

Three months in: A timeline of how COVID-19 has unfolded in the US

Here's a look back on how the coronavirus outbreak began, and how it has unfolded in the U.S. so far.

Grace Hauck, Karl Gelles, Veronica Bravo, and Mitchell Thorson, USA TODAY

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January 22, 2020



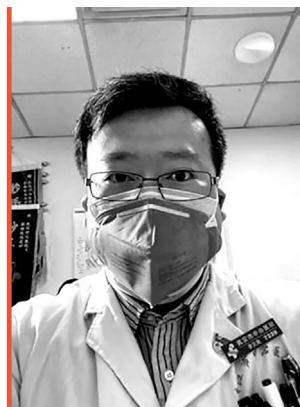
It was three months ago Tuesday that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced the first confirmed coronavirus case in the U.S.

In the weeks since, health officials have confirmed hundreds of thousands of COVID-19 cases across the nation and tens of thousands of deaths. Millions more Americans have lost their jobs, and tens of millions are living under stay-at-home orders.

As we continue to learn more about the virus and grapple with the affects of the pandemic, here's a look back on how the outbreak began, and how it has unfolded in the U.S. so far.

Before arriving in the US, the virus spread through China and abroad

- **November:** Various reports suggest that the first case arose in Wuhan, China, toward the end of 2019, though some reports point to cases in early December.
- **Dec. 30:** Li Wenliang, an ophthalmologist at Wuhan Central Hospital, alerted physicians about the emergence of a SARS-like illness. He was later detained by police on charges of spreading rumors.
- **Dec. 31:** The Wuhan Municipal Health Commission reported 27 cases of viral pneumonia.
- **Jan. 1:** Wuhan officials closed down the Huanan seafood market, which is thought to be linked to the first group of cases.
- **Jan. 7:** Chinese President Xi Jinping recognized the viral pneumonia internally during a meeting of China's highest council.
- **Jan. 11:** China reported its first death.
- **Jan. 13:** Thailand confirmed the first known case of the coronavirus outside China.
- **Jan. 14:** Top Chinese officials determined they likely were facing a pandemic, according to internal documents obtained by The Associated Press. In the following days, Wuhan hosted a mass banquet for tens of thousands of people.



Jan.17: Airport screenings

The CDC began implementing public health entry screening at San Francisco (SFO), New York (JFK) and Los Angeles (LAX) airports. The CDC would later add screening at two more airports Atlanta (ATL) and Chicago (ORD).

Jan. 21: First case confirmed in US

The CDC confirmed the first U.S. case of a new coronavirus that had killed six people so far in China. The Washington state man in his 30s returned from Wuhan a week earlier, on Jan. 15. Nancy Messonnier, director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, called the news "concerning," particularly in light of reports that the virus has begun to spread from person to person.

The U.S. reports its **first** case:



Jan. 23: Wuhan locks down

Chinese authorities locked down at least three cities with a combined population of more than 18 million in an unprecedented effort to contain the virus during the busy Lunar New Year travel period.





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Meanwhile, the World Health Organization declined to categorize the coronavirus as a global health emergency, saying there is no evidence of human-to-human infection outside China.

Jan. 24: First cases in Europe

French health officials confirmed the first three cases in Europe.

In China, the Lunar New Year holiday began. Public transportation halted for roughly 36 million people in 13 cities in central China, including Wuhan. Authorities in Wuhan said they were constructing a 1,000-bed hospital like one built in Beijing during a SARS outbreak, a similar respiratory virus.

President Donald Trump thanked China on Twitter for its efforts to contain the disease. "China has been working very hard to contain the Coronavirus. The United States greatly appreciates their efforts and transparency. It will all work out well. In particular, on behalf of the American People, I want to thank President Xi!" he said in a post.

out well. In particular, on behalf of the American People, I want to thank President Xi!

12.7K

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Meanwhile, Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., urged the Trump administration to declare a public health emergency and sent a letter to the CDC requesting information about the agency's plan to combat the virus. "We have to get serious about the threat of coronavirus coming from China," Scott said in a press release.

Jan. 24: Americans told 'risk is low'

Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, comments on the risk to Americans. "We don't want the American public to be worried about this because their risk is low," [Fauci said](#). "On the other hand, we are taking this very seriously and are dealing very closely with Chinese authorities."



Many health professionals argued that the flu poses a greater threat than the coronavirus.

Jan. 28: 'Monitoring' since December

Alex Azar, secretary of Health and Human Services and chairman of the coronavirus task force, told reporters during a press briefing that the U.S. has "been monitoring this virus and preparing a response since back in December."

Jan. 29: 195 Americans return from China

The first group of passengers returned to the U.S. from China. They were expected to remain under observation for up to three days as they were screened, a CDC official said. The American passengers flew into California from Wuhan, with a stopover in Anchorage, Alaska, where they had also been screened.



Jan. 30: WHO declares global health emergency

The World Health Organization declared the coronavirus outbreak to be a "public health emergency of international concern." Dr.

emergency declaration "is not a vote of no confidence in China."



Jan. 30: US reports first case of person-to-person transmission

The CDC reported that the first case of person-to-person transmission in the U.S. is the husband of a Chicago woman who developed symptoms after visiting China. "We understand this may be concerning, but based on what we know now, our assessment remains that the immediate risk to the American public is low," said Robert Redfield, director of the CDC.

Jan. 31: US public health emergency

The Trump administration declared the coronavirus outbreak to be a public health emergency in the United States, setting quarantines of Americans who have recently been to certain parts of China. CDC officials said it was the first quarantine order issued by the federal government in over 50 years.



Azar also announced a temporary suspension of entry into the United States of foreign nationals who had been in China in the previous 14 days. The ban was effective Feb. 2.

Meanwhile, officials began funneling all flights from China to the U.S. to one of seven airports that were designated ports of entry: New York, San Francisco, Seattle, Honolulu, Los Angeles, Chicago and Atlanta.

The outbreak had infected nearly 12,000 people, most of them in China, and killed more than 250 people, all in China.

Feb. 2: First death outside China

A 44-year-old Chinese man hospitalized in the Philippines became the first known fatality outside China from the new virus that has killed more than 300 people.

Feb. 6: First death in US

Autopsies on the bodies of two people who died at home on Feb. 6 and Feb. 17 showed they were positive for the virus, a California county announced April 21.

Previously, the first U.S. death had been thought to occur Feb. 29 outside Seattle. The autopsy findings revealed that the virus may have been spreading in U.S. communities earlier than previously known. The two people died during a time when very limited testing was available only through the CDC, and the agency's testing criteria restricted testing to only individuals with a known travel history and who sought medical care for specific symptoms.

Feb. 7: Whistleblower dies

The Chinese doctor who was reprimanded by security police for



In the U.S., Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [announced](#) that his department facilitated the transportation of nearly 17.8 tons of donated medical supplies to the China, including "masks, gowns, gauze, respirators and other vital materials."

A [USA TODAY analysis later finds](#) that American companies sold more than \$17.5 million worth of face masks, more than \$13.6 million in surgical garments and more than \$27.2 million in ventilators to China during the first two months of the year, far exceeding that of any other similar period in the past decade.

Feb. 11: COVID-19

The WHO announced a formal name for the coronavirus – COVID-19. Meanwhile, China reported its highest daily coronavirus death toll, the 103 additional fatalities pushing the total past 1,100. "With 99% of cases in China, this remains very much an emergency for that country, but one that holds a very grave threat for the rest of the world," WHO's Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

The CDC confirmed the 13th U.S. coronavirus case, and about 800 Americans evacuated from Wuhan remain under quarantine. At a rally in New Hampshire, Trump said that, "in theory" once the weather warms up, "the virus" will "miraculously" go away.

Feb. 12: First American dies

A 60-year-old U.S. citizen became what appears to be the first American fatality from the global virus outbreak. The American victim, who was not identified, died in China after being diagnosed with the coronavirus in Wuhan, according to the U.S. Embassy.

Feb. 21: Pandemic 'likely'

Dr. Nancy Messonnier, director of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, told reporters that U.S. health officials are preparing for the coronavirus to become a pandemic. "We're not seeing community spread here in the United States, yet, but it's very possible, even likely, that it may eventually happen," she said.

Feb. 23: Italy locks down

Schools, businesses and restaurants were closed in a dozen northern Italian towns following reports of two deaths tied to an outbreak of the coronavirus in the region. The virus would begin to spread rapidly through Europe and Iran.

Feb. 26: CDC reports community spread; Pence to lead task force

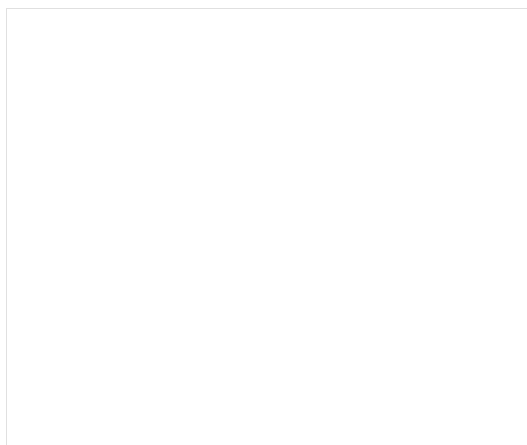
The CDC confirmed an infection in California that would represent the first U.S. person to contract the virus despite not visiting a foreign country recently or coming in contact with an infected patient. This brings the number of coronavirus cases detected in

Meanwhile, Trump announced that [Vice President Mike Pence would lead the administration's coronavirus response](#). "We're very, very ready for this," Trump said at a press conference. "The risk to the American people remains very low."

Feb. 28: Flawed test kits

Messonnier told reporters that the CDC has taken steps to address [problems with flawed test kits mailed to state and local labs](#). The agency has also expanded criteria for coronavirus testing.

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Feb. 29: FDA begins to open up testing

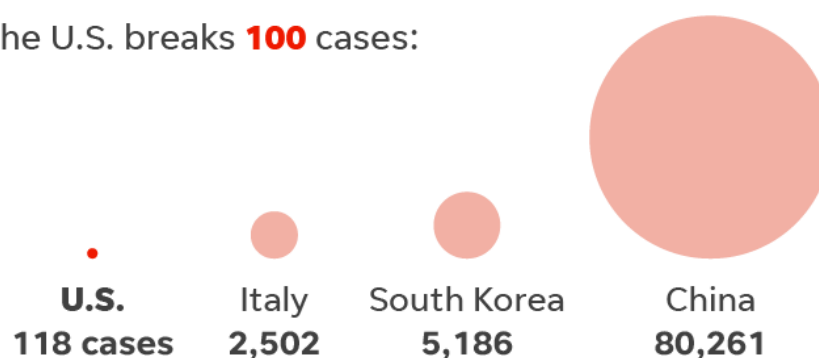
In an effort to increase testing, the Food and Drug Administration [announced it would be opening up its emergency authorization](#)

U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams echoed CDC guidance encouraging Americans not to buy face masks needed by medical professionals. "They are NOT effective in preventing general public from catching #Coronavirus, but if healthcare providers can't get them to care for sick patients, it puts them and our communities at risk," he said [on Twitter](#).

A man in Washington state [died after contracting the coronavirus](#) – what was initially thought to be the first death from the new disease in the U.S. Gov. Jay Inslee declared a state of emergency in Washington hours later, saying that the outbreak "could likely be a worldwide pandemic."

March 3: U.S. surpasses 100 cases

The U.S. breaks **100** cases:



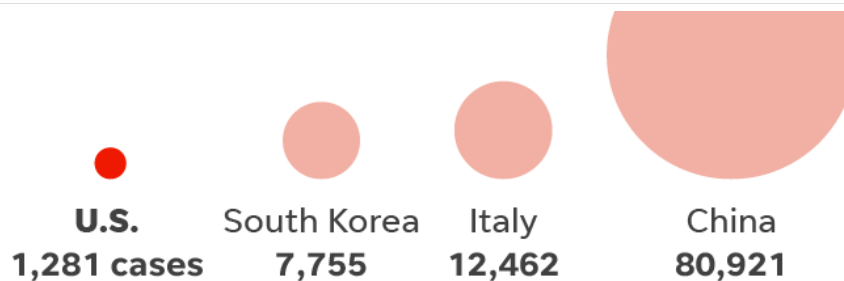
March 6: 'Anybody' can get a test

While touring the CDC headquarters in Atlanta, [Trump told reporters](#): "Anybody that wants a test can get a test. That's what the bottom line is."

March 11: Travel ban on Europe; WHO declares pandemic

Trump addressed the nation on the coronavirus outbreak and [outlined strict travel restrictions](#) on passengers arriving in the United States from hard-hit portions of Europe. Three days later, [he added the United Kingdom and Ireland to the ban](#).

The WHO declared that the spread of COVID-19 [had become a pandemic](#), which the organization has defined as "the worldwide spread of a new disease." Infections outside China have increased 13-fold in two weeks, WHO's director general said. In that same time, the number of countries hit by the outbreak has tripled.



March 12: US testing rollout 'a failing'

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said the testing logjam constitutes a "failing" of the nation's health care system. "The idea of anybody getting (a coronavirus test) easily, the way people in other countries are doing it – we're not set up for that," Fauci told Congress. "That is a failing."

March 13: Trump declares national emergency

Trump declared the coronavirus pandemic to be a national emergency. Trump said the move would free up nearly \$50 billion in additional disaster funding and would allow HHS to waive regulations and laws to deliver coronavirus testing quicker.

March 16: 15 days to slow the spread

Trump issued guidelines that called for Americans to avoid social gatherings of more than 10 people for the next 15 days and to limit discretionary travel, among other guidelines. Trump said the country may be dealing with a number of restrictions through July or August as a result of the virus. He acknowledged the economy may be heading into a recession.

March 17: Trump invokes the Defense Production Act

Trump invoked the Defense Production Act, a wartime authority that allows him to direct industry to produce critical equipment.

March 17: Report shows virus stable on surfaces

A study published in the New England Journal of Medicine found that viable virus could be detected up to three hours later in the air, up to four hours on copper, up to 24 hours on cardboard, and up to two to three days on plastic and stainless steel.

March 18: CDC report shows that all ages are at risk

A CDC report found that among the roughly 12% of COVID-19 cases in the U.S. known to need hospitalizations, about 1 in 5 were among people ages 20 to 44.

China reported no new domestic cases on the mainland – only cases in people returning from abroad.

March 19: U.S. surpasses 10,000 cases

The U.S. surpasses **10,000** cases:



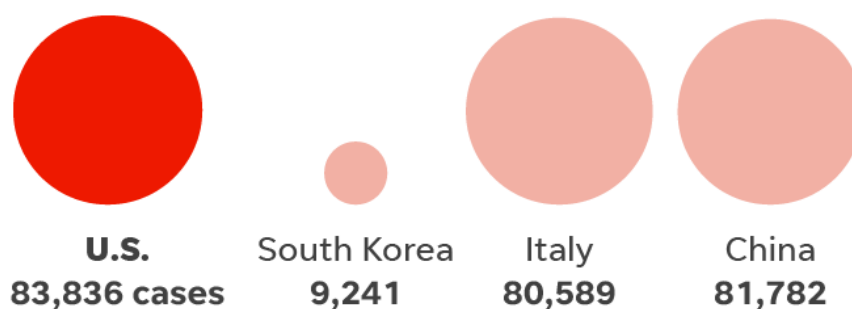
March 24: Tokyo Olympics postponed

The International Olympic Committee and Japanese government agreed to postpone the 2020 Summer Olympics "to a date beyond 2020 but not later than summer 2021" due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. It is the first time in modern Olympic history that a global health issue has disrupted the Games.

March 26: US has most cases

The U.S. surged past China and Italy to become the planet's most infected nation. More than 1,296 people had died in the U.S.

The U.S. **leads the world** in cases:

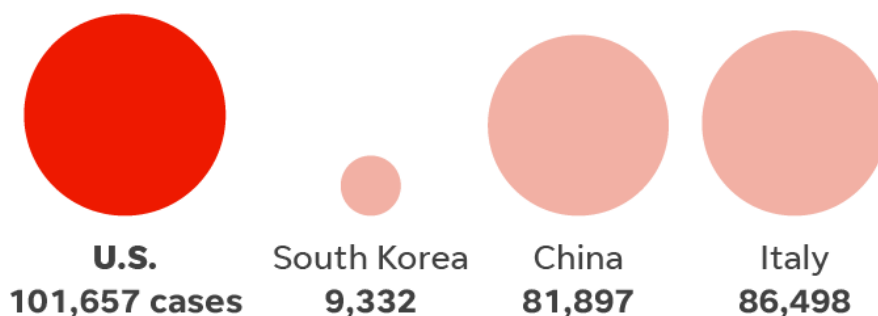


March 27: Trump signs \$2T stimulus package

President Donald Trump signed [the largest stimulus package in U.S. history](#). The stimulus package was expected to provide \$1,200 checks to many Americans – and more for families – while making available hundreds of billions of dollars for companies to maintain payroll through the crisis.

Trump also [ordered](#) his administration to use its authority under the Defense Production Act to force General Motors to expedite government contracts to build ventilators.

The U.S. surpasses **100,000** cases :



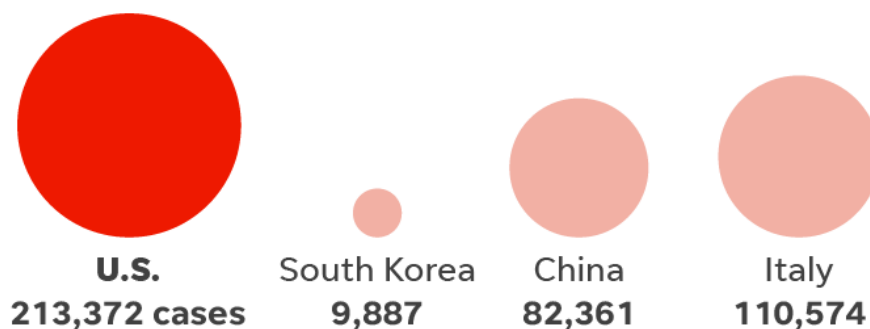
March 28: CDC issues travel advisory to New York area

The CDC [issued a request](#) asking residents of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut to curtail nonessential travel for 14 days.

March 29: White House extends social distancing guidelines

Trump announced that the White House would be extending its social distancing guidelines through April 30. "The peak in death rate is likely to hit in two weeks," Trump said. "Nothing would be worse than declaring victory before the victory is won." Trump said that he expects that, by June 1, "we will be well on our way to recovery."

April 1: The U.S. surpasses 200,000 cases



April 2: More than 1M confirmed cases worldwide

The world registered more than 1 million confirmed cases in less than five months. In reality, that mark was crossed much earlier because many more people have the virus but were not tested.

In the U.S., a record 6.65 million Americans filed first-time jobless claims the previous week, the Labor Department said. That number would later be revised up by 219,000 to an all-time high of 6.86 million.

April 3: CDC recommends use of face masks

The Trump administration advised people to start wearing face masks in public to stop the spread of the coronavirus, a reversal on previous guidance that urged people not to wear masks.



April 8: Wuhan lifts lockdown

The city of Wuhan was lit up after midnight to celebrate the lifting of a 76-day lockdown.

April 10: US marks deadliest day

More than 2,000 people in the U.S. died of coronavirus on Good Friday, a new daily high in the nation's fight against COVID-19. Dr. Deborah Birx, coordinator of the White House coronavirus task force, said that the U.S. has not "reached the peak" of the pandemic but that there were "encouraging" signs that the curves were flattening or lowering.

April 11: US has most deaths

The United States passed Italy to become the country with the most coronavirus deaths. However, as a proportion of the total population in the U.S., virus deaths remain at about one-sixth of those in hard-hit Italy or Spain. More than 19,700 people in the U.S. had died due to complications from the coronavirus. Worldwide, the death count surpassed 104,000.

April 14: All 50 states report deaths

All 50 states reported at least one death, and more than 23,000 Americans died. President Donald Trump said his administration will "halt" funding to the WHO as it conducts a review of the global

April 15: Protests erupt over stay-at-home orders



Demonstrators drove thousands of vehicles to Michigan's state Capitol, protesting the state's stay-at-home order. Protests also erupted in Kentucky, Oklahoma and North Carolina.

April 16: White House issues guidance to reopen

The White House issued guidelines to states aimed at easing social distancing restrictions and reopening parts of the country. About 14% of the U.S. workforce had filed for unemployment in the past month.

April 20: States announce plans to reopen

The governors of Tennessee, South Carolina and Georgia announced various measures aimed at easing restrictions on some businesses in their states.

April 21: FDA approves home-testing kit

LabCorp, a global life sciences company based in North Carolina, received FDA authorization for kits that enable people to collect nasal swab samples at home and mail them to a laboratory for testing.

PHOTOS Getty Images, AP; GRAPHICS Karl Gelles, Jim Sergent, Mitchell Thorson and Veronica Bravo/USA TODAY

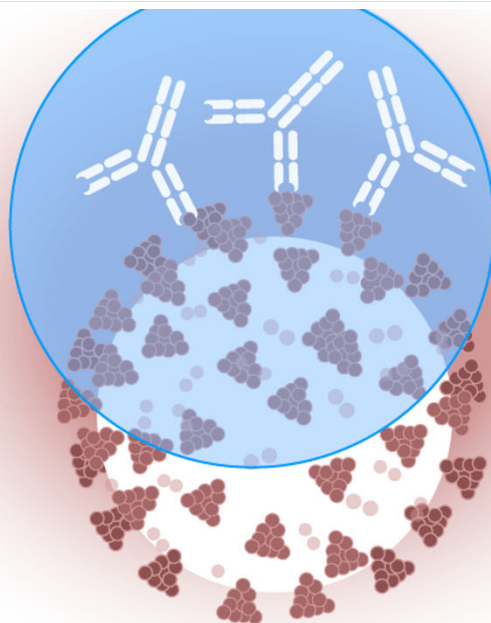
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New Rule in Albany, NY

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Antibody tests could be key to reopening the country. Here's how they work.

Antibody testing will help health experts better assess how many people contracted the novel coronavirus.

Adrianna Rodriguez, Amanda Morris, Jim Sergent, Nicole Schaub, and Janet Loehrke, USA TODAY
Updated 1:38 p.m. EDT Apr. 20, 2020

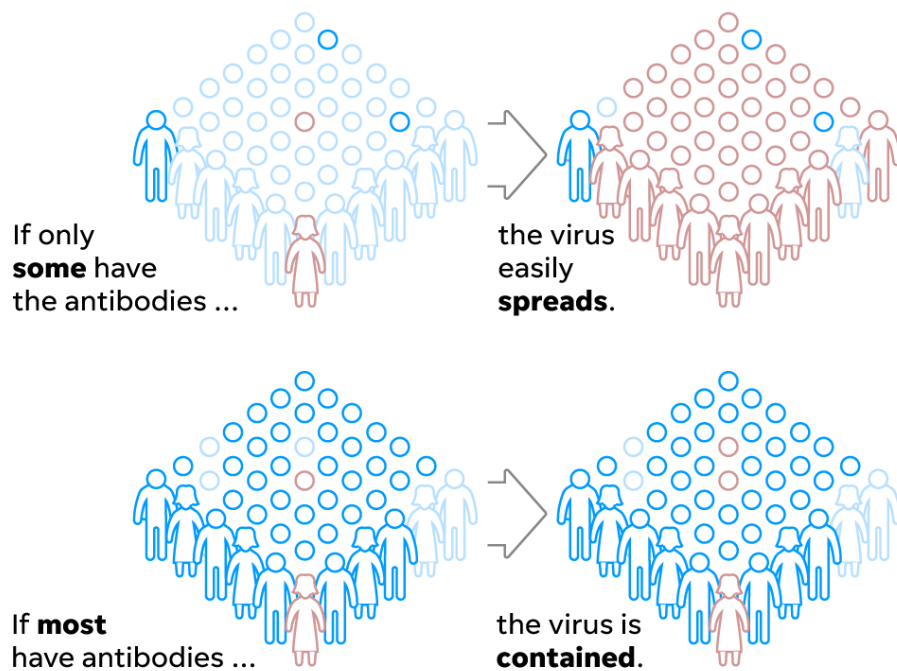
After weeks of sheltering in place, Americans are asking how soon we can return to a more normal life outside our homes. Much of the answer might be in a test.

The first phase of testing has been about determining who has COVID-19. The next phase will be about who had it – or may still be fighting it.

Instead of looking in our throats for the coronavirus itself, health care workers will look for signs in our blood that we developed antibodies to fight the virus.

Infection rates. Researchers say many people have been asymptomatic – or didn't know they were infected. Widespread testing would provide insights into how prevalent the most serious cases have been.

Herd immunity. If a large percentage of people in a city or state have those antibodies, researchers might determine there is enough herd immunity to protect those who haven't contracted the virus.



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Marc Lipsitch, a professor of epidemiology at Harvard and an expert in public health interventions, told the USA TODAY Editorial Board on April 8 that a significant portion of the population must be immune to the coronavirus before social distancing restrictions can be lifted.

Unproven tests. Inaccurate results: [Public health labs worry 'bad data' could taint U.S. recovery from coronavirus crisis.](#)

Antibodies are the body's way of remembering how it responded to an infection so it can attack again if exposed to the same pathogen. People with antibodies in their blood have immune cells available to fight the virus, which lowers the risk of reinfection.

Antibodies are Y-shaped proteins produced by white blood cells to help stop a virus from intruding. Antibody tests look for two antibodies in the blood, immunoglobulin M (IgM) and immunoglobulin G (IgG).

IgM and IgG antibodies fight all kinds of infections. The blood tests for COVID-19 look for antibodies specific to this coronavirus, which shows whether the body is producing antibodies to it or to others such as the seasonal flu.

To create an antibody test, researchers isolate specific parts of the genetic material from a virus that correspond to the virus' outermost vulnerable layer – the place where antibodies attach themselves.

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Once researchers isolate specific parts of the virus' genetic code, or RNA, they inject it into other types of mammal cells to make those cells grow with the same structure, or outermost shell, as the novel coronavirus.

"As they grow, they'll start to produce the spike protein," University of Arizona immunologist Deepta Bhattacharya said. "You can basically trick the cells into making what you want."

How to test for coronavirus antigens _____

grown spike protein would have the same shape as the novel coronavirus.

Health care workers take a sample of a patient's blood and isolate the parts of the blood that contain the antibodies into a serum. If a patient has coronavirus antibodies, they would be found in the blood, along with the other antibodies.

Other tests can involve just a simple finger prick to draw a blood sample, which is collected with a plastic straw and deposited in a small cartridge along with a special solution of liquids that will cause a reaction. Ten minutes later, the test promises to tell you whether you've had COVID-19.

These tests are one of many antibody tests the FDA approved under its Emergency Use Authorization, which means they haven't been thoroughly reviewed by the agency and are not guaranteed to be accurate.

In a clinical evaluation, Zhejiang Orient Gene Biotech reported the finger-prick tests to be 61.8% to 94.4% sensitive, depending on the type of antibody that shows up in the test results, which means that the tests are reported to give accurate results 61.8% to 94.4% of the time.

Private lab offers COVID-19 antibody test that detects past infections

A private lab is offering antibody testing to tell if someone had coronavirus and has over 2,000 people on a waiting list for the test.

AMANDA MORRIS, ARIZONA REPUBLIC

The challenge of creating a coronavirus blood test

Dr. Raed Dweik, chairman of the Respiratory Institute at the Cleveland Clinic, said some of the tests he has seen aren't accurate enough to determine whether someone is truly immune to the coronavirus.

That's because antibodies for the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 look very similar to other coronavirus antibodies that cause illnesses, such as the common cold.

Tests could mistakenly identify antibodies as being for the coronavirus that causes COVID-19, producing a false positive. Dweik said it will take more time to develop a test that can accurately detect the right antibodies.

Why antibody testing is key to reopening America —

Dr. Neeraj Sood, professor and vice dean of research and faculty at the University of Southern California Sol Price School of Public Policy, leads a study in conjunction with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health using antibody tests to determine how widely coronavirus has spread and how deadly it is.

As of Sunday, there have been more than 600 deaths related to COVID-19 in the county, according to the health department. If, based on the antibody study, researchers determine that about 5,000 people had been infected, it would be considered a deadly

“If we find out COVID is far less deadly than the flu, we can open up the economy. You don’t need to hit herd immunity to open it up,” Sood said. “But if you find out that COVID is 10 times deadlier than the flu, then you have to keep it closed.”

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