

US health official says pandemic clearly can be controlled

October 26 2020, by Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar



In this Sept. 16, 2020 file photo, Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services for Health Adm. Brett Giroir speaks at a Senate Appropriations subcommittee hearing on a "Review of Coronavirus Response Efforts" on Capitol Hill in Washington. A day after White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows said "we're not going to control the pandemic," a top Trump administration health official says Americans have already proven they can do that through basic safeguards shown to work. "I think we can control the pandemic," Assistant Secretary for Health Adm. Brett Giroir said Monday on a

call with reporters. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik, Pool)

A day after White House chief of staff Mark Meadows said "we're not going to control the pandemic," a top Trump administration health official said Monday that Americans have already proven they can do that through basic safeguards shown to work.

"I think we can control the pandemic," Assistant Secretary for Health Adm. Brett Giroir said on a call with reporters.

"I want to be clear that what we have done—what the American people have done—has been able to put out very significant outbreaks ... all across the Deep South," Giroir said.

He underscored what he calls the "3 W's"—watching your distance from other people, wearing masks when you can't keep away and frequently washing your hands.

Giroir said the data are pretty clear that while such simple measures cannot completely defeat the virus, they can control it. The "nail in the coffin" for the coronavirus will come when vaccines are approved and widely distributed, he added.

Giroir's comments highlight open differences between government health officials and some in the top circle of White House advisers to President Donald Trump, who believe Americans can achieve widespread immunity by returning to normal life while protecting the elderly and others highly vulnerable. Trump himself asserts the U.S. is rounding the corner on the virus as he pursues a fast-paced schedule of public rallies in the closing days of the campaign. Most attendees appear to take no precautions.

A senior political appointee at the Department of Health and Human Services, Giroir is a pediatric critical care specialist but has also held high-level management posts and conducted scientific research. He has been working to increase [coronavirus](#) testing in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, which account for more than 40% of deaths from COVID-19. His office Monday announced new testing support for states bearing the brunt of the latest surge in cases.

On Sunday, Meadows had told CNN that "we're not going to control the pandemic. We are going to control the fact that we get vaccines, therapeutics and other mitigation areas."

Asked why the U.S. wasn't going to get control, Meadows responded, "Because it is a contagious virus. Just like the flu, it's contagious."

But scientists say public health measures have already been shown to work. After the initial outbreak in [early spring](#) led to a national shutdown, the number of new cases a day dropped from about 40,000 to around 20,000.

Then came the summer surge. As southern states embraced reopening, new cases topped 70,000 a day, driven by increases in the South and West. When some of those same states pulled back, new daily cases dropped to between 35,000-40,000. Now they're shooting back up across the northern part of the country, as cold weather returns and people spend more time indoors. Restriction-weary states elsewhere are also seeing increases as average daily cases again approach 70,000.

Giroir said basic public health measures are "smart" and "proven" policies. "We need to continue that and reach higher levels, particularly in areas of community spread," he said.

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