

## Trump Says ‘People Have to Remain Calm’ Amid Coronavirus Outbreak

During a visit to the C.D.C., the president sought to play down the risk from the virus and said he would not be inclined to cancel events and travel except to infected areas.



By Peter Baker

Published March 6, 2020 Updated March 7, 2020

ATLANTA — President Trump sought to play down the coronavirus outbreak on Friday and offered a vote of confidence to besieged federal health officials as infections spread further, markets tumbled again and the authorities scrambled to accelerate the availability of testing kits across the country.

“It will end,” Mr. Trump said during a visit to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, the headquarters of the federal government’s efforts to combat the virus. “People have to remain calm.”

He emphasized that the outbreak in the United States was small by comparison with that in other countries and cautioned against drastic societal changes in areas without major infections. “I think it’s fine if they want to do it,” he said about Americans canceling travel, conventions and other events out of fear of the virus. “I don’t think it’s an overreaction. But I wouldn’t be generally inclined to do it. I really wouldn’t be.”

Mr. Trump flew to Atlanta after signing an \$8.3 billion emergency spending bill at the White House to ramp up efforts to curb the virus, accepting more money than even his administration had requested. But his trip to the C.D.C. reflected the uncertainty and fear that currently have the nation on edge. The president canceled the trip on Thursday night after being told that a C.D.C. employee might have the coronavirus herself, then surprised even some top aides by reversing his decision Friday morning after a test result came back negative.

Other elements of his schedule in the coming days have likewise been affected by the outbreak. A global health conference in Orlando, Fla., that Mr. Trump was scheduled to address on Monday has been canceled because of the coronavirus.

After touring the laboratories at the C.D.C. headquarters on Friday, the president emphasized that the number of infections and deaths in the United States remained limited and that the fatality rate was relatively low.

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Mr. Trump said he would prefer not to let 3,533 people on board a cruise ship held off the coast of California disembark onto American soil, even if they were placed into quarantine, in part because it would inflate the number of American infections and make the situation look worse. But he added that he had backed down from that position and authorized federal health officials to decide the matter as they saw fit.

“They would like to have the people come off,” he said. “I would like to have the people stay. I told them to make the final decision. I would rather — because I like the numbers being where they are. I don’t need to have the numbers double because of one ship that wasn’t our fault. And it wasn’t the fault of the people on the ship either. OK? It wasn’t their fault, either. And they are mostly Americans.”

“So, I can live either way with it,” he added. “I would rather have them stay on, personally. But I fully understand if they want to take them off. I gave them the authority to make the decision.”

Vice President Mike Pence announced on Friday that 19 crew members and two passengers of that ship, which is idling off the coast of San Francisco, had so far tested positive for the coronavirus. A plan had been made to bring the ship into a noncommercial port, he said.

Dr. Robert R. Redfield, the C.D.C. director who led the president on a tour of his facilities along with Steve Monroe, the associate director for laboratory science and safety, said the government still hoped to control the spread of the virus to prevent a pandemic. “This nation should not give up on containment,” Dr. Redfield said.

The Trump administration gave conflicting explanations of the on-again, off-again trip on Friday morning. A White House official initially said the president had canceled the visit because he did not want to interfere with the work at the centers as its staff scrambled to get a grip on the virus. But then Mr. Trump told reporters it was called off because of a suspected case of coronavirus at the C.D.C. itself.

The C.D.C. is at the nexus of an extraordinary crisis as the number of coronavirus cases worldwide has surpassed 100,000. In response to the outbreak, investors are dumping stocks, businesses and nonprofit organizations are canceling conventions, travelers are calling off spring break vacations, airlines and hotels are laying off workers and schools are suspending study abroad programs.

As of Friday evening, the authorities had reported more than 300 coronavirus cases in the United States, and at least 17 people have died. The first cases near the nation’s capital were reported Thursday in a Maryland suburb.

The C.D.C. response has generated concern and criticism among many health experts, who have complained that the agency was slow to react to the spread of the infection and imposed overly restrictive guidelines early on about who could be tested. Mr. Trump himself has come under fire, as well. Among those who lined his motorcade route in Atlanta were people holding up signs that said, “Have Faith in Science” and “We Need a Vaccine Against Trump.”

Even now, testing remains a major challenge. Officials told Mr. Trump that about 700,000 testing kits had already shipped and that it would grow to four million by the end of next week. “Anyone who wants a test can get a test,” the president said after his briefing.

At a news conference on Friday evening at the White House, Mr. Pence, who is leading the administration response, would not commit to that, but said doctors treating potentially symptomatic Americans could contact local officials and have state labs do the testing.

Mr. Trump rejected any suggestion that the C.D.C. had not acted aggressively enough, presenting officials to reporters to describe how they quickly moved to develop a diagnostic test when China reported its own outbreak. “They are incredible people,” he said of the scientists, “and honestly you should be giving them tremendous credit. They have done a tremendous job.”

Mr. Trump lashed out at Gov. Jay Inslee of Washington, a former Democratic presidential candidate who has criticized the president’s leadership on the coronavirus and met on Thursday with Mr. Pence.

“I told Mike not to be complimentary of that governor because that governor is a snake,” Mr. Trump said.

“Let me just tell you we have a lot of problems with the governor,” he added. “So Mike may be happy with him, but I’m not, OK?”

On the way to Georgia, Mr. Trump stopped in Tennessee to inspect the devastation from deadly tornadoes this week that killed more than two dozen people, injured many more and left a swath of destruction for miles.

The president, wearing a White House windbreaker, khaki slacks and a red “Keep America Great” baseball cap, was shown a neighborhood of homes flattened by the storm to the west of Cookeville. Mr. Trump looked around to see demolished houses, uprooted trees, smashed cars and piles of debris. “It’s a war zone,” Ricky Shelton, the town’s mayor, told him.

Visible in the wreckage on Hensley Drive were the remains of a quiet rural life — a blue flower dress, a toy animal with white stuffing coming out of its torn exterior, a child’s red wagon, a mangled bicycle, a crushed photograph of a smiling couple — left in the mud. Nearby someone had mounted an American flag on a makeshift pole fashioned out of two pieces of wood strapped together. Mr. Trump was told that a young boy had been sucked out of his house by the tornado and blown hundreds of feet away, while his parents were killed.

On a frigid, windy day, the president met with survivors, some of them wrapped in blankets. “They’re wiped out, they have nothing and many people died,” Mr. Trump said. His message, he added, was that he would do what he could to help. “I love them very much that’s why I’m here,” he said. “We’re going to be with them all the way.”

After Atlanta, Mr. Trump headed to Florida for campaign fund-raising events and to spend the weekend at his Mar-a-Lago estate.

Noah Weiland contributed reporting from Washington.

**The Coronavirus Outbreak** >

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Updated April 11, 2020

### ● When will this end?

This is a difficult question, because a lot depends on how well the virus is contained. A better question might be: “How will we know when to reopen the country?” In an [American Enterprise Institute report](#), Scott Gottlieb, Caitlin

Rivers, Mark B. McClellan, Lauren Silvis and Crystal Watson staked out four goal posts for recovery: Hospitals in the state must be able to safely treat all patients requiring hospitalization, without resorting to crisis standards of care; the state needs to be able to at least test everyone who has symptoms; the state is able to conduct monitoring of confirmed cases and contacts; and there must be a sustained reduction in cases for at least 14 days

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