

# The Washington Post

## President Trump extends social distancing guidance until end of April

Ian Duncan, Felicia Sonmez 3/29/20

Days after President Trump said he hoped the country would be “[opened up and raring to go](#)” by Easter, he instead announced on Sunday an extension of federal guidance on social distancing through April, in a continued effort to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus.

It was an abrupt reversal for the president, who last week [tweeted](#) that “WE CANNOT LET THE CURE BE WORSE THAN THE PROBLEM ITSELF,” amid [a volatile stock market](#) and [record applications for unemployment benefits](#). He made comparisons to car crashes and “a very bad flu season,” downplaying the virus’s potential death toll.

But public health experts widely scoffed at Trump’s idea of packed churches and bustling businesses by Easter on April 12. The nation has reached more than 136,000 confirmed cases of covid-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, and more than 2,400 related deaths — with numbers continuing to climb across the country. New York continues to be hit particularly bad, eclipsing 1,000 confirmed deaths related to the coronavirus on Sunday.

**Calling his previous statements targeting Easter “just an aspiration,”** Trump said he now expects the covid-19 death rate to peak in two weeks, around the same time as the holiday.

“Nothing would be worse than declaring victory before the victory is won,” Trump said at an evening news conference in the White House Rose Garden. “That would be the greatest loss of all.”

**Trump said that by June 1, he expects the country “will be well on our way to recovery.”**

The president’s comments came after a top medical adviser to the White House and state governors said in television interviews Sunday that they could not envision an easing soon of measures designed to slow the virus’s spread, warning that the outbreak will continue taxing hospitals and could kill thousands more people.

Anthony S. Fauci, the White House adviser, said on CNN’s “State of the Union” that models suggest the virus could cause between 100,000 and 200,000 deaths and that millions of people could be infected. But he stressed that the 200,000 figure was a worst-case estimate that is unlikely to come to pass.

In the Rose Garden on Sunday, Trump compared those numbers favorably with the more than 2 million deaths forecast as a worst-case scenario had the nation not taken strict measures to respond

to the virus. If coronavirus-related deaths remained under 200,000, he said, “we all together have done a very good job.”

However, he said the economic impacts of the crisis as businesses are forced to close down would be felt in rising suicides and drug abuse.

“You’re going to have mental depression for people,” he said. “You’re going to have large numbers of suicides. Take a look at what happens in a really horrible recession or worse. So you’re going to have tremendous suicides.”

He added that “you will see drugs being used like nobody’s ever used them before, and people are going to be dying all over the place from drug addiction.”

The president checked off steps his administration has taken to address the outbreak and invited leaders of medical supply and logistics companies to describe what they are doing to help.

But governors in hard-hit states and the president’s advisers continued to talk darkly about the spread of the virus and the toll it would take.

In an earlier television appearance, Deborah L. Birx, coordinator of the White House coronavirus task force, said: “No state, no metro area, will be spared.”

Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said that making rapid testing for the coronavirus more accessible, providing results in minutes, would be key in determining when it is safe to open schools and businesses and ease social distancing rules in certain cases.

“I think we can reasonably, with the safety of the American people in mind, pull back on the restrictions” in places where testing is adequate.

The number of covid-19 cases continues to soar worldwide, surpassing 700,000, with nearly 34,000 reported deaths. About 80 percent of people who have tested positive for the virus have mild or moderate symptoms, health experts have said, and some have no obvious symptoms.

The virus continued to rage in Europe on Sunday, with Spain reporting a record daily death toll of 838. Italy, which has the second-largest number of coronavirus cases, reported a daily death toll of 756. A British health official said it could be six months before life there returns to normal.

In a CNN interview before Trump announced the extension of federal guidelines, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) sharply criticized the president’s handling of the coronavirus pandemic and warned against the relaxing of social distancing guidelines.

“I think the best thing [to do would be] to prevent more loss of life rather than open things up because we just don’t know,” Pelosi said on “State of the Union.”

“As the president fiddles, people are dying,” the speaker said. “And we just have to take every precaution.”

While New York has seen by far the worst of the virus so far, the governors of Maryland, Louisiana and Michigan said in television interviews that their states' health systems were at risk of becoming overburdened. The three states could become the next hot spots as cases climb in the Washington suburbs, Detroit and New Orleans.

Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan (R) said the president's comments about reopening the government and business were unhelpful, conflicting with governors who are urging people to hunker down.

"The virus is going to dictate the time frame, and we're going to follow the advice of the scientists and doctors," Hogan said on "Fox News Sunday." "We don't see any way we're going to be opening up in a couple of weeks."

"In two weeks, around Easter, we're going to be looking a lot more like New York," Hogan said.

In Michigan, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D) said on NBC's "Meet the Press" that officials were seeing numbers "climbing exponentially."

"We see this astronomical rise," said Whitmer, who has attracted Trump's ire in recent days by criticizing the lack of federal assistance. "We've got hospitals that are already at capacity, we're already running out of [supplies] as well."

Whitmer added: "We're going to be in dire straits again in a matter of days."

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