

Weekend Edition: June 19-21, 2020

[BY ELIJAH WOLFSON](#)

Increased Testing Is the Only Way Out of the Pandemic

Last night, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, U.S. President Donald Trump held his first campaign rally since March 2. Primarily, he used it to air the personal grievances he's been stewing over for the last three-and-a-half months—but also to sow falsehoods about the state of the pandemic in the country he leads.

In terms of COVID-19, the rally started inauspiciously, as the campaign announced earlier in the day that six staff members who were helping set up the event [tested positive for the virus](#). And Oklahoma had only just recorded its worst day yet on Thursday, with 451 new confirmed cases; Friday and Saturday, with 352 and 331 respectively, were also the second- and third-worst days, respectively for the state.

After the (largely unmasked) crowd settled in, Trump began his segment on COVID-19 referring to it by an obscene nickname, “Kung Flu,” that, as the [New York Times notes](#), even one of his closest advisors, Kellyanne Conway, has called “highly offensive.” Then, Trump went on to completely obfuscate what is currently happening in the U.S., and, in the process, undermine the efforts of public health workers across the country to contain the virus. He called testing a “double edged sword,” saying “Here's the bad part. When you do testing to that extent, you're gonna find more people, you're gonna find more cases. So I said to my people: 'Slow the testing down, please.'”

Without a doubt, testing finds more cases. That is a good thing. Without widespread testing, we would have no idea of the impact the virus is having on the health of American communities. As has [widely been reported](#), the [failure](#) of the U.S. to enact testing at the levels needed in the early days of the pandemic are largely to blame for the fact that the country has suffered more than any other in the world to date.

Further, as my colleagues Chris Wilson and Tara Law reported last week, if you actually look at the data, increased testing in the new U.S. hotspots—Texas, Arizona and Florida, in particular—does not explain the rise in cases in those states. “If widespread testing was the entire reason for the rise in cases,” they write, “you'd expect the share of positive tests to go down, or, at the very least, remain steady. Instead, that figure is rising in a number of states.”

If, in fact, Trump did actually tell “his people” to slow down testing, he would have been putting thousands of lives at risk. Earlier today, White House advisor [Peter Navarro told CNN's Jake Tapper](#) that Trump's statement was “tongue in cheek,” whatever that means. Navarro then went on to say that “virus was a product of the Chinese Communist party.... They hid the virus. They created that virus. And they sent over hundreds of thousands of Chinese citizens here to spread that around and around the world.... Whether they did that on purpose, that's an open question. But that's a fact.”

There is no evidence for that. There is, however, evidence that widespread testing is essential to containing a viral outbreak. Trump, of course, wants the U.S. economy to rebound. So, of course, does everyone in the U.S. But accusing China of malice isn't going to help a U.S. economic recovery, nor will feeding conspiracy theories that COVID-19 is not a big deal—and, especially, that testing is a problem and not a part of the solution. It will only set the U.S. back.

[Read more here.](#)

OVER THE WEEKEND

Mask Confusion at Movie Theaters

A decades-long tradition of summer blockbuster movie releases has been almost entirely put on ice due to the pandemic. But last week, the biggest theater chain in the U.S., AMC, announced it would be re-opening in mid-July—and, moviegoers wouldn't even have to wear a mask. But AMC didn't get the response it expected; #boycottAMC began trending on Twitter, and by Friday afternoon, AMC backtracked, saying guests would, in fact, have to wear masks. The same day, Regal, one of the other major theater chains in the U.S., followed suit, saying it, too, would only allow guests wearing masks.

Somewhat strangely, AMC CEO Adam Aron had seemed to imply last Thursday in an interview with *Variety* that the company's initial decision was due to its view that enforcing mask-wearing was a political matter. "We did not want to be drawn into a political controversy," Aron said. "We thought it might be counterproductive if we forced mask-wearing on those people who believe strongly that it is not necessary." That's despite the clear guidance from nearly every public health official, and the fact that daily new COVID-19 cases in the U.S. have flatlined. In any case, AMC says it will open 450 U.S. locations on July 15—and will sell masks to anyone who doesn't have one but still wants to get in, for \$1.

[Read more here.](#)

Problems in South Korea

Yesterday, South Korea reported 67 new cases of COVID-19. To those in parts of the world where the virus is still ravaging populations, that might not seem like a big deal—the U.K., with a similar population size as South Korea, reported 1,295 new cases on Saturday, for example. However, that's the highest daily count in South Korea since May 28, and that's worrying for a number of reasons.

South Korea has largely been upheld as an example of how to properly contain the virus, after bringing down its daily case rates from a peak of about 600 in early March to single digits in late April.

But since easing social distancing restrictions in May, the country's numbers have been creeping back up, especially in Seoul, where most South Koreans reside. If South Korea can't contain the virus in its post-reopening phase, it's hard to imagine countries which have struggled, like the U.S., being able to.

[Read more here.](#)

Trouble In India

A new global hotspot is emerging in India: daily new cases there continue to rise, passing 15,000 for the first time yesterday. That wasn't an anomaly, either. Daily case rates have not dipped below 10,000 since June 8, and have been climbing steadily since then. India now has the fourth-highest overall number of confirmed COVID-19 cases, following the U.S., Brazil and Russia.

On Friday, the government in the capital city of New Delhi [ordered all hospital workers](#) to have their workers return to duty immediately, to deal with the rising numbers of COVID-19 hospitalizations, and a number of countries have begun to evacuate their citizens living in India in fears that the health care system will soon be overwhelmed. And yet Prime Minister Narendra Modi has declined to change course from the easing of the lockdown which was put in place on March 25, but in recent weeks has been rolled back. In fact, last week, he told state leaders that they should get ready for the next phase of his "unlock" program.

[Read more here.](#)

New York City Enters Reopening Phase 2

Starting tomorrow, New York City companies will be allowed to reopen their offices for the first time in three months. But "allowed to reopen" isn't the same as "reopening." According to the [Wall Street Journal](#), "New York real-estate brokers and landlords say they anticipate only 10% to 20% of Manhattan's office workers will return on Monday."

Other aspects of New York City's [Phase 2 reopening include](#):

- Outdoor dining
- Salons and barbershops
- Real estate services
- Car dealerships
- In-store retail

There's plenty that's still not open in New York, including malls, gyms, arenas and event spaces, movie theaters, and indoor dining and bar service, but this is a big moment for the biggest and most economically influential city in the U.S. One hugely symbolic moment for the city's recovery: on Friday, New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo gave his [final daily coronavirus briefing](#), after over three months of speaking to the public seven days a week, every week. Nevertheless, he cautioned that "COVID isn't over," and told New York to be prepared for a possible second wave in the near future.

"We reopened the economy and we saved lives. Because it was never a choice between one or the other, it was always right to do both," he said. "Today we

are seeing the virus spread in many places. More people will die, and it doesn't have to be that way. Forget the politics, be smart."

Fireworks Usage Is Exploding. But a July 4th Silence Awaits

You aren't imagining it: in cities across the U.S., people are setting off fireworks in the middle of the night with a regularity that is far from typical, even though July 4 is approaching. Boston police, for example, recorded 1,445 fireworks complaints in the first week of June, compared with 22 in the same week last year, according to the Boston *Herald*. At least in part, that might be due to the fact that so many July 4th events have been cancelled this year due to the pandemic.

TIME reporter Andrew R. Chow spoke with a number of people in the professional fireworks—ahem, *pyrotechnics*—industry, who, he writes, told him that “the widespread cancellation of Independence Day celebrations has left many wondering if they will make it to New Year’s without federal intervention.” And yet, the casual consumer business is doing gangbusters. “Usually there’s one week before July 4th where it’s like a mad rush,” one fireworks purveyor in Pennsylvania told Chow. “But that level of activity is happening now. Everyone is buying radically: they’re bored, and they have nothing to do at night. Fireworks fill in that little void instead of sitting at home and watching TV.”

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Today's newsletter was written and edited by Elijah Wolfson.

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