

LIVE AND LET DIE: THE DATA MANIPULATION BEGINS

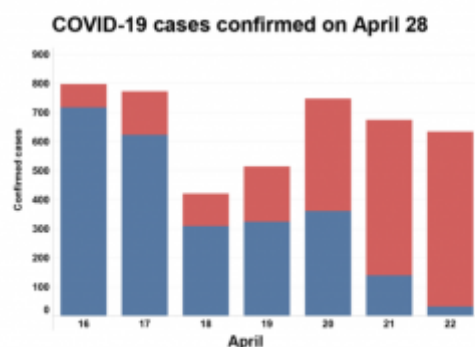
From the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, various entities in the United States were always engaged in the kind of dishonesty we accuse China of to hide the extent of the virus. Trump tried to keep a cruise ship off shore so it wouldn't count against "his" numbers. States everywhere didn't reveal the crises in nursing homes by hiding where they were occurring. Other states refused to track known COVID-19 deaths because they didn't occur in a hospital.

But now that Trump has fully committed to reopening the economy before the shut down has its desired effect, he and allied governors are engaged in more aggressive data manipulation to hide the stupidity of what they're doing.

Georgia had long manipulated its data, by rigging cut-off numbers to make it look like the only outbreaks were around Atlanta and in the Black Belt outbreak around Albany. But as Brian Kemp moved to reopen Georgia in the stupidest possible way, the state shifted its reporting to show confirmed cases.

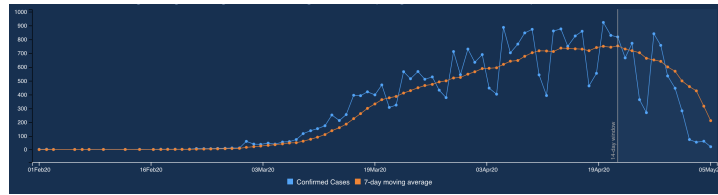
How case numbers change

COVID-19 cases reported by the Department of Public Health have begun shifting over time because of a change in how the agency records cases. Georgia now dates a confirmed case by the day symptoms began or a test was taken. But it can take days or even a week or more for the final test result to be reported. That means the most recent days will show artificially low case numbers until they are updated. Here's how case numbers have shifted for one week this month.



That means it can always show a trend of

declining cases that would match White House guidelines for reopening, rather than the plateau the state actually has, because the trend reflects known cases that aren't counted yet.



Interestingly, Georgia may also be hiding the extent to which this virus has moved beyond predominantly African-American areas, thereby hiding that Kemp's stupid decision is actually killing white people, too.

Meanwhile, Arizona's Doug Ducey, who already lost the state's experienced emergency manager, just ordered some epidemiologists at the state's public universities to stop work on a COVID model that used the states internal data, because their model showed the only way to avoid exponential growth would be to stay closed until the end of May.

The universities' model had shown that reopening at the end of May was the only scenario that didn't dramatically increase cases.

In late April, Tim Lant, a mathematical epidemiologist at ASU, said the model showed five different scenarios for how the disease could progress in Arizona, depending on how social distancing efforts were relaxed.

The slowest curve, based on if the state reopens at the end of May, is "the only one that doesn't put me immediately back on an exponential growth curve," Lant said in April. That's because transmission rates would be lowest at that time, he said.

"I can say, scientifically, no, it's not safe to reopen unless you're planning

on, you know, shutting down again after a couple of weeks, and we can help figure out what the appropriate amount of time is to stay open before we shut down," he said.

Bailey wrote that health department leadership asked the team to "pause" all work on projections and modeling. The department would also be ending access to special data sets the modeling team had been using for their efforts, Bailey said.

Finally, yesterday the White House tweeted out the model that it has embraced in lieu of models by epidemiologists.

The image is a screenshot of a tweet from the official Twitter account of the White House Center for Economic Analysis (@WhiteHouseCEA). The tweet text reads: "To better visualize observed data, we also continually update a curve-fitting exercise to summarize COVID-19's observed trajectory. Particularly with irregular data, curve fitting can improve data visualization. As shown, IHME's mortality curves have matched the data fairly well." Below the text is a line graph titled "United States Daily COVID-19 Deaths: Actual Data, IHME/UW Model Projections, & Cubic Fit." The graph shows daily deaths from February 2020 to August 2020. It includes actual data (black line), IHME projections from March 27, April 5, and May 4 (colored lines), and a cubic fit (red dashed line). A secondary line shows cumulative projected deaths, with the latest IHME projection at 134,475. The tweet is timestamped "10:35am · 5 May 2020 · Twitter Web App".

United States Daily COVID-19 Deaths: Actual Data, IHME/UW Model Projections, & Cubic Fit.
Updated today (5/5/20), data through yesterday (5/4/20).
Legend: IHME Projection (3/27), IHME Projection (4/5), IHME Projection (5/4), Cubic Fit, Actual.
Cumulative Projected Deaths
Latest IHME Projection: 134,475
Sources: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), New York Times, CEA calculations.

This release is an effort to rebut WaPo reporting on how this model – by the guy behind

the Dow 36,000 book, Kevin Hassett – continues to be pulled out of Hassett’s ass whenever Trump needs to be told something he wants to hear.

The epidemiological models under review in the White House Situation Room in late March were bracing. In a best-case scenario, they showed the novel coronavirus was likely to kill between 100,000 and 240,000 Americans. President Trump was apprehensive about so much carnage on his watch, yet also impatient to reopen the economy – and he wanted data to justify doing so.

So the White House considered its own analysis. A small team led by Kevin Hassett – a former chairman of Trump’s Council of Economic Advisers with no background in infectious diseases – quietly built an econometric model to guide response operations.

Many White House aides interpreted the analysis as predicting that the daily death count would peak in mid-April before dropping off substantially, and that there would be far fewer fatalities than initially foreseen, according to six people briefed on it.

Although Hassett denied that he ever projected the number of dead, other senior administration officials said his presentations characterized the count as lower than commonly forecast – and that it was embraced inside the West Wing by the president’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and other powerful aides helping to oversee the government’s pandemic response. It affirmed their own skepticism about the severity of the virus and bolstered their case to shift the focus to the economy, which they firmly believed would determine whether Trump wins a second term.

[snip]

By the end of April – with more Americans dying in the month than in all of the Vietnam War – it became clear that the Hasset model was too good to be true. “A catastrophic miss,” as a former senior administration official briefed on the data described it. The president’s course would not be changed, however. Trump and Kushner began to declare a great victory against the virus, while urging America to start reopening businesses and schools.

The effort to prove the value of the epidemiological models done by people who are considered frauds within their actual profession of economics comes as the CDC’s own model showing an increase to 3,000 deaths a day was leaked. And the Council of Economic Advisors released this line-drawing exercise comes as the US has blown by Hasset’s original estimate of 60,000, one also adopted publicly by Trump.

Understand: This is not just an attempt to lie about the sanity of the decision to reopen the economy even as COVID cases continue to grow. It’s an attempt to lie about the stupidity of the economic decisions Trump made, too.

While other countries have had more cases per population, that has happened with economic relief focused on actual human beings rather than cruise lines and luxury hotels. Here, much of Trump’s economic policies have been just another attempt to loot the economy for his friends and campaign donors. That has made the economic impact of all this in the United States worse than it is in other countries, and it will only continue to get worse.

Some places that reopen prematurely will be forced to shut down again. And as more people are out spreading the virus, more bottle necks in critical infrastructure will be exposed.

Trump has pursued the worst of all policy options. After his initial dawdling let the

virus spread in some cities, he endorsed shutting down the economy in an attempt to mitigate the pandemic. That had a predictable catastrophic impact on the economy (and more unemployment numbers will be out today). But because Republicans refused to adopt policies that would actually cushion that crash, the impact was much worse than it might have been.

Now, after taking the full hit of shutting down, Republicans are insisting on reopening – bolstered by their fraudulent charts and graphs – before the shutdown has any lasting epidemiological value. We'll have the medical impact of a herd immunity approach, with the economic impact of a badly executed mitigation strategy. The worst of both options.

And to pretend that this is not all knowable and known now, Trump has swapped briefings by medical experts for photo ops set to campaign music, to the apt Live and Let Die.

Update: Meanwhile, Florida just removed details of possible positive COVID cases in January and February from a public website.