

Covid-19: Pandemic Accelerating in United States

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The corona virus world wide pandemic has hit the United States in the last few weeks hard. Of the reported cases worldwide so far, the U.S. — with five percent of the world's population — now has 12 percent of cases and growing.

The World Health Organization says the U.S. may soon be a major epicenter of the disease.

One important indicator is that for the last period deaths caused by the virus in the U.S. have doubled about every four days. That is, at a true exponential rate.

Sometimes people have difficulty grasping what this means, so here is what will happen if this continues: today, March 24, the number of deaths is about 650; by March 28 the number will be 1,300; April 1, 2,600; April 5, 5,200; April 9, 10,400 and so on. Over one million in early May.

We can hope that this progression will not occur, and that the time between the doubling of deaths will increase. But this will only happen if there is a full implementation of “stay at home” for the whole population to curb the spread of the disease, with exception of only for those workers needed for critical services and goods.

The failure of the federal government to adequately deal with the pandemic from the beginning has created the situation where the country has greatly lagged behind the curve of the increase of infections. Instead of preparing for the worse, and the worse is what's happening, we are not even being able to keep up with the growing need for crucial medical equipment.

Two glaring failures: one, there are no plans to provide the number of ventilators (“breathing machines”) that will be needed to deal with the sickest patients, many of whom will die as a result. If this need for new ventilators is not met, doctors in the U.S. will be faced with the situation already true in Italy: triage to determine who will live and who will die.

The epicenter of the pandemic is now New York. The governor of that state estimates, based on the advice of medical scientists, that 30,000 ventilators will be needed in the next few weeks. The federal government has provided New York with 2,400. The governor warns the other states that NY is their future.

The second failure: the lack of providing the needed personal protective equipment including masks of a special type, gloves, gowns, and other things for the nurses and doctors at the front lines fighting to help those requiring hospitalization. Nurses' unions and doctors have pleaded with Trump to provide these, to no avail.

This places these indispensable medical personnel in danger of getting sick themselves, further compromising the health of their patients.

Another critical need is more hospitals and hospital beds on the scale needed to meet the inevitable peak in cases needing to be hospitalized, with experts saying that will be reached within six weeks.

Trump and his internally totalitarian Republican Party long downplayed the danger. He and his Fox News media output even charged that when the stock market began to fall as a result of the danger to the economy, that the rest of the media was falsely beginning to sound the alarm in order to discredit him. Fox commentators said the whole thing was a “hoax”.

The facts about the pandemic in the U.S. began to be widely known. When the disruption to the national economy with many workers being laid off and businesses in difficult circumstances was becoming clear, finally Trump switched and declared a national emergency on March 13. He appeared to be paying attention to his medical advisors, who advised that people keep a safe distance (six feet) from each other and to stay at home except for exercise, going to the grocery store, and other needed tasks, while keeping the six feet separation.

Hospitals, medical workers, and many state governors have asked Trump to use his powers under the state of emergency to temporarily nationalize manufacturing corporations, to retool to make the needed medical equipment.

Trump has so far refused, saying, “America doesn’t do nationalizations.”

On March 23, Trump reversed himself, and went on TV to call for businesses to start opening and workers returning to work, with a deadline of the economy be fully back to normal by Easter.

“We cannot let the cure be worse than the problem,” he said. “And essentially we’re referring to the timing of the opening, essentially the opening of our country.”

With 16 states already in lockdown, lockdowns in areas of nine more, and many governors sounding the alarm while other state governments are not enforcing “stay at home” at all and the president saying one thing and then the opposite, it is no wonder that the population is confused, and many are being swept up in fear of the unknown. Also his false picture means his core followers are complacent.

Trump has consistently labeled the virus not by its name but as “the Chinese virus.” This has whipped up anti-Chinese racism among his more backward followers, with the result of many Chinese Americans (and many other Asian Americans who “look Chinese”) reporting being given dirty looks, enduring racist remarks, and assaults. There has been one stabbing.

California, where I live, is one of the states in lockdown. I stay at home except for going to get groceries, getting exercise with my dog, and a few other necessary tasks. While walking my dog in my neighborhood, I often pass a “Chinese American Christian Church”. Yesterday I saw that vandals had ripped up and broken a large permanent sign with that name on it in front of the church.

Trump’s racism once again inspires the white nationalist extreme.

Meanwhile, the Congress is debating a measure to spend two trillion dollars to ward off or ameliorate the economic recession that has begun as a result of the virus. The measure will reportedly contain funds to help workers who are laid off, help the states cope with the virus, help small businesses that have been hard hit, and other positive steps.

But a big part of the proposal is a many hundred-billion-dollar slush fund to bail out the giant corporations – a repeat of what was done in the Great Recession a decade ago. This dovetails with Trump’s concentration on trying to stop the recession at the expense of the nation’s health.

This reverses the needed priorities, which is to concentrate on containing the virus, helping the great majority of the population which is taking the brunt of the economic downturn, meeting the health needs of the epidemic right now, and spending whatever is needed to do that, and not concentrating on bailing out the super-wealthy.

Ironically, reversing the needed priorities will only make the recession worse, as the peaking of the infections will deepen the recession, making the task of ameliorating it even harder, requiring even more huge bailouts.

When the talk of a two-trillion-dollar fund began, lobbyists for the different capitalists descended on Congress to stick their snouts in the trough to get as much for themselves as possible.

It has recently come to light that five Senators, four Republicans and one Democrat, were on a committee that heard on February 4 a report from the CIA predicting the truth about the pandemic and the likelihood of a big drop in the stock market. They cashed in by selling their millions worth of stocks before the crash.

One of these was Kelly Loeffler, Senator from Georgia. Even as she was shedding stock shares, she was parroting Trump. "Democrats have dangerously and intentionally misled the American people on coronavirus readiness," she tweeted on February 28, assuring the public that the president and his team are "doing a great job working to keep Americans healthy & safe."

Many workers in necessary jobs, including the medical workers, are sacrificing their own health, and most people are joining together in solidarity. On my dog walks and at the grocery I have found every person I meet expressing solidarity. Another example was my African American next door neighbor, knowing I'm 82, checking on my health and offering to help me in anything I might need as the pandemic progresses.

The pandemic is bringing out the best in almost all people, but also the worst in some like these Senators, and the very wealthy seeking to profit from it.

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