

An unexpected side effect of this coronavirus crisis, Asian- Americans becoming targets of discrimination

NBC News TODAY SHOW 7:00 AM EST

April 24, 2020 Friday

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Section: NEWS; Domestic

Length: 1379 words

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Highlight: Doctor Chen Fu is on the front lines in the battle against COVID-19. As a Chinese-American doctor, he feels both celebrated and vilified. On his commute to the hospital, Doctor Fu says he was approached by a stranger. This, just one of many incidents across the country, now being reported. Asian-Americans targeted for their race. In Texas, this person yelling at a Vietnamese restaurant owner. And this man and his two children stabbed at a Sam's Club. The suspect, according to the FBI, thought the family was Chinese and infecting people with the coronavirus.

Body

HODA KOTB (08:14:29): We are back with an unexpected side effect of this coronavirus crisis, Asian-Americans becoming targets of discrimination. The FBI recently issued a warning about a potential spike in hate crimes. And just this week, the NYPD launched a social media campaign to raise awareness, tweeting, "Hate is an ugly word and it has no place in our vocabulary." A growing number of celebrities were also speaking out, including actor John Cho who penned an op-ed for the L.A. Times. NBC News investigative and consumer correspondent Vicky Nguyen is here with more. And, Vicky, this is a really, really troubling trend.

VICKY NGUYEN (NBC News Investigative and Consumer Correspondent) (08:15:03): It is. And I will say it is personal for me, too, Hoda. The numbers really back it up. One Asian advocacy group says it has received more than fifteen hundred reports of COVID related hate incidents since mid-January. People are saying they have been harassed online, spit on, yelled at, even physically attacked. But as more people speak up to fight back against the hate, there is hope we can stop it from spreading.

(Begin VT)

VICKY NGUYEN (08:15:27): Doctor Chen Fu is on the front lines in the battle against COVID-19. As a Chinese-American doctor, he feels both celebrated and vilified.

DR. CHEN FU (08:15:38): I feel an animosity that I've never felt before.

VICKY NGUYEN (08:15:41): On his commute to the hospital, Doctor Fu says he was approached by a stranger.

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DR. CHEN FU (08:15:45): You dirty Chinese. And he just kept saying that over and over again. I've never felt anything like this before.

VICKY NGUYEN (08:15:50): This, just one of many incidents across the country, now being reported. Asian-Americans targeted for their race.

WOMAN #1 (Sammi Tran) (08:15:59): Get out of our country. VICKY NGUYEN (08:16:00): In Texas, this person yelling at a Vietnamese restaurant owner.

WOMAN #1 (Sammi Tran) (08:16:05): Get out.

VICKY NGUYEN (08:16:06): And this man and his two children stabbed at a Sam's Club. The suspect, according to the FBI, thought the family was Chinese and infecting people with the coronavirus. In Minnesota, this note the tenants claimed was posted on their door, reading, "We're watching you. Take the Chinese virus back to China." In New York City in just a month, police say they have investigated eleven hate crimes against Asian- Americans compared to three in all of last year. OCA, Asian Pacific American Advocates, a non-profit group that tracks discrimination against Asian-Americans, says it has received more than fifteen hundred COVID-19 related reports of hate incidents since January.

RITA PIN AHRENS (Asian Pacific American Advocates Executive Director) (08:16:48): We have seen everything from cashiers who will tell somebody I'm not going to serve you because I don't want to catch coronavirus. We've also seen patients who have gone into health clinics who say I don't want you as a nurse. I want somebody else to help me.

VICKY NGUYEN (08:17:04): Because the nurse was Asian-American?

RITA PIN AHRENS (08:17:05): Exactly.

VICKY NGUYEN (08:17:06): From mid to late March, President Trump repeatedly refers the coronavirus as the Chinese virus.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP (08:17:12): The Chinese virus. The fight against the Chinese virus. (08:17:15): It comes from China.

WOMAN #2 (08:17:15): I'm going to say it's racist.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP (08:17:16): It's not racist at all. No.

VICKY NGUYEN (08:17:18): This photo of his speech with the word Chinese replacing corona went viral on social media.

GENE WU (08:17:24): I have never seen Asian-American community this scared. They are in fear for their life.

VICKY NGUYEN (08:17:28): Gene Wu is a state representative in Texas.

(08:17:30): Why not call it the Chinese virus?

GENE WU (08:17:32): Because it could create harm and has created harm.

VICKY NGUYEN (08:17:36): Now many are calling for people to rise above the hate. New York Mayor Bill de Blasio.

MAYOR BILL DE BLASIO (08:17:41): We will not tolerate any discrimination. We will not tolerate any hate crimes.

VICKY NGUYEN (08:17:46): Black, Hispanic and Asian Congressional leaders uniting to condemn racism.

REPRESENTATIVE HAKEEM JEFFRIES (D-NY House Democratic Caucus Chairman) (08:17:51): It's important for us to negate the hate, come together as Americans.

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VICKY NGUYEN (08:17:57): And celebrities urging fans to stand up for each other. Actor Daniel Dae Kim.

DANIEL DAE KIM (Daniel Dae Kim; Instagram) (08:18:03): Please, please stop the prejudice and senseless violence against Asian people.

VICKY NGUYEN (08:18:07): Social media campaigns, #WashTheHate, #RacismIsAVirus and #IAmNotCOVID19 are spreading.

WOMAN #3 (@AAJA_LA; #WashTheHate) (08:18:14): Namaste.

WOMAN #4 (@AAJA_LA; #WashTheHate) (08:18:14): Namaste.

WOMAN #3 (@AAJA_LA; #WashTheHate) (08:18:15): Let's wash the hate. VICKY NGUYEN (08:18:16): Also spotlighting the growing discrimination, multiple op-eds, including mine. While there's more work ahead, some things have changed. After repeatedly calling it the Chinese virus, President Trump appears to have stopped and tweeted in part, "It is very important that we totally protect our Asian-American community in the United States, and all around the world. They are amazing people, and the spreading of the virus is not their fault." And in some of the racist attacks, people stepped in to help. Zack Owens risked his life to save the family attacked in Texas.

MAN (08:18:51): He saved our lives.

VICKY NGUYEN (08:18:53): And for Doctor Fu, a stranger jumped in.

DR. CHEN FU (08:18:56): He defended me and he said, "No, you can't do this." That guy was my hero.

(End VT)

VICKY NGUYEN (08:19:01): And this is not just happening with adults. Just this week, an Asian mom posted this to her Instagram. A student in her daughter's second grade class said, he didn't like China or Chinese people because they started this quarantine. She encouraged her daughter to put her feelings on paper and the result was this letter. It reads in part, "This made me feel sad because he was my friend and I'm Chinese. It's wrong because he doesn't know what he's saying." But it ends on a compassionate note, "Thank you for being my friend." And it really is so important, Hoda, for kids to speak with-- for parents to speak with their kids about this kind of discrimination.

HODA KOTB (08:19:34): I mean, it's so jarring, but to think of a sec-- a second-grader who's being mocked by another classmate is just so disturbing. And I was just-- I mean, this whole thing makes me so sick. But if you are put in a position like some of these folks who have been, what's the best thing for you to do? VICKY NGUYEN (08:19:49): Well, safety first.

HODA KOTB (08:19:49): Yeah.

VICKY NGUYEN (08:19:49): So you really do want to try to remove yourself from the situation. Of course, report the incident if you can. Both law enforcement and these advocacy groups say they take it very seriously. They will investigate. And-- and talk about it. Lean into your family and your friends for support. Sometimes you feel embarrassed or ashamed like it's something you did to bring it on but that's not the case. And you've got to put these messages out there. It reminds us all we're all in this together.

HODA KOTB (08:20:11): Yeah. Wow. What a really eye-opening report. All right. Thank you so much, Vicky.

(08:20:14): All right. Let's turn now to Mister Roker and get a check of the forecast. Hey, Al.

AL ROKER (08:20:20): Hey. Good morning, Hoda. And we still have some severe weather going on down through Florida. The radar shows this line of showers and thunderstorms that stretched from the Gulf across far about four hundred miles. There's the tornado watch. We'll be watching that closely over the next several hours. Fifteen million people at risk for severe weather in Florida, also in the Southern Plains as well. We'll watch that today.

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Tornadoes possible. Record highs from Texas into California. Mountain snows in the Northern Rockies. It's going to be a cool, rainy mess here in the Northeast and severe storms start to fire up later today in the Central Plains.

(08:20:54): That's what's going on around the country. Here's what's happening in your neck of the woods.

(Weather follows)

AL ROKER (08:21:30): (AUDIO CUT) your latest weather. Guys.

Load-Date: May 6, 2020

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