

# US death toll from coronavirus surges past 100,000 people

May 28 2020, by Carla K. Johnson, Susan Haigh and Lisa Marie Pane

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The body of Mohammad Altaf, who died at 48 of COVID-19, is ritually washed and wrapped before being given funeral prayers at Al-Rayaan Muslim Funeral Services, Sunday, May 17, 2020, in the Brooklyn borough of New York. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)

The U.S. surpassed a jarring milestone Wednesday in the coronavirus

pandemic: 100,000 deaths.

That number is the best estimate and most assuredly an undercount. But it represents the stark reality that more Americans have died from the virus than from the Vietnam and Korean wars combined.

"It's a striking reminder of how dangerous this virus can be," said Josh Michaud, associate director of global health policy with the Kaiser Family Foundation in Washington.

The once-unthinkable toll appears to be just the beginning of untold misery in the months ahead as Las Vegas casinos and Walt Disney World make plans to reopen, crowds of unmasked Americans swarm beaches and [public health officials](#) predict a resurgence by fall.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert, issued a stern warning after watching video of Memorial Day crowds gathered at a pool party in Missouri.

"We have a situation in which you see that type of crowding with no mask and people interacting. That's not prudent, and that's inviting a situation that could get out of control," he said during an interview Wednesday on CNN. "Don't start leapfrogging some of the recommendations in the guidelines because that's really tempting fate and asking for trouble."



Health care workers wave to a departing patient, who recovered from being stricken with COVID-19, outside the Southern New Hampshire Medical Center in Nashua, N.H., Wednesday, May 27, 2020. (AP Photo/Charles Krupa)

Worldwide, the virus has infected more than 5.6 million people and killed over 350,000, with the U.S. having the most confirmed cases and deaths by far, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. Europe has recorded about 170,000 deaths, while the U.S. reached more than 100,000 in less than four months.

The true death toll from the virus, which emerged in China late last year and was first reported in the U.S. in January, is widely believed to be significantly higher, with experts saying many victims died of COVID-19 without ever being tested for it.

Early on, President Donald Trump downplayed the severity of the coronavirus, likening it to the flu, and predicted the U.S. wouldn't reach 100,000 deaths.

"I think we'll be substantially under that number," Trump said on April 10. Ten days later, he said, "We're going toward 50- or 60,000 people." Ten days after that: "We're probably heading to 60,000, 70,000."



Rhode Island National Guard Pfc. Gerald Moniz distributes gallons of milk and produce along with volunteers with the Dairy Farmers of America to families in need, Wednesday, May 27, 2020, in Pawtucket, R.I. Dairy farmers have a milk surplus because demand has dropped as schools and restaurants closed during the coronavirus pandemic, and some farmers have had to pour excess milk away. Farmers donated the 4,300 gallons of milk given away today at McCoy Stadium. (AP Photo/David Goldman)

Critics have said deaths spiked because Trump was slow to respond, but he has contended on Twitter that it could have been 20 times higher without his actions. He has urged states to reopen their economies after months of stay-at-home restrictions.

Las Vegas casinos can welcome tourists again on June 4. SeaWorld and Walt Disney World plan to reopen to limited numbers of tourists in Orlando, Florida, in June and July. And people who have been cooped up indoors began venturing outside in droves, often without practicing social distancing or wearing masks.

Kelly Hove, 79, of Twin Falls, Idaho, an internationally known pianist, died at a nursing home on April 12 of complications from COVID-19 after a long battle with dementia. Her sister-in-law Jan Hove fears that more will die as states start lifting restrictions.





A member of medical personnel, wearing a full protective equipment, takes a mouth swab sample from a woman to be tested for coronavirus COVID-19 in a drive-in station in Luxembourg, Wednesday, May 27, 2020. Luxembourg has launch on Wednesday a nation wide coronavirus testing campaign among its population and commuters. (AP Photo/Francisco Seco)

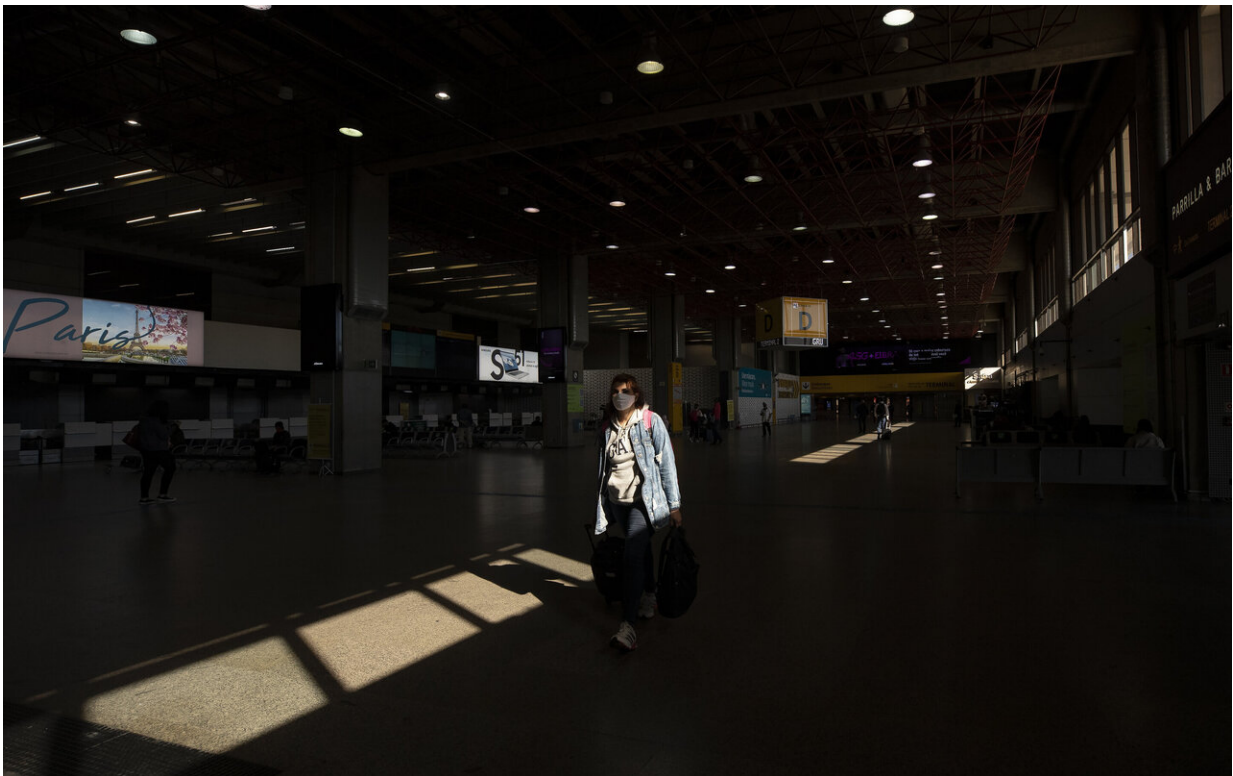
"I think going back too soon is going to cause more deaths, so I'm incredibly concerned," she said. "And I don't think we have adequate leadership. ... It's an absolute joke, from the White House down."

The virus exacted an especially vicious toll on Trump's hometown of New York City and its surrounding suburbs, killing more than 21,000. At the peak, hundreds of people were dying per day in New York City, and hospitals, ambulances and first responders were inundated with

patients.

There is no vaccine or treatment for COVID-19, though several emergency treatments are being used after showing some promise in preliminary testing.

Worldwide, about a dozen [vaccine candidates](#) are starting to be tested or getting close to it. Health officials have said studies of a potential vaccine might be done by late this year or early next year.



A few people walk through an empty corridor inside the Sao Paulo International Airport in Guarulhos, Brazil, Wednesday, May 27, 2020. According to the airport administration, Brazil's busiest airport has had an average reduction of 85% in flights, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (AP Photo/Andre Penner)

Only half of Americans said they would be willing to get vaccinated if scientists are successful in developing a vaccine, according to a poll released Wednesday from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

For most, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially [older adults](#) and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

Among the 100,000 fatalities was 74-year-old Michael Ganci of Newington, Connecticut, who died March 21. He was a public school teacher, a grandfather and father of four, and a 4th-degree belt Sensei in Kyokushin karate.

Ganci, who had a compromised immune system, died at a hospital in Hartford three days after showing symptoms. His family was not allowed to be with him and tried to text and talk with him on his cellphone during his final days. His wife of 48 years also tested positive for COVID-19 and had to grieve alone.





Mike Douglass, owner of the East J Barbershop, sanitizes the counters of his shop in Sacramento, Calif., Wednesday, May 27, 2020. Barbershops and hair salons in the Sacramento area and most other California counties can begin reopening following Gov. Gavin Newsom's announcement Tuesday. Douglass said he will reopen in a few days so he has time to get his shop ready to adhere to the new guidelines that must be followed due to the coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli)

For their daughter, 45-year-old Joanna Ganci of Beverly, Massachusetts, the milestone is important to understand the scope of the virus.

"But at the same time, I think the danger of counting, the danger of statistics, is that it just minimizes the human element," she said. "It's like, what number is going to make an impact for people who haven't

been touched by it?"

It's not even clear when the coronavirus turned deadly in the United States. Initially, it was believed the first U.S. deaths from the virus were in late February in a Seattle suburb. But by mid-April, it was determined that two people with the coronavirus died in California as many as three weeks earlier.

Comparing countries is tricky, given varying levels of testing and that some coronavirus deaths can be missed. According to figures tracked by Johns Hopkins University, the death rate per 100,000 people is lower in the U.S. than in Italy, France and Spain but higher than in Germany, China, South Korea, Singapore, Japan, New Zealand and Australia.



Students wearing face masks as a precaution against the new coronavirus, walk to their classrooms while maintaining social distancing after they attend the entrance ceremony at Chungwoon elementary school in Seoul, South Korea,



Wednesday, May 27, 2020. More than 2 million high school juniors, middle school seniors, first- and second-grade elementary school children and kindergartners were expected to return to school on Wednesday. (Lee Jin-wook/Yonhap via AP)



A man and a woman demonstrate dining under a plastic shield Wednesday, May 27, 2020 in a restaurant of Paris. As restaurants in food-loving France prepare to reopen, some are investing in lampshade-like plastic shields to protect diners from the virus. The strange-looking contraptions are among experiments restaurants are trying around the world as they try to lure back clientele while keeping them virus-free. (AP Photo/Thibault Camus)



People wearing face masks hold food boxes distributed by the government during a lockdown to contain the spread of COVID-19 in a poor area on the outskirts of Quito, Ecuador, Wednesday, May 27, 2020. (AP Photo/Dolores Ochoa)





Graduates of New Orleans Charter Science and Math High School class of 2020 parade in vehicles after holding a drive-in graduation ceremony as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, outside Delgado Community College in New Orleans, Wednesday, May 27, 2020. Students and family got out of their cars to receive diplomas one by one, and then held a parade of cars through city streets. (AP Photo/Gerald Herbert)





Jeffrey Holinka wears a protective face mask as he waits to receive an order at the On Ocean 7 Cafe along Ocean Drive in Miami Beach, Fla. during the new coronavirus pandemic, Wednesday, May 27, 2020. Ocean Drive was closed to traffic as restaurants in Miami Beach reopened Wednesday after being closed to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Lynne Sladky)



People sit on a terrace in a beach in Barcelona, Spain, on Wednesday, May 27, 2020. Roughly half of the population, including residents in the biggest cities of Madrid and Barcelona, are entering phase 1, which allows social gatherings in limited numbers, restaurant and bar service with outdoor sitting and some cultural and sports activities. (AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti)



A security guard takes a worker's temperature at the entrance of a fish market in the Villa Maria del Triunfo district on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, Wednesday, May 27, 2020, amid the new coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)





Agustin Aguilar holds his mask so barber Adrian Mayorga can cut his sideburns at the Country Club Barbers, Wednesday, May 27, 2020, in Escondido, Calif. Barber shops and hair salons were allowed to re-open, Wednesday in San Diego County, after closing to help stop the spread of the new coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Gregory Bull)



Photographs of the graduating class of 2020 line the fence in front of James Madison High School, Wednesday, May 27, 2020, in the Brooklyn borough of New York. The portraits honor the 750 graduating seniors who may not have the opportunity to step across a graduation stage this year due to the coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

"The experience of other countries shows that death at that scale was preventable," said Michaud of the Kaiser Family Foundation. "To some extent, the United States suffers from having a slow start and inconsistent approach. We might have seen a different trajectory if different policies were put into place earlier and more forcefully."

Countries with low death rates suppressed the virus "through lots of testing, contact tracing and policies to support isolation and quarantine



of people at risk," Michaud said.

Dr. Wafaa El-Sadr, director of ICAP, a global health center at Columbia University, called the U.S. [death](#) rate shocking.

"It reflects the fact that we have neglected basic fundamentals for health," El-Sadr said. "So, now we are in this shameful situation. It is the most vulnerable people in our midst—the elderly, the poor, members of racial/ethnic minority groups—who are the ones disproportionately getting sick and dying."

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