

SARS-CoV-2: U.S. Timeline¹

January 3

Secretary of HHS, Alex Azar tells his chief of staff to make sure that the National Security Council is aware of the new coronavirus discovered in China.

“This is a very big deal,” Mr. Azar told him.²

January 8

CDC alerts doctors to be vigilant for patients with respiratory symptoms who have traveled in Wuhan.

January 11

The Chinese published the genetic sequence of the novel coronavirus, and the CDC began creating a diagnostic test³

January 13

Chicago woman in her 60s arrives back in U.S. from Wuhan; will soon become ill (and become second U.S. patient identified).

January 15

WA state man, 35, returns from travel in Wuhan infected with COVID, appearing set off community spread that went undetected in the Seattle area for weeks

January 16

¹ Rolling Stone Timeline: Coronavirus in America: <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/rolling-stone-timeline-coronavirus-america-982944/> (except as otherwise noted)

² New York Times; March 7, 2020, “Inside Trump Administration, Debate Raged Over What to Tell Public” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/07/us/politics/trump-coronavirus.html>

³ Rolling Stone Magazine, May 10, 2020, “The Four Men Responsible For America’s COVID-19 Test Disaster” <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/covid-19-test-trump-admin-failed-disaster-995930/>

German scientists produce a test for coronavirus that will become the World Health Organization's (WHO) test, used across much of the world, but not in the United States.

January 17

CDC launches “*public health entry screening*” at San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles international airports, soon extending to Atlanta and Chicago, sending 100 health screeners to the airports. CDC offers the public reassurance: “*The risk from 2019-nCoV to the American public is currently deemed to be low.*”⁴

Dr. Nancy Messonnier, director of CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases tells public: “*For a family sitting around the dinner table tonight, this is not something that they generally need to worry about.*”

January 18

HHS Secretary Azar, who had been alerted to the outbreak at the beginning of January, finally reaches Trump to talk about coronavirus. The president wants to talk about political fallout from his flavored vape ban.⁵

January 20

South Korea confirms first COVID case⁶

"The first human infection with new coronavirus has been reported in the U.S." [CDC](#)

January 22

⁴ New York Times; January 17, 2020, “Three U.S. Airports to Check Passengers for a Deadly Chinese Coronavirus” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/17/health/china-coronavirus-airport-screening.html>

⁵ New York Times; July 16, 2020, “He Could Have Seen What Was Coming: Behind Trump's Failure on the Virus” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/us/politics/coronavirus-trump-response.html?referringSource=articleShare>

⁶ Financial Times; May 14, 2020, “Inside Trump's Coronavirus Meltdown” https://amp.ft.com/content/97dc7de6-940b-11ea-abcd-371e24b679ed?__twitter_impression=true

At Davos, Trump is asked: “Are there worries about a pandemic at this point?” Trump: *“No, not it all. We have it totally under control. It’s one person coming in from China, and we have it under control. It’s going to be just fine.”*

On CNBC’s Squawk Box Trump says of the coronavirus: *“We have it totally under control. It’s one person coming in from China.”*

President Donald Trump said today the U.S. has a deadly Chinese coronavirus “totally under control” and there are no worries of a pandemic.⁷

CDC announces its own coronavirus test. Informs the public: *“Currently, testing must take place at CDC.”*

Trump praises Chinese response to the coronavirus on Twitter

January 23

Wuhan and other cities placed under lockdown by Chinese government — many residents have already dispersed across China for lunar new year celebrations.

January 24

Trump [tweets](#):

“China has been working very hard to contain the Coronavirus. The United States greatly appreciates their efforts and transparency. It will all work out well. In particular, on behalf of the American People, I want to thank President Xi!”

January 26

CDC announces more travel-related cases of coronavirus, bringing total to five.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer calls for emergency declaration in the U.S.

⁷ POLITICO, January 22, 2020, “Trump: Chinese coronavirus 'totally under control'” <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/01/22/trump-chinese-coronavirus-totally-under-control-102054>

January 27

White House Domestic Policy Council chief Joe Grogan reportedly warns chief of staff Mick Mulvaney that failing to get a handle on coronavirus could cost Trump reelection.

January 28

👉 CDC advises against nonessential travel to China. 👉

In letter to CDC staff, Redfield calls coronavirus “*a very serious public health threat*” but claims the “*virus is not spreading in the U.S. at this time*” and that risk to general public is “*low.*” Foresees “*it’s likely there will be some person-to-person spread with this virus.*”

January 28

About 200 Americans evacuated from Wuhan, China, land at a military base in Southern California. After a debate broke out in the White House about what to do with them, they are booked into hotel rooms for two weeks of a monitored quarantine:⁸

Inside the White House a debate broke out, centered on concerns that had become ever-present since the virus first emerged: How would the government’s actions be perceived by the public? And what would the president think?⁹

January 29

Memo from trade adviser Peter Navarro to National Security Council warns America would be “defenseless in the case of a full-blown coronavirus outbreak on U.S. soil” raising alarm about “a full-blown pandemic, imperiling the lives of millions of Americans.”

Nearly 200 Americans repatriated from Wuhan to California air base.

⁸ New York Times; January 29, 2020, “Foreigners Airlifted From Chinese City at Heart of Coronavirus Outbreak” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/29/world/asia/wuhan-china-coronavirus-evacuations.html>

⁹ New York Times; March 7, 2020, “Inside Trump Administration, Debate Raged Over What to Tell Public” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/07/us/politics/trump-coronavirus.html>

Trump creates Coronavirus Task Force, headed by Azar.

January 30

WHO declares world health emergency.

CDC confirms a case of person-to-person spread of coronavirus, starting from the Washington state patient: “This latest 2019-nCoV patient has no history of travel to Wuhan, but shared a household with the patient diagnosed with 2019-nCoV infection on January 21, 2020.”

Redfield says: *“We still believe the immediate risk to the American public is low.”*

Trump tells America: *“We think we have it very well under control. We have very little problem in this country at this moment.”*

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross says coronavirus outbreak in China could be an economic boon: *“I think it will help to accelerate the return of jobs to North America.”*

January 31

Redfield: *“The risk at this time to the American public is low.”*

In move he will trumpet long afterward, Trump shuts down travel of foreign nationals who’ve been in China. The restriction comes two weeks after travelers stricken with the virus appear to have spread it in the U.S. An estimated 300,000 people have arrived from China in the previous month.

Azar declares public health emergency.

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases director Dr. Anthony **Fauci** warns of asymptomatic spread: *“In the beginning...it was not clear whether an asymptomatic person could transmit it to someone while they were asymptomatic. Now we know... that that is absolutely the case.”*

February 1

Surgeon General minimizes the threat in a tweeted poem:

Roses are red

Violets are blue

Risk is low for #coronavirius

But high for the #flu

February 3

U.S. Army estimates coronavirus could kill as many as 150,000 Americans in a worst-case scenario.

February 5

In a briefing on Capitol Hill, senators urged administration officials to take the threat more seriously. Several asked if the administration needed additional money to help local and state health departments prepare.¹⁰

Senator Chris Murphy [tweets](#):

"Just left the Administration briefing on Coronavirus. Bottom line: they aren't taking this seriously enough...Local health systems need supplies, training, screening staff etc. And they need it now."

February 7

HHS Secretary Alex Azar requests \$2 billion for respirator masks and other supplies. Trump officials balk, wait weeks, then ask for only \$500 million. ¹¹

¹⁰New York Times, July 16, 2020, "He Could Have Seen What Was Coming: Behind Trump's Failure on the Virus" <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/us/politics/coronavirus-trump-response.html?referringSource=articleShare>

¹¹Washington Post; March 28, 2020, "Desperate for medical equipment, states encounter beleaguered national stockpile" https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/desperate-for-medical-equipment-states-encounter-a-beleaguered-national-stockpile/2020/03/28/1f4f9a0a-6f82-11ea-aa80-c2470c6b2034_story.html

Secretary of State Pompeo announces that the Trump administration is sending 17.8 tons of medical equipment to China.¹²

Pompeo [tweets](#) video of the PPE stockpile being loaded onto a plane:

We have coordinated with U.S. organizations to transport more humanitarian relief to people in Wuhan. Personal protective equipment and other medical supplies donated by these organizations can help save lives in #China and help protect people from the #coronavirus.

February 10

At a White House press conference Trump says about the coronavirus: “A lot of people think that goes away in April with the heat — as the heat comes in.”¹³

February 17

328 Americans evacuated from the Diamond Princess cruise ship docked in Japan, but because American officials started bringing passengers home before learning their test results, they placed infected passengers on the planes with the non-infected passengers.¹⁴ (Later, more would test positive for COVID-19.)¹⁵

¹²State Department Press Release; February 7, 2020 <https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-announces-assistance-to-combat-the-novel-coronavirus/>

¹³FactCheck.org; February 13, 2020 <https://www.factcheck.org/2020/02/will-the-new-coronavirus-go-away-in-april/>

¹⁴New York Times; February 17, 2020, “They Escaped an Infected Ship, but the Flight Home Was No Haven” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/17/world/asia/japan-cruise-ship-coronavirus.html>

¹⁵New York Times; February 22, 2020, “Trump Was Furious That Passengers With Coronavirus Were Brought Back to U.S.” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/22/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-cruise-ship.html>

February 23

“President Xi loves his country. He’s working very hard to solve the problem and he will solve the problem. Okay?”¹⁶

Harvard School of Public Health official Michael Mina issues a warning on limited COVID tests and the lack of transparency on testing failures in a thread on [Twitter](#).

Reminder: As of today (Feb 23), the US remains extremely limited in #COVID19 testing. Only 3 of 100 public health labs have @CDC test kits working and CDC is not sharing what went wrong with the kits. How to know if COVID19 is spreading here if we are not looking for it. 1/7

February 24

Trump [tweets](#):

The Coronavirus is very much under control in the USA. We are in contact with everyone and all relevant countries. CDC & World Health have been working hard and very smart. Stock Market starting to look very good to me!

Dr. Robert Kadlec at HHS requests urgent COVID task force meeting with POTUS to provide social distancing recommendations. The meeting is cancelled and President Trump would not make social distancing recommendations until March 16, 21 days later.¹⁷

February 25

¹⁶Remarks by President Trump before Marine One departure; February 23, 2020 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-marine-one-departure-83/>

¹⁷New York Times; April 11, 2020 (updated May 4), “He Could Have Seen What Was Coming...” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/11/us/politics/coronavirus-trump-response.html?searchResultPosition=4>

*"Cryin Chuck Schumer is complaining...that I should be asking for more money than \$2.5 Billion to prepare for Coronavirus."*¹⁸

March 6

Trump's media-blitz visit to CDC with Dr. Redfield, Secretary Azar, and Georgia Governor Brian Kemp: Trump claimed South Korea was calling America for help. *"They have a lot of people that are infected; we don't."* *"All I say is, 'Be calm.' Everyone is relying on us. The world is relying on us."*¹⁹

March 7

CPAC attendee tests positive for COVID-19.²⁰ (Trump spoke at the conference Saturday, February 29th.)

March 11

In an Oval Office broadcast, Trump banned travel from most of Europe, which expanded the partial ban he put on China in February.²¹

March 14

¹⁸Remarks by President Trump, Vice President Pence, and Members of the Coronavirus Task Force in Press Conference; February 25, 2020 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-vice-president-pence-members-coronavirus-task-force-press-conference/>

¹⁹Financial Times, "Inside Trump's Coronavirus Meltdown", May 14, 2020 https://amp.ft.com/content/97dc7de6-940b-11ea-abcd-371e24b679ed?__twitter_impression=true

²⁰New York Times; March 7, 2020, "CPAC Attendee Has the Coronavirus, Officials Say" <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/07/us/coronavirus-cpac.html>

²¹Financial Times; "Inside Trump's Coronavirus Meltdown", May 14, 2020 https://amp.ft.com/content/97dc7de6-940b-11ea-abcd-371e24b679ed?__twitter_impression=true

*Trump declares a national emergency. Even then, however, he insisted America was leading the world. “We’ve done a great job because we acted quickly,” he said. “We acted early.”*²²

March 16

Citing a call with one of his sons, Trump said: “It’s bad. It’s bad... They think August [before the disease peaks](#). Could be July. Could be longer than that.”²³



Jan. 27: Trump continues fulsome praise of China and Xi.

²²ibid.

²³ibid.

**Donald J. Trump** 

@realDonaldTrump



China has been working very hard to contain the Coronavirus. The United States greatly appreciates their efforts and transparency. It will all work out well. In particular, on behalf of the American People, I want to thank President Xi!

 128K 5:18 PM - Jan 24, 2020

Jan. 22: Trump praises Chinese response to the coronavirus

*"Personal
Protective
Equipment and other
medical supplies...
can help save lives
⚡ in #China"*



Secretary Pompeo
@SecPompeo

We have coordinated with U.S. organizations to transport more humanitarian relief to people in Wuhan. Personal protective equipment and other medical supplies donated by these organizations can help save lives in [#China](#) and help protect people from the [#coronavirus](#).



3.1M views

12:41 PM · 2/7/20 · [Twitter Web App](#)

9,062 Retweets · 15.7K Likes



Chris Murphy
@ChrisMurphyCT

Just left the Administration briefing Coronavirus. Bottom line: they aren't taking this seriously enough.

Notably, no request for ANY emergency funding, which is a big mistake. Local health systems need supplies, training, screening staff etc. And they need it now.

10:09 AM · 2/5/20 · [Twitter Web App](#)

18.3K Retweets 48.6K Likes

@mythserene

*"health systems
need supplies,
screening staff,
etc. And they
⚡ need it now."*