

## *Public Health Experts Reject President's View of Fading Pandemic*

Contrary to President Trump's recent comments, specialists say, recent increases are real, and the virus is like a "forest fire" that will burn as long as there is fuel

The New York Times

**James Gorman** June 21, 2020

Public health experts warned on Sunday that the coronavirus pandemic is not going away anytime soon. They directly contradicted President Trump's promise that [the disease that has infected more than two million Americans would "fade away"](#) and his remarks that disparaged the value of evidence from coronavirus tests. A day after Mr. Trump told a largely maskless audience at an indoor rally in Tulsa, Okla., that he had asked to "slow down the testing" because it inevitably increased the number of confirmed coronavirus cases, infectious disease experts countered that the latest rise of infections in the United States is real, the country's response to the pandemic is not working and rallies like the president's risk becoming major spreading events.

Dr. Tom Inglesby, the director of the Center for Health Security at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said on "Fox News Sunday" that the spikes in confirmed cases in many states in the South and West [are not simply a result of increased testing](#). Data show that the percentage of tests that are positive is increasing, he said, and in some states is accompanied by increased hospitalizations. In states like Arizona, Texas, North and South Carolina and Florida, he said, "That's a real rise."

On "Face the Nation" on CBS, [Dr. Scott Gottlieb, the former commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration](#), said, "[We're seeing the positivity rates go up](#). That's a clear indication there is now community spread underway, and this isn't just a function of testing.

And Dr. Michael T. Osterholm, the director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, repeated his call for a national plan to respond to the pandemic, calling the existing patchwork of state-by-state policy "disjointed." In an interview [on NBC's "Meet the Press," Dr. Osterholm noted, "We're at 70 percent of the number of cases today](#) that we were at the very height of the pandemic cases in early April."

He said that a wave and trough pattern of the virus rising and falling like influenza was one of the scenarios described in an [April report that he helped to write](#). Now, however,

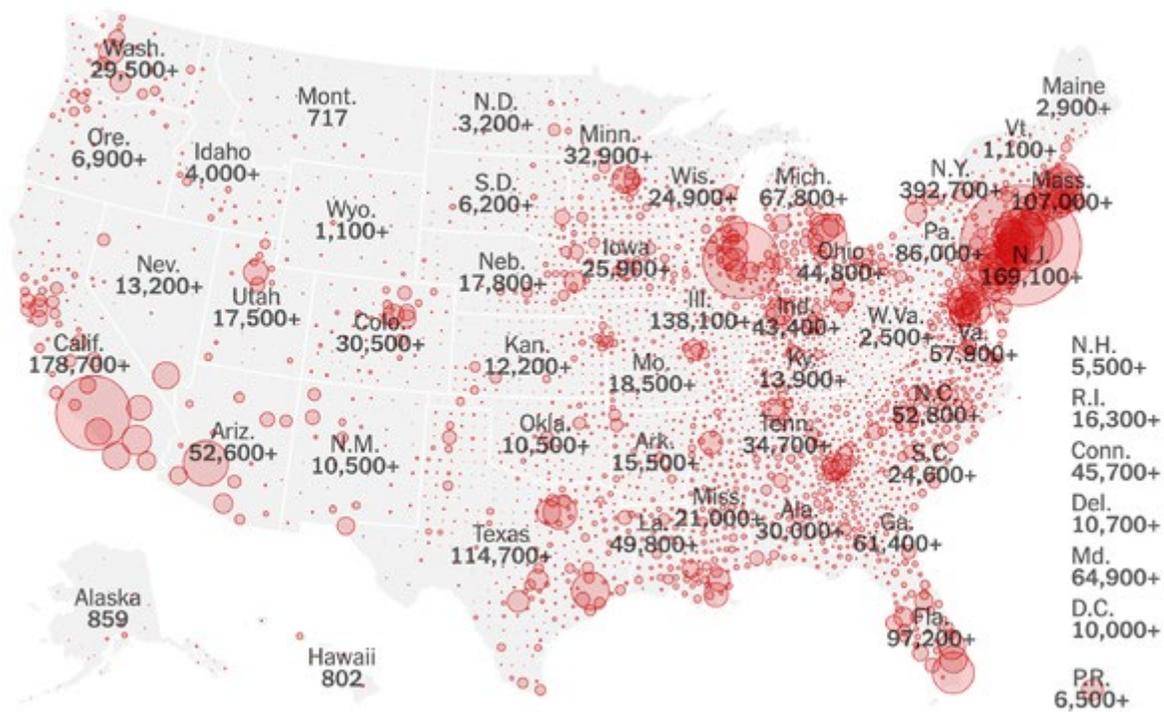
the data on how the virus spreads do not support that pattern. “I don’t see this slowing down for the summer or into the fall,” he said. “I think this is more like a forest fire,” he said. “I think that wherever there’s wood to burn, this fire is going to burn it.”

The experts mainly urged greater use of proven interventions to slow the spread of disease, like hand-washing, mask-wearing and maintaining social distancing when out in public. When asked whether states should consider reversing the levels of reopening, Dr. Inglesby did not recommend a return to lockdown. “Each state has a different story,” he said, adding that “leaders should be encouraging people to use the tools we know work.”

He said indoor gatherings like the president’s rally were a concern, as were outdoor demonstrations like the mass protests against police brutality, but to a lesser degree. “We know from what we’ve seen so far in the last few months,” said Dr. Inglesby, “that outdoors is less of a risk than indoors and that mask use has a major impact.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, he noted, has advised that “the highest-risk gatherings are those that are large indoors, where people can’t stay apart from each other more than six feet, and where people travel from out of town. And this rally met all of those criteria.”

He and other public health specialists expressed concerns about the potential for a significant spreading event. Oklahoma has a rapidly rising infection rate, although its absolute numbers are still small. It had a record number of cases — 450 — and the last five days have been the highest the state has recorded. Deaths in that state have been in the single digits since the end of April.



## Coronavirus in the U.S.: Latest Map and Case Count

A detailed county map shows the extent of the coronavirus outbreak, with tables of the number of cases by county.

U.S. cases are up 15 percent in the past two weeks, with at least 2.2 million confirmed infections since the start of the pandemic and cases on the rise in 22 states.