

Total coronavirus cases in United States surge past Italy, China

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The United States is rapidly becoming the epicenter of the global coronavirus pandemic. The number of cases in the country rocketed past both those in Italy and China. The US now has the largest number of officially recorded cases of COVID-19, 85,594, and the largest number of new cases in a 24-hour period, more than 17,000. The death toll in the United States is now 1,300.

The number of coronavirus cases in America has multiplied 10 times over in only a week. The exponentially increasing caseload is also reflected worldwide, where there are more than 532,000 cases, double the level of six days ago. Deaths are also skyrocketing, now at 24,000 worldwide.

As the US becomes the epicenter of the world pandemic, so New York City has become the epicenter within the country, with nearly 400 deaths, 5,237 hospitalized, and 1,290 in intensive care. These numbers currently double every three days. Mayor Bill de Blasio has released plans to build emergency facilities of more than 1,000 beds in each of its five boroughs, which even now would account for less than one week's worth of new cases in the city. The arrival of the US Navy hospital ship *USS Comfort* to the area next week will absorb less than one day's worth of new hospitalizations.

Similar efforts in other states, such as Louisiana's plan to temporarily place 1,100 beds in a convention center, are similarly at risk of being rapidly overwhelmed. And such plans recall the nightmarish experience at the same convention center during Hurricane Katrina.

All sectors of workers are affected. A Mt. Sinai nurse, Bevon Bloise, posted on Facebook, "We do not have enough PPE [Personal Protective Equipment], we do not have the correct PPE, and we do not have the appropriate staffing to handle this pandemic."

The first death among New York City MTA conductors was reported, 49-year-old Peter Petrassi. The MTA is still not providing employees with necessary protective gear.

Workers in other urban transit systems are also demanding masks and gear.

The record number of unemployment claims is another indication of the economic burden that is being placed on the working class. There were 155,000 claims in New Jersey alone, 16 times the previous week, and 3.3 million in the country as a whole, the highest number of weekly jobless claims in history.

In contrast, Wall Street and the big banks have already been given or promised trillions of dollars in liquidity to weather the economic storm the pandemic has triggered, and Congress is currently debating a further stimulus package to prop up the major corporations.

Fifteen states now have more than 1,000 cases, with California numbers climbing by 30 percent to 3,910, Washington by 24 percent to 3,207, Michigan by 25 percent to 2,856, Illinois by 36 percent to 2,538, etc. New hot spots are emerging, including major US cities Chicago and Detroit, which are poised to follow the example of the New York metropolitan area.

The response of the Trump administration was to suggest that the virus was somehow limited to the hardest-hit urban centers like New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Seattle, and that large sections of the country are relatively unscathed. At Thursday's press briefing, White House Coronavirus Task Force Response Coordinator Deborah Birx declared proudly that 19 out of the 50 states still had fewer than 200 cases each, claiming this represented "40 percent of the country" where infection rates were "extraordinarily low numbers."

She did not list them, but the 19 states with the lowest coronavirus tolls are mostly small in terms of population (including the 16 smallest) and relatively remote from global commerce. (The states are Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, West

Virginia, and Wyoming.) They may comprise 40 percent of the states, but only 13 percent of the population. To cite such statistics as progress, let alone success, is to deliberately disarm the American public in the face of a rapidly mounting threat.

In a further distortion, she stated that in “no country to date have we seen an attack rate of over one in 1,000,” leaving out the key word, *yet*. She was clearly seeking to suggest that no more than one in 1,000 Americans was likely to contract COVID-19, or about 330,000 people—a figure that could well be surpassed within a week.

Dr. Birx went on to denounce as unwarranted the reported discussions within hospitals as to how to allocate—and deallocate—critical ventilators when faced, as some hospitals already are, with an overflow of cases. She said it was improper “to make the implication, when they need a hospital bed, it’s not going to be there.” Some hospitals are in fact already at capacity, including two major Detroit-area hospitals, while hospitals in New York City are completely overwhelmed.

What Trump and his sycophantic aides claim as success is actually criminal malpractice. The infection could have been stopped in its tracks if proper testing, contact tracing and isolation measures had been taken from the very beginning of the crisis. Instead, the Trump administration ignored warnings from the World Health Organization in January and allowed the virus to spread essentially unchecked for several weeks.

Even now, coronavirus testing is still restricted to those exhibiting symptoms, despite the fact that COVID-19 is often contagious even when a patient is asymptomatic, one of the many reasons it is so dangerous.

For his part, Trump continued to insist, against overwhelming evidence of popular demands to shut down workplaces to minimize the contagion, that American workers “don’t want to sit around,” and therefore, “we have to go back [to work],” which will ostensibly happen after Easter weekend. One of the indications that this will in fact become policy is that car manufacturers Ford and Honda have announced that they will reopen their North American plants on April 6 and 7, respectively, to be followed by Toyota on April 20. Safety measures for workers have been promised, the details to be revealed—later.

The Trump administration is also planning to deploy 1,000 US troops to the over 5,000-mile-long Canadian border for the first time in modern history, according to an internal Department of Homeland Security memo. This will include the installation of remote sensors, to stop

illegal migrants and their “potential to spread infectious disease.” Trump further justified this scheme in an afternoon press briefing by claiming that “we have illegal trade that we don’t like,” referring to alleged dumping of Chinese steel through crossborder Canadian trade.

The militarization of the US-Canadian border and the increased militarization of the US-Mexican border further speaks to the irrational and reactionary response of the Trump administration to the coronavirus pandemic. In yesterday’s remarks to the G20, World Health Organization Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus insisted, “This is a global crisis that demands a global response. . . .

“No country can solve this crisis alone. We’re all in this together, and we will only get out of it together. That means a paradigm shift in global solidarity—in sharing experiences, expertise and resources, and in working together to keep supply lines open, and supporting nations who need our support.”

While Dr. Tedros’ words may be sincere, they fall on deaf ears. When facing a crisis which demands that the metaphorical and physical walls between nations come down, Trump and his counterparts are busy erecting even greater barriers to international collaboration. They are much more interested in the three straight days of gains on the stock market, which has risen 20 percent since Monday. The potentially millions of lives that will be lost if workers are ordered back to work are merely the cost of doing business.



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