

US announces \$8.3bn in coronavirus funding as cases surge

March 5 2020



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

US lawmakers passed an emergency \$8.3 billion spending bill to combat the coronavirus on Thursday as the number of cases surged in the country's northwest and deaths reached 12.

The Senate gave sweeping bipartisan support to the funding one day after the House passed the bill, so that it could be quickly sent to the White House for President Donald Trump's signature.

"The American people are looking for leadership, they want assurance their government is up to the task of protecting their health and safety," said Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy.

The amount is significantly above the \$2.5 billion President Donald Trump had initially requested, but he later said he was happy to accept more.

The US reported its first case of the disease in January and its first death on February 29—both in the state of Washington in the country's Pacific Northwest.

Since then the toll has risen to 12 and the virus has spread to at least 15 states—the latest being Maryland adjacent to the nation's capital Washington.

More than 180 people are infected, according to an AFP tally.

On Thursday, Washington state officials announced a jump in cases, from 39 to more than 70. Eleven of the 12 deaths have been reported there, with the other in California.

Tech firms in Seattle like Amazon, Facebook and Google were telling employees to work remotely, as was Microsoft in nearby Redmond.

Some schools in the state have also decided to close for a couple weeks and hold classes online.

Vice President Mike Pence, the White House pointman on the crisis,

visited the state later in the day.

He greeted Governor Jay Inslee and other officials with an "elbow bump," intended to avoid the germ transmission of a traditional handshake.

Some 1.2 million tests would be distributed nationwide in "a few days," followed by another four million by the end of next week, said Pence.

Earlier Thursday in Minnesota, Pence had told reporters that "we don't have enough tests today to meet what we anticipate will be the demand going forward."

Meanwhile a cruise ship with 21 people who have symptoms was being held off the coast of San Francisco, California. The state has the second highest number of cases and has declared an emergency.

Thousands of people are traveling aboard the Grand Princess, the same cruise ship on which California's first victim was thought to have contracted the virus.

The Grand Princess belongs to Princess Cruises, the company that operated the coronavirus-stricken ship held off Japan last month on which more than 700 people tested positive.

Carolyn Wright, a passenger, told AFP that the captain announced Thursday evening there were "no confirmed cases of coronavirus on the ship" so far, echoing a tweet from Princess Cruises earlier in the day.

Nursing union slams preparation

US officials continue to stress that the overall risk to the public remains low and are urging people not to panic or buy masks—which could

create a shortage for those who require them.

Scientific research so far shows that elderly people and those with underlying conditions are most at risk of a serious illness, and the majority of US deaths so far have occurred in a Seattle-area nursing home.

But the largest nursing union in the US denounced Thursday the "disturbing" lack of preparation at many hospitals.

Nurses are working without necessary personal protective equipment and lack education and training for handling the disease, said National Nurses United director Bonnie Castillo.

"As of today more than 80 of our nurse members have been in quarantine," she said at a press conference in California held by the union, which claims 150,000 members.

"It is not a successful strategy to leave nurses and other health workers unprotected."

Revised mortality rate

Earlier, a top federal health official said the overall mortality rate for the novel coronavirus was estimated at one percent or less, lower than previously thought.

"The best estimates now of the overall mortality rate for COVID-19 is somewhere between 0.1 percent and one percent," Admiral Brett Giroir, the assistant secretary of health, said at a news briefing.

"That's... because many people don't get sick and don't get tested—this reflects the overseas experience.

"It certainly could be higher than normal flu, it probably is, but it's not likely in the range of two to three percent."

© 2020 AFP

Citation: US announces \$8.3bn in coronavirus funding as cases surge (2020, March 5) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-03-83bn-coronavirus-funding-cases-surge.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.