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We must end the fallout from COVID-19: xenophobia and hate

By [Ellen J. Kennedy](#) | 09:01 am

REUTERS/Alyson McClaran

Covid-19 is releasing a deadly mix of illness, hate, danger, poverty, fear, and violence.

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This week marks the 34th anniversary of the worst nuclear disaster in history. That tragedy occurred on April 26, 1986, at Chernobyl in Ukraine, then part of the Soviet Union. The explosion released radioactivity estimated at 400 times the size of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

The death toll wasn't as bad as experts feared because responders put out fires before explosions erupted in three other nuclear reactors. But in the long term, the fallout has been deadly. Thousands have died from radiation-induced cancer. Children have contracted thyroid cancer after drinking milk from cows that grazed near Chernobyl. And experts believe that this disaster will trigger more cancer, more illness, and more deaths for decades to come.

COVID-19 is releasing a different form of radioactivity: a deadly mix of illness, hate, danger, poverty, fear, and violence.

People stocking up on guns

Gun sales are exploding. In the United States, Canada, and even in Europe, which has tight weapons controls, people are stocking up on guns and ammunition in fear that the pandemic will lead to social unrest.

The ammunition website Ammo.com **reported a 222 percent increase** in transactions in the past three weeks and a revenue jump of more than 300 percent, which it attributes to the virus gaining traction.

Sales boomed in North Carolina and Georgia, with leaps of 179% and 169% respectively. Other states with large increases included Pennsylvania, Texas, Florida, Illinois, and New York, which also have high pandemic levels.

A frightening connection exists between guns and intimate partner violence. Data show that abusers with firearms are five times more likely to kill their victims than those without guns. Every month in the U.S., an average of 52 women are shot and killed by an intimate partner. Nearly one million women alive today have reported being shot or shot at by intimate partners, and 4.5 million women have reported being threatened with a gun.

This was *before* the pandemic.

Ellen Kennedy

Alcohol adds to the mix. According to the World Health Organization, alcohol is involved in at least 55% of domestic assault cases. Again, that was *before* the pandemic.

Alcohol sales in the U.S. have not stopped. Liquor stores in most cities are deemed essential businesses and are still open and offer delivery and curbside pickup.

A double threat

As the coronavirus sweeps across the globe and governments respond with social controls, victims of domestic violence, most often women, face a double threat: the deadly virus outside and an abuser inside, and that abuser may have guns and alcohol.

Children are at great risk as well. According to UNICEF, hundreds of millions of children around the world will likely face increasing threats to their safety and well-being – including mistreatment, gender-based violence, exploitation, social exclusion, and separation from caregivers – because of actions to contain the spread of COVID-19.

We know the escalating rates of illness and deaths, but what about those who are the most invisible and the most at risk: American Indians, people in prisons, the homeless?

Conditions are desperate for American Indians and Alaska Natives, who are the poorest people in the United States. Indian Health Service hospitals have only 625 beds nationwide, with six intensive-care-unit beds and 10 ventilators to serve more than 2.5 million American Indians and Alaska Natives.

There are almost 2.3 million people in prisons, jails, detention centers and psychiatric hospitals. And these institutions have a regular influx of correctional staff, vendors, health care workers, and educators — all potential transmitters and receivers of infection.

Some reports indicate that as many as 4 million people in America are homeless. Their vulnerability is unimaginable to most of us.

The fallout of the virus also portends economic collapse for decades. Businesses are shuttered, especially those that employ women and less-skilled workers. Life savings are evaporating. Homes will be lost. Human rights experts predict a spike in organized crime and human trafficking in this chaotic financial environment.

Everyone is terrified – frightened about who will live and who will die and what will remain of their social and material lives.

The tendency to blame others

When fear kicks in like this, one response is to blame others for the terrible calamity that triggers the fear. And that's what is happening.

Hate is spreading at least as rapidly as the virus. Asian-Americans, especially Chinese-Americans, are accused of bringing COVID-19 into the country. The result is a surge of xenophobia and outright acts of physical violence and assault against Asian-appearing people.

It's not only Asians who are blamed. Neo-Nazis are busy with new conspiracy theories blaming Jews for creating the virus and for using it to profit through insider trading in unstable financial markets. These outrageous ideas are not only the fodder of extremist websites; they are wildly contagious on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

In India, the Hindu nationalist government blames the virus on the Muslims.

This hate is like the unseen and unmeasurable fallout from Chernobyl that poisons the earth for decades. More fires broke out at Chernobyl earlier this month that took a thousand fire fighters, planes, and helicopters days to extinguish – releasing yet more radioactivity into the air.

We can't control the virus, at least not yet. But we can take two important steps.

First, we must end the xenophobia and hate. And second, we must protect the most vulnerable among us: the prisoners, the homeless, those at risk of assault, and those with the fewest resources.

Radioactivity cannot be stopped or contained, but we can keep the fallout from getting worse.

Ellen J. Kennedy, Ph.D., is the executive director of [World Without Genocide](#) at Mitchell Hamline School of Law. April 1 begins Genocide Awareness and Prevention Month.

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COMMENTS (6)

SUBMITTED BY JOE SMITH ON [04/27/2020 - 10:01 AM](#).

It is the flu people, of course some people are getting it, millions of people get the flu annually. The issue is not who is getting the virus but who is dying of the virus. COVID 19 is a virus, no not the super virus that is uncontrollable, just a virus that is contagious like all viruses. In Minnesota we have had 270 deaths, 220 of those come from long care facilities. Average age of those dying in Minnesota is 86. We have a long term care crisis and people are screaming "workers at a meat packing plant caught Coronavirus". Again, yes, many people will catch this virus, many will not have a symptom, some will have mild symptoms, some will have a miserable 7-10 days with chills, fever, diarrhea and loss of smell/taste (take zinc and see what happens to smell/taste), a small percentage will die (elderly with underlying health issues being the overwhelming majority).

What will calm everyone down is an understanding of what COVID 19 is and who is dying.

Herd immunity, which has kept a variety of species alive for thousands of years including humans, is somehow now a bad thing. As I have asked here a multitude of times, show me the deaths of 2-5 year olds that have continued to go to daycare centers, so their parents can go to work. Governor Walz pleaded with daycare centers to remain open so essential workers can leave home and go to work. The children go to daycare and play all day with each other, then go home to parents who have been dealing with the public in their essential job. Show me the outbreak first, then show me the deaths of the children from this non social distancing practice. It is not there,! Back to herd immunity, yes if you open up our State, some people will get Coronavirus. The vast majority will have a bad couple days of flu like symptoms or no symptoms, then be immune to the virus, just like every year Dec-April known as flu season.

The past 6 weeks of "hide in your basement" has produced numbers to look at here in Minnesota. Look at the

numbers yourself and ask if our response to COVID 19 should change?
Actual facts and information will calm people down, unfortunately those are in short supply.

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SUBMITTED BY IAN WADE ON 04/27/2020 - 02:13 PM.

Its. Not. The. Flu!

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SUBMITTED BY PAT TERRY ON 04/27/2020 - 03:15 PM.

It is not the flu. It is a different virus. I stopped reading there.

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SUBMITTED BY BOB BARNES ON 04/27/2020 - 10:54 AM.

I wonder if Ellen realizes that the very policies Gov Walz implemented lead to more violence and substance abuse (not to mention suicides, mental health issues etc etc) she's talking about?

The media and politicians have been stoking panic and fear from the start. The data shows us that the virus has spread far and wide despite the lockdowns. The data also shows us that the actual mortality rate is not much more than the seasonal flu (0.1 to 0.3%). The data also shows up exactly who is hit hardest and where. The Diamond Princess proved all the so called experts wrong. The data that's been coming out ever since just confirmed that.

The best way to end all this hate etc is to stop fear mongering in the media and to open things up immediately so people get back to normal life. Yes some will get the virus and some will die. But we will build herd immunity for now and the virus will go away at least for the summer.

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SUBMITTED BY IAN WADE ON 04/27/2020 - 02:16 PM.

I'm to the point of believing that the Barnes account is parody, performance art or some sort of school project.

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SUBMITTED BY JOHN KIRBY ON 04/27/2020 - 03:24 PM.

Economic collapse for decades? Everyone is terrified? There are some legitimate points buried in this article – but buried they are under all the hyperbole.

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