



scribe The Forward's Contributor Network

Is Trump lying about when he tested positive for the virus?

October 2, 2020

LOS ANGELES

By [Peter Dreier](#)

There's a good chance that President Donald Trump is lying about *when* he caught the virus and is thus downplaying the number of people he put in danger.

Given his history of lying about everything, journalists should be skeptical about the timing of Trump's disease. They should not rule out the possibility that he actually tested positive at least a few days earlier than he claims, and that he insisted that his doctor and staff keep it a secret so that he could participate in the past few days of meetings and rallies, which feed his insatiable ego.



According to Bloomberg News, “Some of Trump’s closest aides said they sensed on Wednesday that Trump was feeling poorly but they chalked it up to fatigue from an intense campaign schedule. The president seemed exhausted, one person familiar with the situation said.”

Of course, we cannot know at this point what the exact timeline was. The White House announced the quarantine of Trump and the First Lady several hours before they announced the test result. That sounds suspicious, since [apparently Trump gets tested “multiple times per day.”](#)

Trump has been exposed to people who’ve had the virus before — including President Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, national security adviser Robert O’Brien, Kimberly Guilfoyle (Donald Trump Jr.’s girlfriend), at least 25 Secret Service agents, and others — and didn’t bother to quarantine then or even begin wearing a mask and social distancing.

Given the incubation period, it is possible that Trump had the virus before his aide Hope Hicks. (She, by the way, flew on Air Force One even [after feeling sick](#) and did not immediately inform the press corps, with whom she works closely, about her symptoms).

It is even possible that Trump, whether or not he was aware that he had the virus, put Joe Biden at risk during Tuesday night’s debate (Biden has now [tested negative](#)).

Bloomberg reporter [Tyler Pager, who covered the debate, tweeted](#) that at Tuesday night’s debate in Cleveland, a physician from the esteemed Cleveland Clinic asked members of Trump’s entourage, who were sitting in the front row, to social distance and wear masks, and they refused to do so. In contrast, all of Biden’s family and staff were wearing masks at the debate.

But before I examine the consequences of Trump’s daily diet of lies and his incompetence in managing this national public health and economic crisis, I want to honor the many public health officials around the country who, over the past few months, have spoken truth to power about the seriousness of the virus, who warned Americans not to listen to Trump and his lies, and who in some cases put their own jobs at risk in order to protect the American public. At the top of that list should be Dr. Bruce Dart, the head of the Tulsa County Health Department in Oklahoma.

Dr. Dart bravely went public and urged city officials and the Trump campaign to cancel the June indoor rally at the BOK Center in Tulsa, warning that it could become a “super spreader” event and put many people at risk. (I was one of the first journalists to report this after my interview with him, for [The Daily Beast](#)). Trump and city officials ignored his warnings but many Trump followers took Dr. Dart seriously. As a result, turnout for the event — which Trump boasted would attract hundreds of thousands of people and would require several overflow venues — was embarrassingly small. There were just under 6,200 people in the arena, which had a capacity of 19,000. Dr. Dart’s action no doubt saved the lives of many people who might otherwise had gone to the rally and then spread the virus to others. Some of the people who attended the rally, including former GOP presidential candidate and Trump ally Herman Cain, contracted the virus. Cain died not long after that.

If Joe Biden is elected president, one of his first acts should be to give Dr. Dart the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

We know that since his 2016 campaign, Trump’s doctors have made [statements of questionable truthfulness](#) about his health, so why should we believe his current physician about when he contracted the virus? It is likely that Trump resisted immediately making it public, knowing that it would expose and embarrass him as a liar and hypocrite after six months of downplaying the reality of the virus, even calling it a Democratic “hoax,” and refusing to social distance or wear a mask, thus putting his staff, his family, and everyone he came in contact with at risk, as well as putting all the people who attended his rallies at risk (including the many people who got the virus after the Tulsa rally), and modeling bad behavior for his millions of followers who have ardently refused to obey rules about social distancing and mask-wearing.

It was amazing to watch both MSNBC and Fox News on the West coast Thursday night after Trump announced, via Twitter, that he and Mrs. Trump had the virus. MSNBC had serious medical experts making the point that there are no treatments for the virus, except dexamethasone and remdesivir, which are only used once a patient is in the ICU or needs a ventilator. Fox News, in contrast, had “experts” suggesting that there are some treatments that

Trump could try now. But today, even that change. On “Fox and Friends” this Friday morning, Dr. Mehmet Oz – who in most circumstances is hardly a reliable source — warned that the virus is “scarily contagious.” He said that it is necessary for Americans to wear masks to contain the virus. And he said that Trump, as an “obese” 74-year old, was always at serious risk of getting the virus.

As the responsible media are now pointing out, it is now imperative that public health people begin contact-tracing everyone that Trump, the First Lady, Hicks, and his entire inner circle came in contact with over the past week or 10 days, including all the people surrounding them at various events, including the debate.

There are so many political consequences of this that it is difficult to fathom. For example:

1. One assumes that the next two debates will be canceled, unless Trump is willing to agree to a remote debate, where he won't be able to be such a crazy bully IF the moderator does a better job than Chris Wallace did on Tuesday night.
2. Should the Trump administration and the Senate postpone any Senate hearings on Judge Amy Barrett's Supreme Court nomination until after the election? She was with Trump and a number of Senators and their staff throughout the past week. She apparently has tested negative for the virus — although false negatives are always a possibility. Regardless, more meetings and hearings could put many people in danger.
3. If Trump [becomes symptomatic](#) (and tells the truth about it), and Pence does, too (and tells the truth), they may be legally incapable of performing the duties of president. The Presidential Succession Act says that the Speaker of the House — Nancy Pelosi — would be next in line to serve as acting president. But for that to happen, a majority of the Cabinet has to agree that both Trump and Pence are too incapacitated to perform presidential duties, and that is highly unlikely, especially since it is unthinkable that they would acknowledge that (unless they both have to go to the hospital and put on ventilators).

4. We cannot expect Trump to act reasonably or responsibly under any circumstances. For example, a responsible person would acknowledge that he was wrong about the seriousness of the virus, and about the need for Americans to social distance and wear masks, and about his failures to listen to the public health scientists who called for bolder measures to protect Americans from the virus, acknowledging that his insistence on re-opening business and schools and holding rallies was a major mistake. He won't do any of this. But will public opinion now change with regard to Trump's irresponsible words and deeds that not only put himself but the entire country in danger? And will this reduce support for Trump in the key swing states, especially among independent voters but perhaps even among some Republicans who are not part of Trump's hard-core cult followers?
5. Will Trump's hard-core cult followers, as well as Republican governors, continue to resist following responsible guidelines for protecting the public from the virus? Will they keep insisting it is OK to open schools and businesses? Will they continue to refuse to wear masks and practice social distancing? Will they continue to hold protests and rallies in those states where Democratic governors and other public officials have insisted on following responsible public health guidelines? Or will Trump's announcement that he has the virus dampen their enthusiasm for reckless behavior and rules?
6. Will Dr. Anthony Fauci, Dr. Robert Redfield (head of the Centers for Disease Control), and other federal public health officials now be more vocal and honest about Trump's lies and mismanagement of the virus, Trump's efforts to muzzle them, and Trump's efforts to manipulate the CDC and other agencies, including his own virus task force?
7. The American Public Health Association should honor Dr. Dart of the Tulsa County Health Department and other public health officials who were not muzzled by Trump, who took science seriously, and whose actions saved lives by challenging Trump, Republican governors, and other public officials whose ignorance, cowardice, and

complicity in the face of this crisis will go down as one of the most shameful episodes in American history.

Peter Dreier is professor of politics and founding chair of the Urban & Environmental Policy Department at Occidental College.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Forward.