

DONALD TRUMP JUST KILLED A MAN. NOW HE WANTS TO KILL A MILLION AMERICANS.

It wasn't in the middle of Fifth Avenue, but yesterday, Donald Trump killed a man. The man's wife survived, and did not have good things to say about him. Here's NBC News on the death:

An Arizona man has died after ingesting chloroquine phosphate – believing it would protect him from becoming infected with the coronavirus. The man's wife also ingested the substance and is under critical care.

The toxic ingredient they consumed was not the medication form of chloroquine, used to treat malaria in humans. Instead, it was an ingredient listed on a parasite treatment for fish.

The man's wife told NBC News she'd watched televised briefings during which President Trump talked about the potential benefits of chloroquine.

The wife talked further with NBC:

Woman in ICU: "Trump kept saying it was basically pretty much a cure."

NBC: "What would be your message to the American public?"

Woman: "Oh my God. Don't take anything. Don't believe anything. Don't believe anything that the President says & his people...call your doctor."

<https://t.co/C8EiTQQ3r1>
pic.twitter.com/UA0XBNs54t

– Vaughn Hillyard (@VaughnHillyard)

March 24, 2020

This death and near-death drive home the danger of Trump's daily "press briefings" which he is now using as a replacement for his political rallies. His touting of chloroquine on Friday has now killed someone in the US. Recall that Nigeria had to put out a warning Friday as well, as NBC in the same article reported that there were at least two known chloroquine poisonings there right after Trump's presser. (Chloroquine is more widely available in areas where malaria is endemic.)

But the chloroquine story is far from the biggest problem with Trump's daily gaslighter. It's hard to believe that we are only at one week since the publishing of the epidemiological model that really seemed to get the attention of even those who felt COVID-19 fears were overblown. Here's a summary of the US findings of this modeling, as written by University of Minnesota researchers:

To understand how mitigation or suppression would play out, the Imperial College team, led by Neil Ferguson, OBE, ran a model based on three scenarios. In the first, US officials do nothing to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, schools and businesses are kept open, and the virus is allowed to move through the population.

This would result in 81% of the US population, about 264 million people, contracting the disease. Of those, 2.2 million would die, including 4% to 8% of Americans over age 70. More important, by the second week in April, the demand for critical care beds would be 30 times greater than supply.

If mitigation practices are put in place, including a combination of case isolation, home quarantine, and social distancing of those most at risk (over age 70), the peak critical care demand would reduce by 60%, and there would be half the number of deaths. But this

scenario still produces an eightfold demand on critical care beds above surge capacity.

In order to suppress the pandemic to an R_0 of below 1, a country would need to combine case isolation, social distancing of the entire population, and either household quarantine or school and university closure, the authors found. These measures “are assumed to be in place for a 5-month duration,” they wrote.

So, with no social distancing, this model predicts over 2 million deaths in the US. Even with fairly strong mitigation practices, there are still over a million deaths and we will need more than 8 times the number of ICU beds we have now. Sadly, from what I can tell, we are somewhere around that level of mitigation with perhaps a few states going a bit more stringent. The UK just yesterday went to social distancing of the entire population, a move that Trump has resisted. Note also that even should the US move to full distancing, the model suggests a need to do so for five months. I’ve seen some pushback against this model, but I would argue instead that if anything, it is an underestimate because I fully expect compliance to fall far short of the assumptions in the model. I’ve seen suggestions that lack of compliance with early distancing orders drove much of the rapid outbreak in Italy.

It appears that the World Health Organization agrees that the US is far short of the level of distancing needed to quash the outbreak here.

From Reuters:

The World Health Organization said on Tuesday it was seeing a “very large acceleration” in coronavirus infections in the United States which had the potential of becoming the new epicentre. Asked whether the United States could become the new epicentre, WHO

spokeswoman Margaret Harris told reporters: "We are now seeing a very large acceleration in cases in the U.S. So it does have that potential."

I can only imagine Trump's presser on the day we become "number one" for the virus.

So even though there was a push for distancing as the Imperial College model was released, we're already hearing that Trump has had enough. To be fair, Trump and his team were only talking about a 15 day process from the start, but any fool can see that we are still moving in the wrong direction in terms of new cases being discovered to even contemplate letting up on social distancing.

David Farenthold suggests one reason Trump wants to ease restrictions in the Washington Post:

President Trump's private business has shut down six of its top seven revenue-producing clubs and hotels because of restrictions meant to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus, potentially depriving Trump's company of millions of dollars in revenue.

Those closures come as Trump is considering easing restrictions on movement sooner than federal public health experts recommend, in the name of reducing the virus's economic damage.

In a tweet late Sunday, Trump said the measures could be lifted as soon as March 30. "WE CANNOT LET THE CURE BE WORSE THAN THE PROBLEM ITSELF," he wrote on Twitter.

Heaven forbid that Trump should lose a few dollars to save some lives. Sadly, though, Trump isn't the only one spouting the bullshit. In fact, it's pretty clear that Trump's tweet about the cure being worse than the problem came right after he heard that phrase on Fox News. And to

soften the territory for easing distancing, Fox yesterday had the Lieutenant Governor of Texas on to suggest that old grandparents like me need to be prepared to sacrifice our lives so that the economy can get going again. Of course, that's complete bullshit, as once distancing is reduced anywhere, the effects will be spread over a huge area and across age groups. Anyway, here it is:

Texas Lt Gov Dan Patrick went on national tv & argued elderly people should die for the health of the market. Capitalism is a system that prioritizes profits over people. This fight is literally a matter of life or death. Battle lines are being drawn. Which side are you on? pic.twitter.com/GI3LQZG7uo

– Chris Brooks (@chactivist) March 24, 2020

So that's where we find ourselves today. We are perched at a spot where WHO is convinced that the US will be the epicenter of the outbreak within a few days. Instead of moving ahead with the full nationwide lockdown that will be needed actually flatten the curve, Fox News is helping Donald Trump to prepare the public for losing grandma and grandpa so that Trump properties can generate income again and Trump can hold his ego-stoking rallies. If distancing is reduced in a week, as Trump is wanting, the death toll in the US will reach catastrophic levels somewhere between the 1 and 2 million mark Imperial College calculated.

What is likely to interrupt Trump's desire here, though, is the rate at which New York hospitals are filling. It sounds like they will be overwhelmed as soon as this weekend, so I'd like to think that there will be too much pressure to increase rather than decrease distancing once that reality strikes.

With Trump, though, there are no guarantees and reality often gets left in the dust.