

A Virus Doesn't Discriminate: Dr. Sanjay Gupta's coronavirus podcast for March 27

By **Ryan Prior**, CNN

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(CNN) — *The coronavirus outbreak has fueled a surge in racism against Asian-Americans around the country. CNN's Chief Medical Correspondent Sanjay Gupta hears from some Americans who have personally experienced racism and he talks about why there's no place for hate in our country.*

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A Virus Doesn't Discriminate

The coronavirus pandemic has fueled a surge in racism against Asian-Americans around the country. CNN's Chief Medical Correspondent Sanjay Gupta hears from some Americans who've personally experienced racism and talks about why there's no place for hate in our country.

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Dr. Sanjay Gupta: As word spread of a new virus out of Wuhan, China, a stigma spread with it.

Maybe you've seen the videos on social media of Asian-Americans being harassed on the street or in public transit. It's hard to watch but it's important to talk about.

The thing is ... a virus doesn't care about borders ... Nor does it care about the race of whom it infects.

A virus doesn't discriminate. Nor should we.

I'm Dr. Sanjay Gupta, CNN's Chief Medical Correspondent. This is "Coronavirus: Fact vs. Fiction."

Kyung Lah: So we were working just, you know, clearly a television crew working, and a man walked up. And he said something right next to my producer.

Dr. Gupta: That's my colleague Kyung Lah, Senior National Correspondent for CNN.

Lah: As I asked him to repeat himself, I said, 'Excuse me, sir, can I help you?' It was dawning on me what he had said. He had used a derogatory term, you know, talked about a long-held xenophobic stereotype about immigrants. And it was just surreal. It's not something that I'd experienced to my face in a very long time.

Dr. Gupta: Kyung is Korean-American and based in Los Angeles. She herself was targeted.

Lah: It's still really hard for me to explain how it makes me feel. I joked about it on Twitter and said, if you're gonna be racist, please be accurate. I'm Korean, not Chinese. Not that that matters at all.

Dr. Gupta: It doesn't matter at all. And she's not alone.

San Francisco State University [found](#) that news about coronavirus discrimination increased by 50% across the country, from February 9th through March 7th. That's just one month.

Dr. Gupta: Even on social media -- we're seeing the same thing.

Just last week Eugenie Grey, a blogger in New York, was out walking her dog when a passerby kicked the dog. She described what happened on Instagram.

Eugenie Grey: I'm sorry. I wasn't gonna cry when I started recording, and then I just started crying right now. I'm just so upset because who [BLEEP] kicks dogs? You guys, I'm not a virus.

Dr. Gupta: It's not just individual attacks.

Earlier this year, with only a handful of novel coronavirus cases in America, Chinese restaurants were already suffering.

Rose Wu: (*speaks in Chinese*)

In New York City's Chinatown, restaurant owner Rose Wu told us many of her customers canceled their Chinese New Year bookings last minute. That was just as the city of Wuhan, in China, was going into lockdown.

Rose Wu: (*speaks in Chinese*)

Rose says some customers told her they canceled out of fear of catching the virus because she and her staff are Chinese.

By mid-February, Rose's business [was down](#) some 70 to 80 percent. That was weeks before most of America started staying at home.

Unfortunately, the list goes on and on.

Here's what President Trump had to say when a reporter asked him about it:

Reporter: Why do you keep calling this the Chinese virus? There are reports of dozens of incidents of bias against Chinese Americans in this country. Your own aide, Secretary Azar, has said he does not use this term. He says ethnicity does not cause the virus. Why do you keep using this?

President Donald Trump: Because it comes from China.

Reporter: People say it's racist.

Trump: It's not racist at all, no, not at all. It comes from China. That's why. It comes from China.

Dr. Gupta: That was on March 18th.

Five days later, President Trump reversed course. He opened a press conference on Sunday with this statement:

Trump: It's very important that we totally protect our Asian-American community in the United States and all around the world. They're amazing people and the spreading of the virus is not their fault in any way, shape or form.

Dr. Gupta: The president rebuking racism is certainly a welcome development and the right thing to do.

For some Asian-Americans, like my colleague Kyung Lah, the damage had been done.

Lah: When certain members of the political establishment began using the term Chinese virus, when Fox News repeatedly called it Chinese virus, that's when I noticed an uptick in the level of hate on social media. That is not a mistake. I think that you can absolutely show that there is a correlation.

Merlin Chowkwanyun: I mean words and language ... they really matter and they frame the larger public imagination towards this issue. And so I hope we can remember the history of blaming immigrants and racial minorities for diseases and avoid reviving it too much this time.

Dr. Gupta: As you heard him say -- this isn't the first time that an infectious disease outbreak has been linked to certain immigrant groups. It's a pattern that has been repeated in history.

Chowkwanyun: So in the mid 19th century, for example, shortly before the Civil War, it was actually the Irish who were often blamed for cholera epidemics. In the early 20th century, during a polio epidemic, it was Italians who got scapegoated a lot. Jews from Eastern Europe were often blamed for tuberculosis, as were African Americans.

Dr. Gupta: That kind of xenophobia didn't just manifest in individual violence, but also in institutional policies like the Immigration Act of 1924, which severely limited immigration from Asia and parts of Europe.

Chowkwanyun: If you go back and read the proceedings in debates, federal commissions that were deliberating these kinds of immigrant restrictions, you see all sorts of references to epidemics and immigrants and sickness and the threats that they pose.

Dr. Gupta: Thankfully, people have been calling out the racism they are witnessing.

Last week, actor Tzi Ma posted a video as he washed his hands.

Tzi Ma (Twitter clip): Acts of violence against Asian Americans will not stop the spread of the virus.

Dr. Gupta: It's part of an online campaign called #wassthehate, which aims to raise awareness about the harassment that people are now facing.

Tzi Ma (Twitter clip): So the next time you wash your hands, wash out the hate that you may have for your fellow Americans. Hate will get you sick even if the virus doesn't.

Dr. Gupta: His sentiments are being echoed by other celebrities and government officials. Even comedians are talking about it.

Here's Anhtriet Tran performing at a comedy show called "Asians Strike Back" earlier this month.

Anhtriet Tran: The coronavirus has just opened the floodgates for people to be racist to Asians. You know there's one that's very popular, it's oh like Asians. We like to eat dogs. So stupid. You guys know how expensive a dog is?

Dr. Gupta: But even comedy can't erase the hurt being felt by many in our country.

I asked my colleague Kyung what advice did she have for people out there. Here's what she said.

Kyung Lah: It is a virus that sees no race, that sees no boundaries. And if we do not treat this uniformly as a public, this is going to get the better of us. That's what I would say. We are all the same when we are fighting this thing. So we better start acting like one or else we're not going to get through this.

Dr. Gupta: Kyung's right. These are scary times for all of us. But what we need to do is unify and realize that we are stronger if we stick together. All of us are going through this and we will come out of it.

Hatred does not have -- and never will have -- any place in our country. So if you see someone getting mistreated, call it out for what it is. That's part of standing up for each other. We're all in this together.

If you have questions, you can record them as a voice memo and email them to asksanjay@cnn.com -- we might even include them in the podcast.

We'll be back Monday. Thanks for listening.



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