



## The timeline of Trump's coronavirus response is increasingly damning

By **Aaron Blake**

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We just learned that a month and a half before President Trump truly acknowledged the gravity of the coronavirus outbreak, his top trade adviser warned that 500,000 Americans could die of it.

Axios first reported on the Jan. 29 memo from Peter Navarro, in which Navarro said the virus could claim more than a half-million lives because it was much more serious than the seasonal flu.

Navarro would later follow that up with a Feb. 23 memo that offered an even more dire prediction. “There is an increasing probability of a full-blown COVID-19 pandemic that could infect as many as 100 million Americans, with a loss of life of as many as 1-2 million souls,” Navarro wrote.

Despite these warnings, it wouldn't be until mid-March that Trump would truly acknowledge the gravity of the situation. He would repeatedly say the situation was “under control,” play down the threat and compare it to the flu, despite Navarro and others rejecting that comparison.

But it's merely the latest example of a warning that apparently wasn't heeded in the early days of the outbreak. Trump would impose certain travel restrictions on flights from China but otherwise resist truly warning the country and taking further steps.

Below is a timeline of all the warning signs, with some of Trump's public comments interspersed (in yellow). Much of it is based upon two investigative pieces published by The Washington Post on March 20 and this past Saturday.

**Dec. 31:** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention learn of a cluster of cases in China.

**Jan. 1:** The CDC begins developing reports for the Department of Health and Human Services about the situation.

**Jan. 3:** A Chinese official officially informs CDC Director Robert Redfield of the outbreak of a respiratory illness in the city of Wuhan. Redfield later relays the information to HHS Secretary Alex Azar, and Azar informs the White House National Security Council.

**Early January:** Intelligence officials begin offering ominous, classified warnings about the virus to Trump in the President's Daily Brief. The warnings will persist into February.

**Jan. 8:** The CDC issues its first public warning about the outbreak in China, saying that it is monitoring the situation and that people should take precautions when traveling to Wuhan.

**Mid-January:** Assistant HHS Secretary for Preparedness and Response Robert Kadlec instructs subordinates to make contingency plans for using the Defense Production Act, which allows the federal government to compel the production of certain materials in a crisis.

**Jan. 17:** The CDC begins monitoring major airports for passengers arriving from China.

**Jan. 18:** Azar, who had been trying to speak to Trump about the virus, is finally able to meet with him. Before Azar can begin talking about the virus, though, Trump interjects to ask him about a federal crackdown on vaping.

**Jan. 21:** The first confirmed coronavirus case arrives in the United States, in Seattle.

**Jan. 22:** Trump makes his first comments about the coronavirus, saying he is not concerned about a pandemic. “No. Not at all. And we have it totally under control. ... It’s going to be just fine.”

**Jan. 23:** Chinese officials take the drastic step of shutting down Wuhan.

**Jan. 27:** Concerned White House aides meet with then-acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney to get senior officials to pay more attention to the issue. Joe Grogan, the head of the White House Domestic Policy Council, argues it could cost Trump his reelection and says the virus is likely to dominate life in the United States for many months.

**Jan. 29:** A Navarro memo warns of 500,000 or more American deaths and says it is “unlikely the introduction of the coronavirus into the U.S. population in significant numbers will mimic a ‘seasonal flu’ event with relatively low contagion and mortality rates.”

**Jan. 30:** China expands the lockdown beyond Wuhan to the entire province of Hubei, as the World Health Organization declares a global health emergency.

**Jan. 30:** Trump says of the threat: “We think it’s going to have a very good ending for it. So that I can assure you.”

**Jan. 31:** Trump announces travel restrictions from China after three major airlines announced they had halted flights.

**Early February:** Other White House officials, including deputy national security adviser Matthew Pottinger, join Grogan in calling for a more forceful response. Pottinger pushes for expanding the travel ban to countries such as Italy and earns the support of Anthony S. Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. but the plan is resisted by Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, who cited economic concerns.

**Feb. 5:** Trump's impeachment trial ends with his acquittal by the Senate.

**Feb. 10:** Trump says, "I think the virus is going to be — it's going to be fine."

**Feb. 19:** Trump says: "I think it's going to work out fine. I think when we get into April, in the warmer weather, that has a very negative effect on that and that type of a virus. So let's see what happens, but I think it's going to work out fine."

**Feb. 23:** Another Navarro memo warns of an "increasing probability of a full-blown COVID-19 pandemic that could infect as many as 100 million Americans, with a loss of life of as many as 1-2 million souls."

**Feb. 23:** Italy begins to see evidence of a major outbreak in the Lombardy region.

**Feb. 24:** As Iran becomes a hot spot, WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warns of a possible pandemic. "There is a lot of speculation about whether this increase means that this epidemic has now become a pandemic," he says.

**Feb. 24:** Trump says: "The Coronavirus is very much under control in the USA. ... Stock Market starting to look very good to me!"

**Feb. 26:** Trump says, "When you have 15 people — and the 15 within a couple of days is going to be down to close to zero — that's a pretty good job we've done."

**Feb. 27:** Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Richard Burr (R-N.C.), who had received briefings on the threat, tells a private luncheon that the coronavirus is "much more aggressive in its transmission than anything that we have seen in recent history" and is "is probably more akin to the 1918 [influenza] pandemic," in which 50 million or more people died worldwide.

**Feb. 28:** Trump says: "It's going to disappear. One day, it's like a miracle, it will disappear."

**Feb. 29:** The United States records its first coronavirus death and announces new travel restrictions for Iran, Italy and South Korea.

**March 3:** The CDC lifts restrictions on coronavirus testing.

**March 10:** Trump says: “Just stay calm. It will go away.”

**March 11:** The White House suspends travel from most European countries, as the WHO declares a global pandemic.

**March 11:** Trump says, “I think we’re going to get through it very well.”

**March 13:** Trump declares a national emergency.

**March 16:** Trump for the first time publicly reflects on the gravity of the situation. Asked about his repeated comments saying the situation was “under control,” he says: “If you’re talking about the virus, no, that’s not under control for any place in the world. ... I was talking about what we’re doing is under control, but I’m not talking about the virus.”

## Coronavirus: What you need to read

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