

The Coronavirus Crisis

Coronavirus Task Force Details 'Sobering' Data Behind Its Extended Guidelines

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PHILIP EWING



President Trump listens as coronavirus response coordinator Deborah Birx speaks during a briefing at the White House. Mandel Ngan/AFP via Getty Images

Updated at 7:40 p.m. ET

America must brace for 100,000 or more people to die in the coming months in the coronavirus pandemic, the White House's response team warned Tuesday.

"As sobering a number as that is, we should be prepared for it," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, a top immunologist helping to steer White House policy on the disaster. "No one is denying the fact that we are going through a very, very difficult time right now."

The White House's coronavirus task force detailed the modeling and other data that compelled President Trump to extend virus countermeasures deeper into the spring.

Fauci and another top physician, Dr. Deborah Birx, renewed their pleas for Americans to observe social distancing and other precautions to try to depress the rate of infections and deaths.

"This is not a number we need to accept. We can influence this to a varying degree," Fauci said.

Trump, however, suggested that he has been told that 100,000 could be a floor and not the ceiling.

"They're very sobering, yeah," the president said of the estimates. "When you see 100,000 people and that's a minimum number ... and they said it's unlikely you'll be able to attain that. Think of what would have happened if we didn't do anything."

"Hard days" lie ahead

The president had earlier described an imaginary scene of full church pews on Easter Sunday — but then acknowledged Sunday that federal guidelines for social distancing and other mitigation measures would need to remain in place through April 30.

"It's life and death, frankly," Trump said. "It's a matter of life and death."



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THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

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Public health officials warn that infections and deaths may not peak for the next few weeks; it isn't clear when, except that the disaster will get worse.

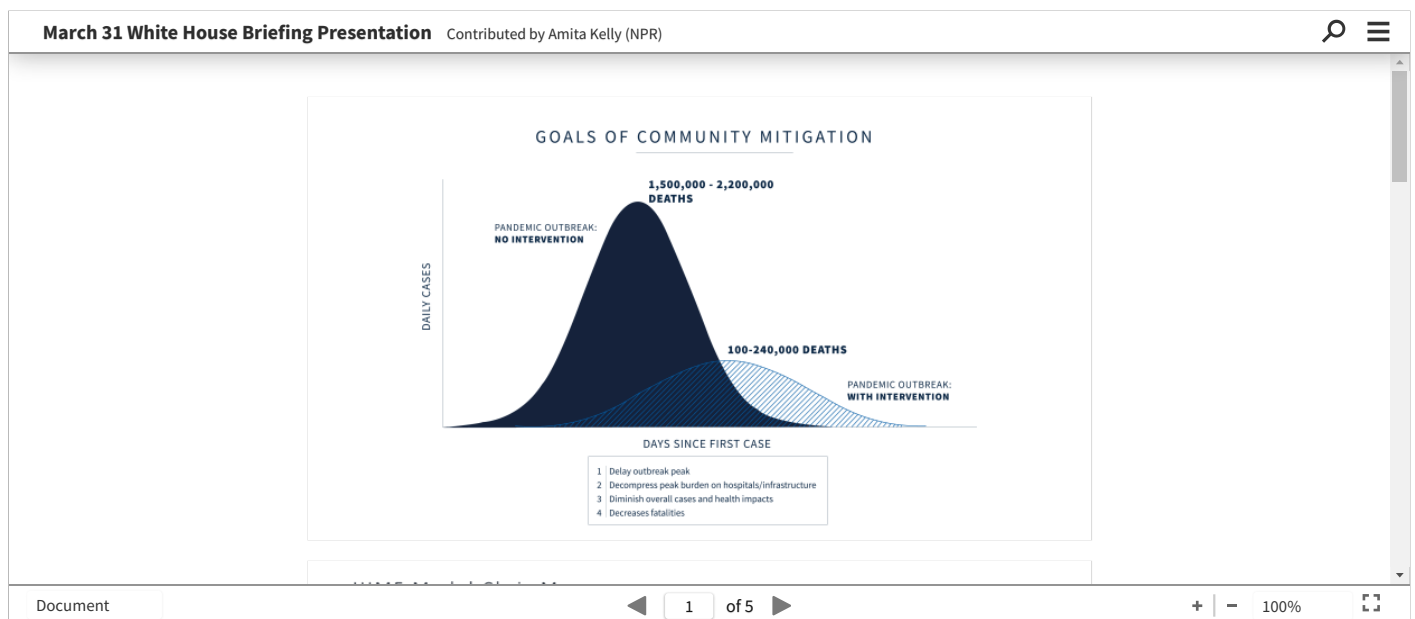
"I want every American to be prepared for the hard days that lie ahead," Trump said.

"This is going to be three weeks that we haven't seen before."

Task force members used Tuesday's briefing to detail the metrics that informed those warnings and that prompted Trump to extend the countermeasure guidelines.

The "blue mountain"

Birx showed reporters at the White House on Tuesday a chart that showed what she called a "blue mountain" of deaths hitting a peak of around 2.2 million — a projection of what could have taken place without any countermeasures at all.



Social distancing and other protocols cause that estimated curve to be shorter in height, which is why they're so essential, Birx said. She and Fauci said the models they've cited still were subject to change based on the ongoing response.

But she also warned that the "stark reality" of the coronavirus justifies the grave warning Trump gave and underscores why she said Americans must continue to isolate and take the other precautionary measures.

The United States is still climbing the statistical curve of infections as the virus spreads into and within new regions such as the South and the Midwest. A statistical curve of mortality will follow and likely abate over a longer period of time, officials say.

Americans must continue to stay home, keep apart, wash their hands and take the other steps that public health officials have urged, Birx said.

"It's communities that will do this," she said. "There's no magic bullet. There's no magic vaccine or therapy. It's just behaviors."

In terms of the *types* of countermeasures required, the officials said nothing more is likely needed beyond what's already recommended: the closure of restaurants, businesses and other public places; avoiding groups; washing hands; and so forth.


"We hope it's enough," Trump said. "We hope we're at a level where we can say, 'Let's go.'"

Leaders Of The Coronavirus Response Effort

From the president to public health experts, here are the officials managing the messaging.

Donald Trump

President



Leading the federal response to the pandemic


Trump restricted travel from China and declared the coronavirus a public health emergency in January. Early on Trump downplayed the threat of the virus, claiming the media and Democrats were trying to use it for political gain. Shifting his tone as the number of U.S. cases climbed, Trump cut off travel from Europe, Canada and Mexico, and issued 15-day guidance to slow the spread, in part by staying 6 feet away from people and avoiding gatherings.

Photo: Mandel Ngan/AFP via Getty Images
Last updated: March 28, 2020



Mike Pence

Vice President



Leading the

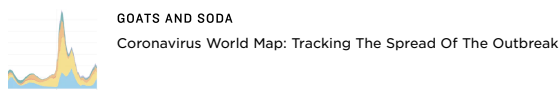
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Photo: Abir Sultan/Poo
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The number of test-confirmed cases nationwide is nearing 200,000, and more than 3,800 Americans have died as of Tuesday evening, per Johns Hopkins University.

Fauci told reporters that the coming weeks' worth of data might be grim, but he said that the nation must hold fast. Data from Washington state and elsewhere show that social distancing makes the statistical curves shorter in height and stops transmissions.



"We're going to continue to see things go up," Fauci said. "We cannot be discouraged by that, because the mitigation is actually working."

The United States, he added, can't "take its foot off the accelerator and put it onto the brakes — I know that's what we can do over the next 30 days."

Life in isolation

Americans in many places are under more stringent restrictions than those in the federal guidelines. Governors and mayors have ordered people to stay at home and business to close through May and into June in some cases.

Others, including Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, haven't yet. Trump was asked Tuesday whether he'd get involved with those leaders' decisions.

Not unless he felt that was necessary, the president said. "Unless we see something obviously wrong, we're going to let the governors do it," he said.

For a time, Trump and Vice President Pence sustained a vision of a phase in which at least some locations could relax their efforts on pandemic mitigation to bring portions of the economy back to life.

Trump and Pence said they didn't want the "cure" to be worse than the disease, and they likened the old projections for coronavirus fatalities to the annual tolls taken in car accidents or by the seasonal flu.

The new data, however, have cooled that ardor.

Trump alluded on Tuesday to what he now says "people were saying" about simply enduring the pandemic and made clear he rules out that approach.

"A lot of people have said, 'Ride it out' and 'Think of it as the flu.' But it's not the flu — it's vicious."

The pandemic is not only a public health disaster but an economic catastrophe.

Already millions of people have filed for unemployment benefits nationwide.

Washington is beginning to implement a \$2 trillion relief program, and members of Congress are discussing the prospect of more such legislation.

Prospect for an era of masks

One question on Tuesday was whether the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention might open the door partly toward normalization with a recommendation that most Americans wear masks outdoors.

Dr. Robert Redfield, the CDC director, told NPR member station WABE in Atlanta that roughly 25% of coronavirus sufferers may be asymptomatic and continue to transmit the virus.

That could compel the CDC to recommend that when people go outside their homes, they should cover their faces in case they're carrying the virus and don't know it, Redfield acknowledged.

No such actual recommendation is yet in place, and Redfield told WABE that anything the CDC issued would be informed by science and data about the pandemic.

Trump suggested on Tuesday that he might support guidelines for using face coverings in public, positing that people might be able to wear scarves.

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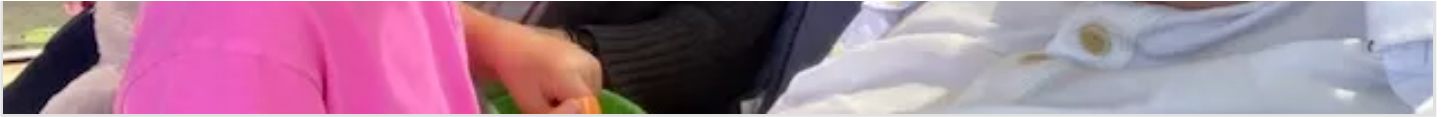


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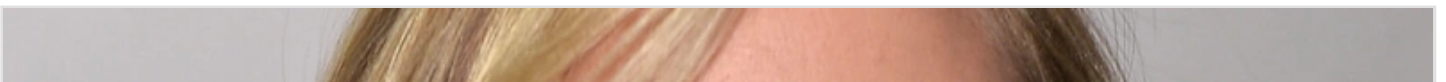
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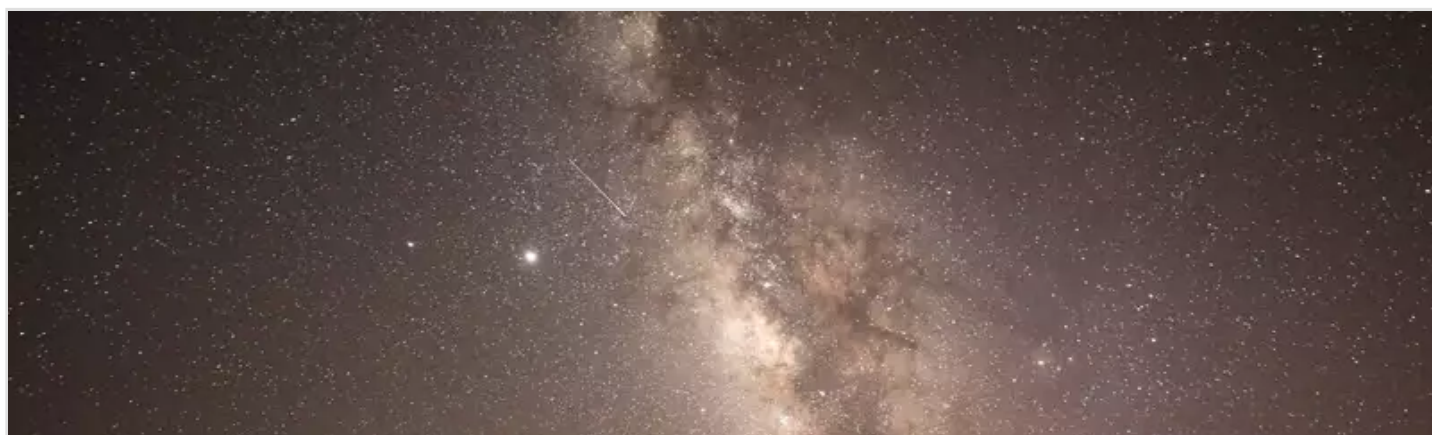




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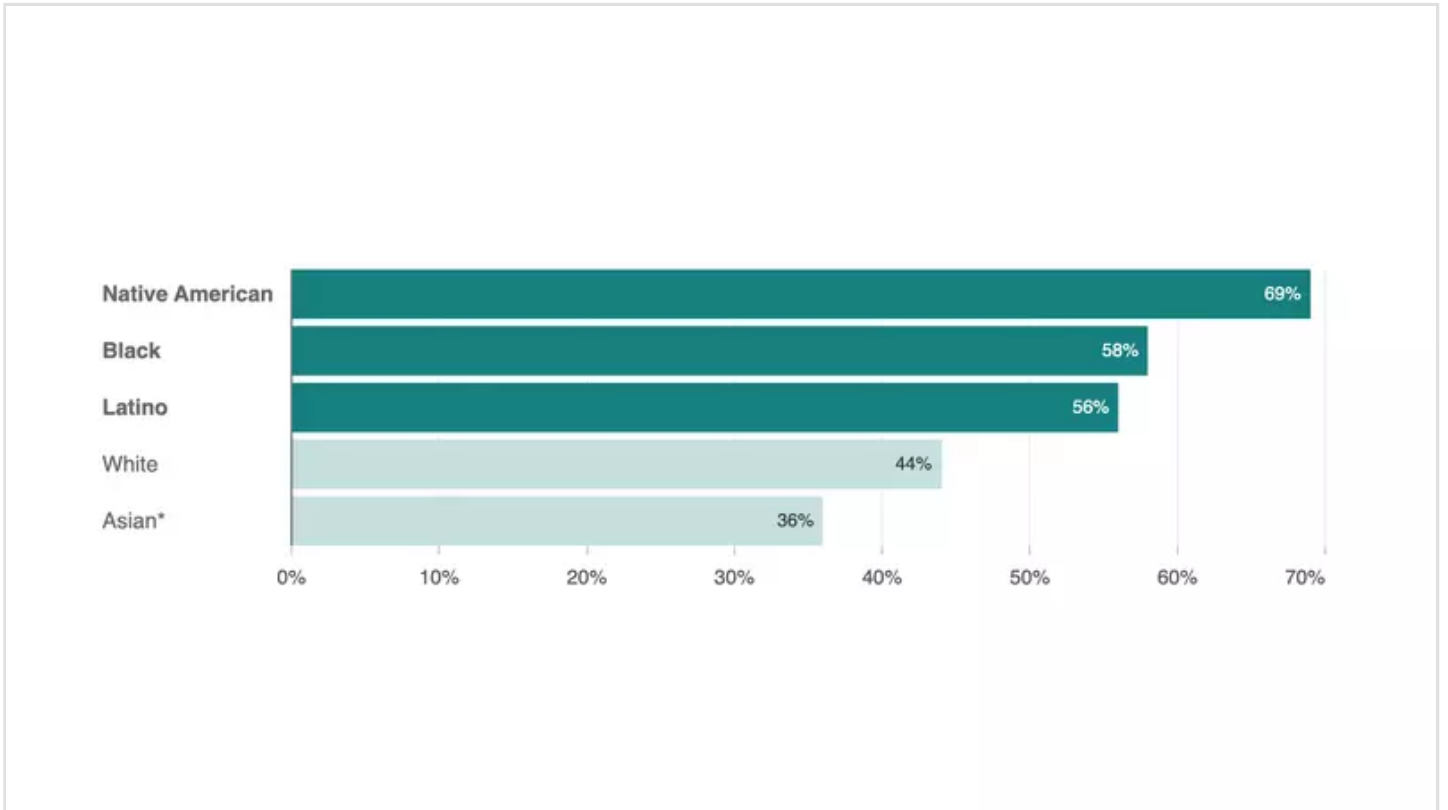


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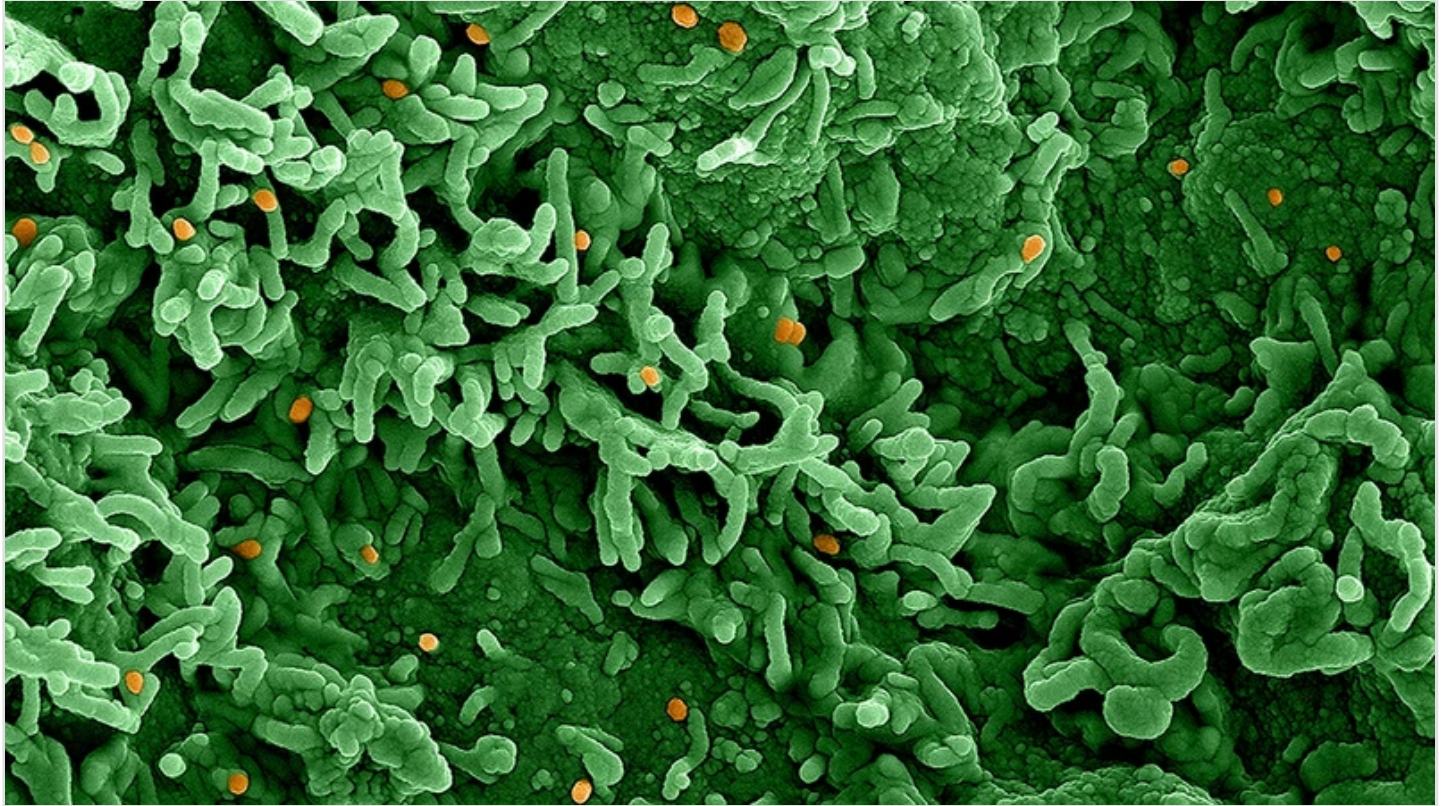


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