10 Of Trump's Most Damaging Coronavirus Lies

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By Ryan
Grenoble

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President Donald Trump has a well-established reputation for lying, having told upwards of 16,240 falsehoods in his first three years in office. So it's predictable that, when confronted with a coronavirus pandemic Trump spent weeks downplaying instead of preparing the country to face, the lies would flow.

Words have consequences, and the president's torrent of prior falsehoods has doubtless caused damage. Much of it, however, is hard to quantify. Did his lies about Hurricane Maria aid to Puerto Rico affect how much his government actually sent to the island? Did his groundless claim that windmills cause cancer affect the renewable energy industry? Did his Sharpie-altered hurricane forecast cause Alabama residents to flee into danger?

But the damage Trump is causing with his coronavirus mistruths is more immediate. In some cases, Trump's falsehoods are contributing to people's deaths.

Below, 10 of Trump's most damaging coronavirus false claims:

1. "Anybody that needs a test gets a test."

> Just reported that the United States has done far more "testing" than any other nation, by far! In fact, over an eight day span, the United States now does more testing than what South Korea (which has been a very successful tester) does over an eight week span. Great job!
>
> — Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) March 25, 2020

Trump has regularly and grossly overstated U.S. coronavirus testing capacity. "Anybody that needs a test gets a test," Trump said on March 6. "We — they're there. They have the tests. And the tests are beautiful. Anybody that needs a test gets a test."

By March 8, two days later, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had conducted around 1,700 tests. The test shortage persists to this day.

Why is this a problem?

It's impossible to know where the coronavirus has spread if we're incapable of testing people who think they have symptoms. And if we don't know where it's spreading and how fast, we can't mobilize scarce resources like ventilators and personal protective equipment

in advance of major outbreaks. That's how you end up with nurses using trash bags as PPE, and dying because of it.

A lack of test kits — and pretending it's not a problem — puts everyone at risk.

2. "Within a couple of days [the number of positive cases is] going to be down to close to zero."

As he pivoted from outright dismissal of a problem he said would "miraculously" go away and began acknowledging the coronavirus was something to deal with, Trump still downplayed the threat.

"When you have 15 [positive] people, and the 15 within a couple of days is going to be down to close to zero," he said on Feb. 26. "That's a pretty good job we've done."

Why is this a problem?

Conveying the truth about the pandemic's threat may have emphasized the importance of early social distancing and stay-at-home orders that experts say are critical in slowing the spread of the coronavirus.

3. "This is their new hoax."

At a Feb. 28 rally in South Carolina, Trump accused Democrats of politicizing his lackluster coronavirus response, which he proclaimed was "one of the great jobs."

"This is their new hoax," he said. "We have 15 [coronavirus-positive] people in this massive country and because of the fact that we went early, we went early, we could have had a lot more than that."

Why is this a problem?

The same day the CDC urged the country take "aggressive measures" to "prevent widespread transmission of the virus," the president undercut the message with a much larger megaphone.

Trump's politicizing of the problem likely led to many of his supporters failing to see the virus as a serious public health issue, and choosing not to take steps to prevent the spread.

4. Repeated selective amnesia about having fired the experts whose job was to foresee exactly this situation.

Trump dismantled the National Security Council's pandemic response unit in 2018, a subject he claims to know nothing about now that the U.S. is being buffeted by the coronavirus pandemic.

Asked about the decision by PBS reporter Yamiche Alcindor earlier this month, Trump said he didn't "know anything about" it, called the question "nasty" and moved on. (For the record, he did know, and here's video to prove it.)

It gets worse: in July, the Trump administration eliminated a Beijing-based American public health official whose role was to help detect disease outbreaks in China.

Why is this a problem?

The pandemic response unit certainly would have come in handy in responding to the coronavirus.

"It would be nice if the office was still there," Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, told Congress.

Trump's choice to dismantle that unit, and then to deny knowledge, shows he wasn't expecting a pandemic and wasn't prepared to take the necessary actions to deal with one, even though experts in Trump's own government had conducted exercises showing a pandemic could cause death, disability and job loss that would harm the economy.

5. "Nobody could have ever seen something like this coming."

On March 25, Trump framed the pandemic as a completely unexpected problem nobody could have prepared for. He's done this many, many times.

Why is this a problem?

Many experts did see this coming.

"The problem is he's using that kind of information to justify, in some way or explain, the incompetencies of what this administration has been doing, or not doing, in preparation for something that we knew was coming," Dr. Irwin Redlener, director Of Columbia University's National Center For Disaster Preparedness, told MSNBC on Thursday.

"The president did not cause this virus to develop," he conceded. But Trump's response to the pandemic, including claiming it was unforeseeable even as it ravaged Italy, is "leading the country in the wrong direction with misinformation that has been extremely destructive to our efforts to combat this calamity that we have on our doorstep."

6. Comparing COVID-19 to the flu.

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"So last year 37,000 Americans died from the common Flu," Trump tweeted on Monday. "It averages between 27,000 and 70,000 per year. Nothing is shut down, life & the economy go on. At this moment there are 546 confirmed cases of CoronaVirus, with 22 deaths. Think about that!"

Trump has repeatedly sought to diminish the severity of COVID-19 and deflect blame for his administration's failures by comparing it to something we're all familiar with.

Why is this a problem?

For starters, it's false. According to Fauci, COVID-19 "is 10 times more lethal than the seasonal flu."

Worse, Trump has begun using this false equivalence to advocate for sending Americans back to work long before experts believe that's wise.

7. We're "very close" to a vaccine.

The president has frequently overstated the speed of vaccine development, telling the public a remedy could be available in as little as "two months" and insisting it was "very close" in his first press conference on the matter.

Why is this a problem?

His March 2 statement was immediately corrected by Fauci: "Let me make sure you get the ... information," he said, noting a vaccine could be ready "at the earliest [in] a year to a year-and-a-half, no matter how fast you go," something Fauci emphasized he'd told the president prior to that press conference.

Once again, Trump ignored facts and put forth a rosier, and false, alternative that downplays the severity of the reality at hand, potentially prompting some to take actions that could spread the disease. Instead of offering reassuring clarity, the president muddled the message and caused confusion.

8. Hyping a speculative, untested drug as a coronavirus treatment.

At a news conference last week, Trump repeatedly touted an anti-malarial drug called chloroquine as a potential coronavirus treatment, going so far as to suggest the Food and Drug Administration had approved it for COVID-19.

"It's shown very encouraging — very, very encouraging early results. And we're going to be able to make that drug available almost immediately. And that's where the FDA has been so great. They — they've gone through the approval process; it's been approved. And they did it — they took it down from many, many months to immediate. So we're going to be able to make that drug available by prescription or states," Trump said.

Why is this a problem?

The FDA hasn't approved chloroquine for use against COVID-19, a point the agency was forced to clarify in a statement after Trump's briefing. Experts said the drug can be fatal if misused and there's no evidence beyond anecdotal stories that it works against COVID-19.

Nevertheless, Trump's statement prompted hoarding of the drug around the world, including in the U.S., where unscrupulous doctors began fraudulently writing themselves prescriptions for it.

An Arizona man died and his wife was hospitalized in critical condition after the two heard Trump tout the supposedly game-changing drug on TV. They drank an aquarium cleaning product that contained the drug because they thought it would help them avoid contracting the disease.

9. "The cure can't be worse than the problem."

Trump has been rolling out variants of this line all week, using it to argue that the economic damage caused by COVID-19 is worse than the disease itself, and, therefore, we should cease social distancing and return to work by Easter.

Why is this a problem?

The economic devastation being caused with much of the country shut down by coronavirus restrictions is apparent — nobody can argue with that. But ending social distancing efforts prematurely will stretch this crisis out longer, put far greater strain on our health care system (leading to more deaths), and make the coronavirus harder to control in the long run, potentially causing even more economic disruption.

10. Bonus accidental truth: "I don't take any responsibility at all."

At a March 13 press conference, Trump declared a national emergency and, when asked about repeated delays in producing and distributing coronavirus test kits, completely washed his hands of the mess.

"I don't take responsibility at all," he told reporters. While this isn't exactly a lie, it warrants a mention nonetheless.

Why is this a problem?

He boasted that he had the foresight to "close up our country to China," but Trump failed to take more drastic action that may have slowed the spread of coronavirus in the U.S., potentially saving thousands of lives. His slow response came despite warnings from experts and U.S. intelligence agencies, who warned him in February that coronavirus could be a global danger, according to The Washington Post.

Trump's rosy assessment of the pandemic's threat to the U.S. may have been colored by assurances from Chinese President Xi Jinping, who Trump repeatedly praised for handling the outbreak in China. Once Trump's misjudgment became clear, he turned to another standby — racism — and began calling the coronavirus the "China virus." This week, following a surge of hate crimes against Asian Americans, Trump said he might stop using the term.

The president's "don't take responsibility" comment was a sharp departure from the Trump of 2013, who tweeted: "Leadership: Whatever happens, you're responsible. If it doesn't happen, you're responsible."

> Leadership: Whatever happens, you're responsible. If it doesn't happen, you're responsible.
>
> — Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) November 8, 2013

A HuffPost Guide To Coronavirus