

Virus ignited in US no earlier than mid-January, study says

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A traveler passes a sign recommending practicing social distancing, to limit spread of the coronavirus outbreak, at the nearly passenger-less JetBlue terminal at Logan Airport in Boston, Friday, May 29, 2020. (AP Photo/Charles Krupa)

The spark that started the U.S. coronavirus epidemic arrived during a

three-week window from mid-January to early February, before the nation halted travel from China, according to the most comprehensive federal study to date of when the virus began spreading.

That means anyone in the U.S. who thought they had the [virus](#) in December or early January probably had the flu, public health researchers said.

Some people have claimed Americans were getting sick from the coronavirus as early as November and that infections were spreading in the U.S. before any case was identified, said Dr. Robert Redfield, the head of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"(This) puts data into the discussion. Prior to this we had discussion without a lot of data," he said.

In previously acknowledged U.S. officials were slow to understand how much the virus was spreading from Europe.

So, did the White House [travel](#) bans come too late to stop outbreaks from beginning?

The CDC study was not designed to assess that, said the agency's Dr. Jay Butler.

"It's important to recognize the travel bans were intended to slow introduction of the virus," he said. "We knew it would be fairly unlikely that it would be completely kept out of the United States."

As of Friday, there have been more than 1.7 million confirmed COVID-19 cases in the U.S. and more than 101,000 deaths.

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