

Youth warned against 'fever dream' of coronavirus invincibility

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Before shutdowns swept the globe and many were urged—or mandated—to stay indoors to stymie coronavirus's spread, Divya Sonti sensed the worst was yet to come.

A specialist in public health communications, the 31-year-old encouraged her millennial peers to steer clear of bars and parties—but says "friends would think I was overreacting."

Her age group is considered low-risk if they contract [coronavirus](#)—but today authorities warn [younger generations](#) are likely carriers of asymptomatic cases, and could easily infect older or immunocompromised people.

Deborah Birx, the White House taskforce coronavirus administrator, said "the millennial generation" could include many more virus carriers than previously thought.

She also said COVID-19—which has infected at least 210,000 people, leaving more than 8,800 people dead worldwide—could hit [younger people](#) harder than believed, noting reports from France and Italy of serious cases even among 20 and 30-somethings.

"We need them to be healthy," Birx said. "I'm not only calling on you to heed what's in the guidance, but to really ensure that each and every one of you are protecting each other."

'Invincible'

Donald Trump also has pointed to young people, saying "we don't want them gathering. And I see they do gather, including on beaches and including in restaurants."

"Young people—they don't realize, they're feeling invincible," said the 73-year-old president of the United States, which so far has reported more than 9,300 cases with 150 deaths, according to a Johns Hopkins University count.

"Millennial" is often used as a blanket term for all [young people](#), though the Pew Research Center defines it as those born between 1981 and 1996.

Those approximately 24 and younger are considered members of Generation Z—the group most likely to be flying south for spring break beach trips.

The Miami Beach mayor, Dan Gelber, warned of "devastating consequences" over the virus and ordered bars and gyms to close this week, telling springbreakers: "You've got to think about the person next to you and even the person you don't know."

Shelly Hill, a 21-year-old university student, told AFP she cut short her Miami trip as airlines axe flights.

"I'm not really scared of corona, but I feel like it's causing a lot of problems... a lot of stuff is getting shut down," the Atlanta resident said.

But "people need to be safe and quarantine, because it is spreading really fast."

'Stupid and privileged'

A streak of individualism runs through contemporary society, standing out most prominently among youth, according to Jean Twenge, a psychology professor and author of "Generation Me."

Individualism has led to more equality and less prejudice, she said—along with a flippant attitude towards rules and less trust in institutions, including science.

"All of us have to realize that we're going to have to shift our thinking,"

she told AFP.

"It just might be particularly challenging for a generation that has not ever experienced a culture that needs to be more collectivistic for some really good reasons."

Celebrities, like 18-year-old Billie Eilish and Ariana Grande, 26, have urged people to heed COVID-19 warnings.

"The 'We will be fine because we're young' mindset is putting people who aren't young and/or healthy in a lot of danger," Grande posted recently. "You sound stupid and privileged and you need to care more about others."

"Like now."

'Fever dream'

Nate Christensen has been laying low at home in New York—which closed schools and banned gatherings—for a week with his partner.

The nursing student, 30, compared attitudes towards coronavirus to those of climate change: "I think people have a hard time taking something seriously that's not right in their backyard."

As America's most populated city began closing up shop over the weekend, Christensen said he "saw a lot of millennials on social media self-isolating—but many also still going to the gym, going on dates."

"Ultimately I don't blame people for wanting to continue living a normal life," he said, criticizing the city's mayor and New York's [state governor](#) "for not acting sooner to shutter public life."

He said his generation's strength has been savvy use of social media to spread coronavirus risk awareness —though he said some people on his feeds, especially Trump supporters, are still touting an "invincible approach."

"Anyone that has seen what is happening in Italy but still thinks this country will deal with the virus like any flu season is certainly living in an 'American exceptionalism' fever dream," Christensen said.

"The virus is about to show just how not great this country truly is."

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