

AFTER A GRIM FORECAST, TRUMP EXTENDS LIMITS



A hospital in Wuhan, China. Instead of using an automatic reporting system as the outbreak began, hospitals deferred to local officials who feared upsetting Beijing.

China Had a Fail-Safe Way to Track Contagions. Officials Failed to Use It.

By STEVEN LEE MYERS

The alarm system was ready. Scarred by the SARS epidemic that erupted in 2002, China had created an infectious disease reporting system that officials said was world-class: fast, thorough and, just as important, immune from meddling.

Hospitals could input patients’ details into a computer and instantly notify government health

authorities in Beijing, where officers are trained to spot and smother contagious outbreaks before they spread.

It didn’t work.

After doctors in Wuhan began treating clusters of patients stricken with a mysterious pneumonia in December, the reporting was supposed to have been automatic. Instead, hospitals deferred to local health officials who, over a political aversion to sharing bad news, withheld information about

cases from the national reporting system — keeping Beijing in the dark and delaying the response.

The central health authorities first learned about the outbreak not from the reporting system but after unknown whistle-blowers leaked two internal documents online.

Even after Beijing got involved, local officials set narrow criteria for confirming cases, leaving out information that could have provided clues that the virus was

spreading among humans.

Hospitals were ordered to count only patients with a known connection to the source of the outbreak, the seafood market. Doctors also had to have their cases confirmed by bureaucrats before they were reported to higher-ups.

As the United States, Europe and the rest of the world struggle to contain the coronavirus pandemic, China has cast itself as a model, bringing down a raging outbreak to the point where the

country has begun to lift the kinds of onerous restrictions on life that are now imposed around the world.

This triumphant narrative obscures the early failures in reporting cases, squandered time that could have been used to slow infections in China before they exploded into a pandemic.

“According to the rules, this of course should have been reported,” Yang Gonghuan, a retired

Continued on Page A10

Politicians Test Novel Playbook For Era of Fear

This article is by Jonathan Martin, Reid J. Epstein and Maggie Haberman.

From the White House to the county courthouse, the coronavirus pandemic has drastically upended the 2020 elections.

Many Democratic leaders now doubt their national party convention will take place as planned in July, while President Trump’s determination to hold the Republican convention could collide with life-or-death realities.

Both Mr. Trump and former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr.



DOUG MILLS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

President Trump at one of his last rallies, in Charlotte, N.C.

are wary of holding public events too soon and may not engage in full-fledged campaigning until the summer.

And hundreds of congressional, statewide and local candidates, who are always overshadowed in presidential years, are turning to the role of good Samaritan — aiding with groceries and hiring people newly out of work in an effort to stay visible without being in-

Continued on Page A19

The Ventilators Were on Order; They Still Are

This article is by Nicholas Kulish, Sarah Kliff and Jessica Silver-Greenberg.

Thirteen years ago, a group of U.S. public health officials came up with a plan to address what they regarded as one of the medical system’s crucial vulnerabilities: a shortage of ventilators.

The breathing-assistance machines tended to be bulky, expensive and limited in number. The plan was to build a large fleet of inexpensive portable devices to deploy in a flu pandemic or another crisis.

Money was budgeted. A federal contract was signed. Work got underway.

And then things suddenly veered off course. A multibillion-dollar maker of medical devices bought the small California company that had been hired to design the new machines. The project ultimately produced zero ventilators.

That failure delayed the development of an affordable ventilator by at least half a decade, depriving hospitals, states and the federal government of the ability to stock up. The federal government started over with another company in 2014, whose ventilator was approved only last year and whose products have not yet been delivered.

Today, with the coronavirus ravaging America’s health care system, the nation’s emergency-response stockpile is still waiting on its first shipment. The scarcity

Continued on Page A8

NEWS ANALYSIS In a crisis that required manufacturing acumen, the president crumpled. PAGE A8

Swapping Whiteboards for Screens, in a Week

By DAVID W. CHEN

In the days before remote instruction began, Chauntae Brown, a second-grade teacher at P.S. 80 in Jamaica, Queens, scrambled to teach parents without Wi-Fi how to use cellphone hot spots. She rummaged in her garage to find materials — a world map, a “Welcome” sign, an apple-shaped chalkboard — to transform her living room wall into a classroom.

A Challenge for 75,000 New York Teachers

She grabbed a plastic tiara because, she said, “I’m the queen of this castle.”

At 8:45 a.m. on Monday, as her students logged on for their first day of remote learning, one after

another, she was thrilled to see them blurt hello for the first time in a week. But all did not go smoothly. A third of the students were not present. There were technical issues. And the class had the feel of a slumber party, since so many children were in their pajamas or in their beds, with parents in the same live shot.

By the second day, though, attendance was up to 88 percent, and most students were dressed for school. There were fewer technical problems, fewer parents to be seen. Students were so excited about Ms. Brown reading “Mercy Watson to the Rescue” aloud that several had already clicked through future assignments.

“I said, ‘Friends, you’re eager, but you have to do the day that it says, because Ms. Brown might change her mind,’ ” she said.

Anything could change, on any given day, as the largest public school system in the country adapts on the fly to a public health emergency without precedent.

Last week was the first week that New York City’s 1.1 million students were back in session, after schools were closed for a week to transition to remote learning. And given that school will be conducted via computer screens for weeks, if not through the end of the academic year, the city’s

Continued on Page A6



Lacey Tragesser teaching from her family’s North Carolina cabin.

In Seattle, Signs That Social Distancing May Be Slowing a Virus

By MIKE BAKER

SEATTLE — The Seattle area, home of the first known coronavirus case in the United States and the place where the virus claimed 37 of its first 50 victims, is now seeing evidence that harsh containment strategies, imposed in the earliest days of the out-

break, are beginning to pay off — at least for now.

Deaths are not rising as fast as they are in other states. Dramatic declines in street traffic show that people are staying home. Hospitals have so far not been overwhelmed. And preliminary statistical models provided to public officials in Washington State suggest that the spread of the virus

has slowed in the Seattle area in recent days.

While each infected person was spreading the virus to an average of 2.7 other people earlier in March, that number appears to have dropped, with one projection suggesting that it was now down to 1.4.

The researchers who are preparing the latest projections, led

by the Institute for Disease Modeling, a private research group in Bellevue, Wash., have been watching a variety of data points since the onset of the outbreak. They include tens of thousands of coronavirus test results, deaths, and mobility information — including traffic patterns and the

Continued on Page A9



NATIONAL A18-19

A Blessing in Disguise

The decision to hunker down in Jonesboro, Ark., to limit illness probably also saved lives when a tornado hit. PAGE A19

New Pain for Asian-Americans

As xenophobia swells, political leaders have tried to comfort constituents, but even they feel unnerved. PAGE A18

INTERNATIONAL A17

France’s Forever War

A mission to fight Islamic militants in the Sahel region of West Africa was supposed to take weeks. Seven years later, there is no end in sight. PAGE A17

SPORTSMONDAY D1-6

A Brotherhood Devastated

A group bound by New York basketball has been hit hard by the coronavirus, with three dead and others ill. PAGE D1

Best Poker Hand? A Clean One

The World Series of Poker is still on, despite the pandemic. Looking for other action? Try Belarusian soccer. PAGE D4

BUSINESS B1-5

Tech’s Shape-Shifting Foes

After spending billions to avoid more election meddling, Facebook, Google and Twitter are careening from crisis to crisis as their enemies change tactics. PAGE B1

Analog Generation in a Crisis

Uncomfortable with tech, many older people are struggling to use modern tools to keep up with friends and family in the pandemic. PAGE B1

Staying Sane in a Crazy World

There are ways to cope when things are especially rough — like now — and ways to remind yourself the world will keep on spinning. PAGE B5



ARTS C1-6

Beautiful Art, Ugly Dispute

Derek Fordjour is battling with a gallery over works discussed before his paintings soared in value. PAGE C1

A Real Nightmare

Producers of dramas like “The Handmaid’s Tale” create dystopian worlds. Now they’re living in one. PAGE C1

OBITUARIES B6-7

Pre-eminent Composer

Krzysztof Penderecki’s work turned up in movies and influenced rock musicians. He was 86. PAGE B6

Overlooked No More

Kate Worley brought a woman’s point of view to the erotic comic Omaha the Cat Dancer in the 1980s. PAGE B6

EDITORIAL, OP-ED A20-21

David Leonhardt PAGE A21



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