

like the old days.

“Thank you, Amazon!” quipped Hunter.

Industry analysts paint a different portrait nationally. About 166 million people are planning to shop from Thanksgiving Day through Cyber Monday this year, according to the annual survey released Friday by the National Retail Federation and Prosper Insights & Analytics, almost

8 million more people than last year and the highest estimate since 2017.

But the same group expects holiday sales growth overall will slow to a range of 6% to 8%, from the blistering 13.5% growth of a year ago, according to The Associated Press.

And those figures, which include online spending, aren’t adjusted for inflation, so

See SHOPPING, 4A

### Warm weekend

8 a.m. Noon 4 p.m. 8 p.m.



72° 79° 80° 74°

10% chance of rain

More, back page of Sports

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