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## **BRIEF19**

*A daily review of covid-19 research and policy*

### **POLICY BRIEFING**

**New analysis: 130,000-210,000 United States coronavirus deaths were avoidable.**

This week, the National Center for Disaster Preparedness, out of Columbia University, [released](#) a chilling analysis of the cost in human lives that resulted from the federal government's missteps during the pandemic response. The analysis acknowledges pre-existing conditions within American healthcare, namely inequitable access to care, a broken system, and vast health disparities among minority groups, but lays the blame at the feet of the administration in no uncertain terms: "...an Administration that has publicly denigrated its own public health officials – and science more generally – thereby hamstringing efforts by its vaunted public health service to curb the pandemic's spread." The report breaks this down into four key failings:

- Insufficient testing capacity: after initial supply shortages limited effective testing, a lack of cohesive data gathering and analysis made contact tracing and epidemiologic study impossible
- Delayed response: there was no unified federal lockdown plan, and the recommendations that were released occurred after the virus was able to spread unchecked
- Lack of mask mandate or guidance: the White House [blocked](#) plans from the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) to ship 650 million masks, for free, in February, and the lack of use, approval, or encouragement of masks from the very top could lead to hundreds of thousands of more deaths.
- Politicization, leadership vacuum, and the failure of top officials to model best practices: the administration allowed partisan politics to override scientific evidence and "mocked" well-established public health guidelines.

The report does give proper due to some unavoidable factors, including population distribution, demographic changes, and comorbid conditions as confounding factors when compared to other countries. But the overall flavor of the analysis is to assign blame where blame is due. *The National Center for Disaster Preparedness.*

—Joshua Lesko, MD

### **Is covid-19 beyond control? Beyond belief.**

It is unsettling when the White House Chief of Staff, Mark Meadows, [states](#) in an interview that "We're not going to control the pandemic." This, following months of public health and infectious disease experts warning of "[twinfluenza](#)," the simultaneous occurrence of covid-19 and flu season, and the significant risk it will pose many American with chronic underlying health conditions. Many experts have [warned](#) of rising cases and second and third waves, if strict social distancing and quarantine guidelines were not followed. These predictions have since materialized. And yet, as early as March the administration privately [acknowledged](#) the infectivity and risk of a coronavirus pandemic, while [downplaying](#) it to the American public.

Later in the same interview, Meadows acknowledged that the administration was "making efforts" to contain the virus, but that they were focusing on making sure people "don't die from this." It is unclear what Meadows meant by this. But perhaps he was referring to [pushing](#) through a vaccine, which would now only be possible by ignoring the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) established safety guidelines, and by [sidelining](#) science at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

—Joshua Lesko, MD

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*Brief19 is a daily executive summary of covid-19-related medical research, news, and public policy. It was founded and created by frontline emergency medicine physicians with expertise in medical research critique, health and public policy.*