



House Oversight Committee
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis
The Urgent Need for a National Plan to Contain the Coronavirus
July 31, 2020
9:00 AM, 2154 Rayburn House Office Building

Purpose

The purpose of the hearing is to examine the urgent need for a national comprehensive plan to address the coronavirus pandemic

Members Present

Chairman Clyburn, Ranking member Scalise, Representatives Maloney, Walorski, Waters, Luetkemeyer, Velazquez, Jordan, Foster, Green, Raskin, Kim

Witnesses

Anthony S. Fauci, M.D., Director, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health

Admiral Brett P. Giroir, M.D., Assistant Secretary for Health, Department of Health and Human Service

Robert R. Redfield, M.D., Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Opening Statements

(0:00) Chairman Clyburn said that so far 150,000 Americans have lost their life as a result of the Coronavirus. It has become abundantly clear that the United States does not have an acceptable plan to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. On the current course, experts predict that another 150,000 Americans could lose their life before the year is over. The goal of today's hearing is simple, to hear from the nation's top public health officials in order to craft a better response to the crisis. The administration has failed on testing even though they were given several warnings that more tests were needed. Many states are conducting less than 30% of the tests they need in order to confront the virus. States have been forced to ration diagnostic supplies and medical equipment. Without rapid testing, it is almost impossible to reopen the country and return to normal. The administration made a clear choice not to implement a national testing and contact tracing plan, because at the time, a majority of cases were in blue states. Public health is not a partisan issues. All members of this committee should be seeking to understand more about this virus as the days go on. If changes are not made, there will be an inevitable tragic outcome.

(6:35) Ranking member Scalise said that it is ridiculous to suggest that there is no COVID-19 plan. The fact that the nation's top public health experts are sitting in front of this committee today is evidence that there is a plan. In fact, if states followed President Trump's effective plan, thousands of residents in nursing homes would still be alive. It is also true that President Trump is responsible for

the creation of Operation Warp Speed. Today because of the work done by public health officials, the United States is conducting over 800,000 tests a day. This is remarkable given the fact that China lied about the virus for so long. It is true, that thanks to the Trump Administration the impact of the coronavirus has been mild. While it is true that Governors are in charge of their state, the federal government has provided a significant amount of support and guidance. Specifically, the decision by the Trump Administration to purchase a rapid test kit for every nursing home in America will save lives.

Testimony

(19:30) Dr. Fauci said that the NIH is the HHS agency leading the research response to COVID-19 and the novel coronavirus that causes the disease, SARS-CoV-2. Within NIH, NIAID is responsible for conducting and supporting research on emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, including COVID-19. NIAID has a longstanding commitment to coronavirus research, including extensive efforts to combat two other serious diseases caused by coronaviruses: SARS and MERS. A safe and effective vaccine for SARS-CoV-2 will be essential to stopping the spread of infection, reducing rates of morbidity and mortality, and preventing future outbreaks. NIAID recently established the COVID-19 Prevention Network (CoVPN) by leveraging four existing NIAID-funded clinical trials networks: the HIV Vaccine Trials Network (HVTN), the HIV Prevention Trials Network (HPTN), the Infectious Diseases Clinical Research Consortium (IDCRC), and the AIDS Clinical Trials Group (ACTG), in partnership with the DOD. As part of a longstanding collaboration, the NIAID Vaccine Research Center worked with the biotechnology company Moderna, Inc., to develop a vaccine candidate using a messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccine platform expressing the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein. The rigorous clinical testing required to establish vaccine safety and efficacy means that it might take some time for a licensed SARS-CoV-2 vaccine to be available to the general public, but there is growing optimism that one or more of these vaccine candidates will prove safe and effective by late 2020 or early 2021. Effective therapeutics for COVID-19 are critically needed to treat patients who have been infected with SARS-CoV-2. The National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS) is leveraging the NCATS Pharmaceutical Collection, a compilation of every drug approved for human use by major regulatory agencies worldwide, and other collections of small molecules and compounds to identify potential SARS-CoV-2 therapeutics for further investigation.

(24:45) Adm. Giroir said testing for the presence of SARS-CoV-2 is an essential component of our nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic; its importance is now further magnified as states continue in their various stages of reopening. The indications for viral testing depend heavily on the stage of the pandemic and the extent of mitigation employed. In general, testing may be indicated for diagnosis of those who are symptomatic or asymptomatic, tracing of those in contact with those who are infected, and surveillance testing of those who are asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic to achieve infection control and/or other public health objectives. Our overall strategic framework for testing is built on the principals outlined in the original Testing Blueprint Opening Up America Again and the Addendum to the Testing Blueprint. Additionally, understanding the importance of increased testing, FDA engaged test developers from the beginning of the pandemic. With a desire to ensure high quality diagnostic testing but also ensure rapid development and dissemination of COVID-19 tests, FDA has provided voluntary EUA templates for laboratories and commercial manufacturers in an effort to streamline the entire process, and works with developers who wish to use alternate approaches to the templates.

Throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, the Administration has encouraged and worked collaboratively with diagnostic test commercial manufacturers, commercial laboratories, public health laboratories, and professional societies to expand capacity and scale for existing nucleic acid testing platforms. Administration efforts have led the United States to develop a multilayered, multifaceted approach to testing that can provide the right test, at the right time, to the right people, with actionable results. As of July 23rd, our nation has performed over 51 million tests. We are now conducting approximately 770,000 tests per day; and this number will continue to increase. To expand capacity and scale without impinging on the traditional health care system like emergency rooms and urgent care clinics, HHS worked closely with FEMA, interagency, and state and local partners to establish Community Based Testing Sites (CBTS). Current efforts are focused on further scaling up testing capabilities to guarantee that each state has the testing supplies and capabilities they need to reopen according to their own individual state plans. The Administration will continue to work hand in hand with governors to support testing plans and rapid response programs.

(30:00) Dr. Redfield said that CDC has developed and continues to update guidance for healthcare professionals and the public to encourage safer practices, improve health outcomes, and save lives. CDC is also working with partners to develop guidance and decision tools to assist state and local officials and other stakeholders in adjusting mitigation strategies. Importantly, CDC is collaborating to prepare the nation's public health system and the private sector to disseminate rapidly a vaccine to the American people when one is available. Abroad, CDC is leveraging investments in global health security, pandemic influenza preparedness and public health infrastructures and capacities built through assets like CDC's Field Epidemiology Training Program and National Public Health Institutes program to support countries in mitigating and containing COVID-19. CDC's experts in over 60 countries work hand-in-hand with host governments in responding to COVID-19. Since the beginning of the outbreak, they have been providing technical assistance, and now programmatic funding, to help countries mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and stop the disease from spreading. The emergence and rapid spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, confirms that an infectious disease threat anywhere is a threat to Americans everywhere, including here at home. As of July 29, 2020, in the U.S., there have been 4,339,997 COVID-19 cases, 148,866 deaths. The latest data can be found on CDC's website: <https://www.cdc.gov/covid-datatracker/index.html>. Congress has addressed the urgent need to respond to this pandemic at home and abroad and has allocated substantial resources for CDC's COVID-19 activities through the statutes mentioned above. This funding supports a federally guided, state managed, and locally implemented response to COVID-19 in the United States. To support health department needs, as of July 23, 2020, CDC has announced or obligated \$12.1 billion in direct awards to jurisdictions across America from the funds provided by Congress, including \$10.25 billion from the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enactment Act. Accurate data are critical as we continue to assess the burden placed on the American healthcare system to inform reopening. CDC is leveraging all available surveillance systems to monitor COVID-19 and protect vulnerable communities, including influenza and viral respiratory disease systems.

Questions and Answers

Round 1

(35:09) Chairman Clyburn asked why the United States is seeing a continued rise in cases. **Dr. Fauci** said that the answer is somewhat complex. Countries in Europe shut down about 90% of their society while the United States shut down a smaller proportion. This allowed the virus to spread faster and grow in total volume. It is also true that there was a patchwork of responses by states which prevented a uniform response. Many people also did not follow social distancing and guidelines to wear a mask.

(40:27) Ranking member Scalise asked if any of the witnesses were sidelined from testifying. **All witnesses** said no. **Ranking member Scalise** asked if Dr. Fauci was involved in the decision to ban flights from China. **Dr. Fauci** said yes. **Ranking member Scalise** asked if that decision saved lives. **Dr. Fauci** said yes. **Ranking member Scalise** asked if Dr. Fauci was involved in the decision to ban flights from Europe. **Dr. Fauci** said yes. **Ranking member Scalise** asked if that decision saved lives. **Dr. Fauci** said yes. **Ranking member Scalise** asked if Dr. Fauci was involved in the plan '15 Days to Stop the Spread'. **Dr. Fauci** said yes. **Ranking member Scalise** asked if that plan saved lives. **Dr. Fauci** said he believes so. **Ranking member Scalise** asked if the decision to extend that plan to 30 days saved lives. **Dr. Fauci** said yes. **Ranking member Scalise** asked if the plan to deliver rapid tests to nursing homes is already in place. **Adm. Giroir** said yes. **Ranking member Scalise** asked if it was a bad policy to force COVID-19 positive patients into nursing homes. **Adm. Giroir** said yes. **Ranking member Scalise** asked if President Trump has a plan to reopen schools. **Dr. Redfield** said yes.

(46:35) Rep. Maloney asked where Dr. Fauci would rate the United States in terms of testing. **Dr. Fauci** said clearly testing capacity has gotten much better. **Rep. Maloney** asked how realistic a vaccine is for COVID-19. **Dr. Fauci** said that it is reality. Furthermore, safety is not being compromised for speed. **Rep. Maloney** asked what steps come after a vaccine is developed. **Dr. Fauci** said doses of a vaccine are being prepared now for distribution. There will be a number of independent bodies who are responsible for distribution.

(53:20) Rep. Walorski asked if it is safe to say that every American will be able to get a vaccine. **Dr. Fauci** said that he believes that over a period of time, every American will be able to get it. It is unlikely that immediate distribution will go to every American. **Rep. Walorski** asked if Operation Warp Speed is maintaining the normal safety steps in vaccine development. **Dr. Fauci** said yes. **Rep. Walorski** asked if the FDA is following safety standards. **Dr. Fauci** said yes. **Rep. Walorski** asked if the administration would approve a vaccine that is not ready for distribution. **Dr. Fauci** said the American public should be assured that the proper steps will be taken. When a vaccine is available it will be safe and effective.

(59:00) Rep. Waters asked when Dr. Redfield first learned that the Trump Administration planned to move nursing home data away from the portal run by HHS. **Dr. Redfield** said that the CDC continues to have access to all of the data. **Rep. Waters** asked when Dr. Redfield was first notified. **Dr. Redfield** said that he was not involved in the decision. **Rep. Waters** asked if Dr. Redfield agreed with this decision. **Dr. Redfield** said yes. **Rep. Waters** asked if Dr. Redfield discussed this with Vice President Pence or Secretary Azar. **Dr. Redfield** said no. **Rep. Waters**

asked why this decision was made. **Dr. Redfield** said that it was done to ensure that Remdesivir could be distributed timely.

(1:04:30) Rep. Luetkemeyer asked if the blanket shuts downs across the country are leading to an increase in substance abuse and suicide. **Dr. Redfield** said that it is important when reopening America to be much more surgical. It is clear that there are consequences for shutting down the economy. **Rep. Luetkemeyer** asked if Dr. Fauci would like to comment on this. **Dr. Fauci** said that there is a clear need to reopen school due to downstream unintended consequences. **Rep. Luetkemeyer** asked what should be done to address this. **Dr. Redfield** said that the nation needs to follow public health guidelines. More facemasks, social distancing and hand hygiene.

(1:10:40) Rep. Velazquez asked if a 5 day testing delay is too long for contact tracing, is it fair to say that a 16 day delay is absurd. **Dr. Fauci** said that that delay would interfere with effective contact tracing. **Adm. Giroir** said that at this point half of the tests are point of care tests. It is true that there are regions of the country that do not have appropriate tests. **Rep. Velazquez** asked if the CDC has comprehensive information on the wait time for test results in all 50 states. **Adm. Giroir** said yes. **Rep. Velazquez** asked what role testing and contact tracing plays in controlling the virus. **Dr. Fauci** said that it is essential but it is not everything. Wearing masks and social distancing is very important.

(1:16:30) Rep. Jordan asked if protests increase the spread of the virus. **Dr. Fauci** said crowding without masks increases the spread of the virus. **Rep. Jordan** should protests be limited. **Dr. Fauci** said he does not think that is relevant to this hearing.

(1:22:30) Rep. Foster asked if the public needs to be reminded of the long line of R&D that has led to the development of a vaccine. **Dr. Fauci** said yes. The generosity of Congress has also supported biomedical research. **Rep. Foster** asked what scientific investments should be made now. **Dr. Fauci** said that he hopes there are no cuts to scientific research.

(1:30:05) Rep. Green asked about t-cell immunity. **Dr. Fauci** said there are two limbs of the immune response, one is an antibody, the other is the cellular immune response of t-cells. T-cells are very important in protection against a virus. Much more work needs to be done to understand this type of response.

(1:37:30) Rep. Raskin asked when the US will reach 5 million cases. **Dr. Redfield** said that the virus is not predictable. What happens next is dependent upon the American public following public health guidelines. **Rep. Raskin** asked if children are almost immune to the disease. **Dr. Fauci** said children get infected. **Rep. Raskin** asked if COVID-19 will magically disappear. **Dr. Fauci** said no. **Rep. Raskin** asked if COVID-19 is a hoax. **Dr. Fauci** said no. **Rep. Raskin** asked if people should take hydroxychloroquine as a treatment for COVID-19. **Dr. Fauci** said no.

(1:45:00) Rep. Kim asked if the federal government is doing everything possible to respond to COVID-19. **Dr. Redfield** said there is a comprehensive response. There has been an under investment in the core capabilities of public health. **Adm. Giroir** said within the federal governments capabilities, yes. **Dr. Fauci** said the NIH is doing everything that it can. **Rep. Kim**

asked if it is possible to achieve a benchmark that all COVID-19 tests return results within 48 hours. **Adm. Giroir** said that it is not possible right now, but it may be in the future.

Round 2

(2:03:00) Chairman Clyburn asked if Dr. Fauci stands by his statement that some states did not do a good job in reopening. **Dr. Fauci** said yes. The reemergence of cases was caused by a number of factors. This includes poor reopening strategies.

(2:10:20) Ranking member Scalise asked if Dr. Redfield is aware of data suggesting that child abuse is increasing. **Dr. Redfield** said yes. Schools are responsible reporting these cases. **Ranking member Scalise** asked what website individuals should go to if they want to be a part of a COVID-19 vaccine trial. **Dr. Fauci** said [Coronaviruspreventionnetwork.org](https://www.coronaviruspreventionnetwork.org). **Ranking member Scalise** asked if Operation Warp speed has compromised safety. **Dr. Fauci** said no.

(2:16:50) Rep. Waters asked if children are almost immune to COVID-19. **Dr. Fauci** said that children get infected with COVID-19.

(2:24:00) Rep. Jordan asked if data is being collected on police officers exposure to COVID-19. **Dr. Fauci** said that he does not track specific exposure. That may be more applicable to the CDC. **Dr. Redfield** said the CDC monitors first responders in some cities.

(2:29:45) Rep. Maloney asked what the task force is doing in regard to safe guarding elections. **Dr. Fauci** said that he will touch base with Rep. Maloney off line about this topic. **Dr. Redfield** said that the CDC is working on guidance.

(2:34:40) Rep. Luetkemeyer asked if there is a better way to collect data on deaths. **Dr. Redfield** said death reporting is ultimately up to how the physician chooses to define it. These causes of death are then reviewed through the proper channels. **Rep. Luetkemeyer** asked if hydroxychloroquine can work in conjunction with zinc. **Dr. Fauci** said that the study being cited had no control group and multiple confounding factors. The study was not a good one and does not provide good evidence for use of hydroxychloroquine.

(2:40:30) Rep. Kim asked if the federal response has been the gold standard of responses. **Dr. Fauci** said that within the context of what is available, everything is being done to control the virus. **Rep. Kim** asked if the Defense Production Act should be utilized more. **Dr. Fauci** said that this is not his area to comment. **Rep. Kim** asked if there should be more federally run test sites. **Dr. Fauci** said that this is not his area to comment. **Rep. Kim** asked if more rapid antigen tests and paper strip tests should be used. **Dr. Fauci** said anything that scales up testing capability should be used.

(2:46:20) Rep. Walorski asked if China covered up the origins of the coronavirus. **Dr. Fauci** said it would have been nice to have information sooner. **Rep. Walorski** asked if China is a threat to American vaccine research. **Dr. Fauci** said no.

(2:50:15) Rep. Foster asked what can be done to make the public confident that the right decisions are being made. **Dr. Fauci** said that transparency is very important when it comes to Operation Warp Speed.

(2:56:30) Rep. Velazquez asked if the inability to control the virus is tied to delays in testing and contact tracing. **Dr. Fauci** said that delays in testing and contact tracing is one reason why the virus has continued to spread. **Rep. Velazquez** asked if efficient testing in South Korea helped them control the virus. **Dr. Fauci** said there are a number of factors that contributed to their success. Mainly was their ability to shut down a larger portion of their economy. **Rep. Velazquez** asked if the increase number of cases in the US is a result of more testing. **Dr. Fauci** said no, these is a true increase in the virus.

(3:03:10) Rep. Raskin asked if Dr. Fauci was aware of the role that Jared Kushner has played in developing the administration's approach to diagnostic testing. **Dr. Fauci** said he has no knowledge of that because he is not involved in those discussions.