

# Trump Says Taking Malaria Drug Despite Risks



**U.S. President Donald Trump says he is using hydroxychloroquine, a malaria drug that US government regulators warn has "not been shown to be safe".**

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump said he is taking a malaria drug to protect against the coronavirus, despite warnings from his own government that it should only be administered for COVID-19 in a hospital or research setting due to potentially fatal side effects.

Trump told reporters Monday he has been taking the drug, hydroxychloroquine, and a zinc supplement daily "for about a week and a half now."

Trump has spent weeks pushing hydroxychloroquine as a potential cure or prophylaxis for COVID-19 against the cautionary advice of many of his administration's top medical professionals. The drug has the potential to cause significant side

effects in some patients and has not been shown to combat the new coronavirus.

Later, in a move that could have far-reaching medical impact during the pandemic, Trump tweeted a letter he had sent to the World Health Organization threatening to permanently drop U.S. funding unless WHO commits to "substantive improvements" over the next 30 days. The U.S. provides \$450 million a year to the organization.

WHO announced Monday it would launch an independent probe into how it managed the international response to the coronavirus, as most of its member states have requested. It did not commit to investigating the origins of the virus, another point of contention between Trump and

China.

At the White House, Trump said his doctor did not recommend hydroxychloroquine to him, but that he requested it from the White House physician.

"I started taking it, because I think it's good," Trump said. "I've heard a lot of good stories."

The White House physician, Dr. Sean Conley, said in a statement released through the White House press office that, after "numerous discussions" with Trump about the evidence for and against using hydroxychloroquine, "we concluded the potential benefit from treatment outweighed the relative risks."

The Food and Drug Administration warned health professionals last month that the drug should not be used to treat COVID-19 outside of hospital or research settings, due to sometimes fatal side effects. Regulators issued the alert for the drug, which can also be used to treat lupus and arthritis, after receiving reports of heart rhythm problems, including deaths, from poison control centers and other health providers.

Trump dismissed reports of side effects, saying, "All I can tell you is, so far I seem to be OK."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi told CNN, "He's our president, and I would rather he not be taking something that has not been approved by the scientists, especially in his age group and his, shall we say, weight group ... morbidly obese, they say."

## Top UK Epidemiologists:

# Tentative Signs Kids May Not Spread Coronavirus



**A man and children wearing protective face masks walk near a Chessington World of Adventures car park, Chessington, Britain, March 28, 2020.**

LONDON (Reuters) -- There are tentative signs that children do not spread the novel coronavirus as much as adults, two top epidemiologists said on Tuesday, though they cautioned that the bad news was that human immunity may not last that long.

As Europe and the United States try to get back to work after the first deadly wave of the novel coronavirus outbreak, world leaders are naying to work out when it is safe for children and students can get back to their studies.

The signs are that children may not spread it as much as adults, Dr Rosalind Eggo, who is on committees that advise the British government on its infectious disease response, told members of parliament's upper house.

"There is only one documented outbreak with a school - which is amazing," Edmunds said. But he added there was potentially bad news, though, that human immunity to the novel coronavirus may not last long.

"We think that children are less likely to get it so far but it is not certain, we are very certain that children are less likely to have severe outcomes and there are hints that children are less infectious but it is not certain," said Eggo of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

John Edmunds, a member of Britain's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), told the House of Lords' science committee that it was striking how children did not seem to play much of a role in spreading the novel coronavirus.

"It is unusual that children don't seem to play much of a role in transmission because for most respiratory viruses and bacteria they play a central role, but in this they don't seem to," said Edmunds, a professor at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

"There is only one documented outbreak with a school - which is amazing," Edmunds said.

But he added there was potentially bad news, though, that human immunity to the novel coronavirus may not last long.

# U.S. Trying to Shift Blame for Mishandling Crisis: China

BEIJING (Reuters/AP) -- China said the United States was trying to shift the blame for Washington's own mishandling of the COVID-19 crisis, responding to President Donald Trump's letter threatening to halt funding to the World Health Organization.

Trump threatened on Monday to reconsider the United States' membership of the World Health Organization (WHO) if the organization did not commit to improvements within 30 days, and said the body had shown an "alarming lack of independence" from China.

Chinese Foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told reporters on Tuesday that the United States was trying to smear China and had miscalculated by trying to use China to avoid its own responsibility.

Health experts say Trump's increasing attacks on the World Health Organization demonstrate a profound misunderstanding of the UN agency's role and could ultimately serve to weaken global health.

In a letter to the WHO's director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Trump wrote that the WHO's "repeated missteps" in its response to the pandemic have proven "very costly for the world."

On Monday, Trump threatened to permanently cut U.S. funding to the WHO unless the agency commits to "substantive improvements" in the next 30 days.

Devi Sridhar, a professor of global health at the Uni-

versity of Edinburgh, said the letter was likely written for Trump's political base and meant to deflect blame for the virus' devastating impact in the U.S., which has by far the most infections and virus deaths in the world.

"China and the U.S. are fighting it out like divorced parents while (the) WHO is the child caught in the middle, trying not to pick sides," she said.

"President Trump doesn't understand what the WHO can and cannot do," she said, explaining that it sets international standards and is driven by its member countries. "If he thinks they need more power, then member states should agree and delegate it more."

In Brussels, the European Union threw its weight behind the WHO, urging all countries to support it in the wake of Trump's continued attacks.

"This is the time for solidarity," said European Commission spokeswoman Virginie Battu-Henriksson. "It is not the time for finger pointing or undermining multilateral cooperation."

Trump's letter also cited "credible reports of the virus spreading in Wuhan in early December 2019 or even earlier, including reports from the Lancet medical journal."

On Tuesday, Lancet editor Dr. Richard Horton tweeted that the reference was inaccurate, noting it published the first reports of the disease only in January.

# Chinese Lab Believes New Drug Can Stop Pandemic



**Researchers say a drug being tested by scientists at China's prestigious Peking University offer short-term immunity from the virus.**

BEIJING (AFP) -- A Chinese laboratory has been developing a drug it believes has the power to bring the coronavirus pandemic to a halt.

The outbreak first emerged in China late last year before spreading across the world, prompting an international race to find treatments and vaccines.

A drug being tested by scientists at China's prestigious Peking University could not only shorten the recovery time for those infected, but even offer short-term immunity from the virus, researchers say.

Sunney Xie, director of the university's Beijing Advanced Innovation Center for Genomics, told AFP that the drug has been successful at the animal testing stage.

"When we injected neutralizing antibodies into infected mice, after five days the viral load was reduced by a factor of 2,500," said Xie. "That means this potential drug has (a) therapeutic effect."

The drug uses neutralizing antibodies -- produced by the human immune system -- to prevent the virus infecting cells -- which Xie's team isolated from the blood of 60 recovered patients.

A study on the team's research, published Sunday in the scientific journal Cell, suggests that using the antibodies provides a potential "cure" for the disease and shortens recovery time.

Xie said his team had been working "day and night" searching for the anti-

body.

"Our expertise is single-cell genomics rather than immunology or virology. When we realized that the single-cell genomic approach can effectively find the neutralizing antibody we were thrilled."

He said he hopes that the drug will be ready for use later this year and in time for any potential winter outbreak of the virus, which has infected 4.8 million people around the world and killed more than 315,000.

"Planning for the clinical trial is underway," said Xie, adding it will be carried out in Australia and other countries since cases have dwindled in China, offering fewer human guinea pigs for testing.

"The hope is these neutralizing antibodies can become a specialized drug that would stop the pandemic," he said.

China already has five potential coronavirus vaccines at the human trial stage, a health official said last week.

But the World Health Organization has warned that developing a vaccine could take 12 to 18 months.

Scientists have also pointed to the potential benefits of plasma -- a blood fluid -- from recovered individuals who have developed antibodies to the virus enabling the body's defenses to attack it.

More than 700 patients have received plasma therapy in China, a process which authorities said showed "very good therapeutic effects".

# Russian PM Recovers as New Infections Decline



**Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin chairs a meeting on measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) via video link in Moscow, April 8, 2020.**

MOSCOW (AFP) -- Russia's Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin returned to his duties on Tuesday after recovering from the coronavirus, as total infections approached 300,000 and officials said new cases were dropping off.

President Vladimir Putin signed a decree reinstating Mishustin as the head of government, nearly three weeks after the prime minister announced on television he had tested positive for coronavirus.

Mishustin checked himself into hospital and his deputy was named interim prime minister, but he continued to participate in meetings via video-link wearing a suit and tie.

The 54-year-old former tax chief was appointed prime minister in a surprise government shake-up earlier this year but had little time to make an impact before the coronavirus pandemic hit.

His reinstatement came after health officials reported 9,263 new infections in Russia over the last 24 hours, bringing the total to 299,941, the second-highest in the world after the United States.

Mishustin was just one of several high-ranking Russian officials to have been infected, including the ministers of culture, education and construction, as well as Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

The prime minister said Monday that Rus-

sia had stopped the growth of new infections, but cautioned that the situation remained "difficult".

He credited a nationwide lockdown and "systematic work" over the past two months for slowing the rate of new infections.

The Kremlin last week eased nationwide anti-virus measures imposed in March and Mishustin said Monday that dozens of regions throughout the country were ready to gradually lift lockdown orders.

Tuesday's tally saw new cases fall below 10,000 for the fourth day in a row, after Monday's count saw new infections under 9,000 for the first time since the beginning of May.

A majority of infections in Russia are centralized in the capital, which has extended its lockdown until the end of May, with residents only allowed to leave their homes for brief trips to a shop, to walk dogs or to travel to essential jobs with a permit.

Yet Putin this week said the emerging hotspot of Dagestan in Russia's North Caucasus required urgent attention after a top official this weekend said hundreds of people in the region might have died from the virus.

"All of Russia will be with Dagestan now," Putin said, addressing residents of the region after a local health official said nearly 700 may have died from the virus including 40 medics.

## News in Brief

PARIS (Reuters) -- Defectors from Emmanuel Macron's ruling party announced the creation of a new group in France's lower house of parliament on Tuesday, depriving the president of an outright majority and raising pressure for more left-wing policies. Seven lawmakers are splintering from Macron's La Republique En March (LREM) to join the new "Ecology, Democracy, Solidarity" group, which will count 17 parliamentarians in its ranks. That means Macron's party now only has 288 MPs, one short of an absolute majority, and down from the 314 Macron had after he redrew the political landscape in 2017. However, 17 is less than the 58 MPs suggested by media reports earlier this month, indicating that party bigwigs had managed to stem the flow. Macron's party, formed by the former banker to propel him to the presidency in 2017, had already suffered a string of defections by lawmakers frustrated by his tight grip on decision-making and his pro-business policies.

NEW DELHI (Reuters) -- Coronavirus cases in India reached 100,000 on Tuesday, matching its number of intensive care beds, and the rate of increase of new infections showed little sign of slowing. India reported 4,970 new cases over the previous 24 hours, taking its total to 101,139. Deaths rose by 134 to 3,163. India's number of cases has easily outstripped that of China, where the virus emerged late last year and which has been one of Asia's infection hot spots. China has reported nearly 83,000 cases but has kept its daily rise in new infections to single digits for the past week. In contrast, new cases in India have risen by an average of more than 4,000 a day over the past week, according to a Reuters tally based on official data, despite a severe weeks-long lockdown. India officially extended the lockdown on Sunday to May 31, although several states indicated they would allow businesses to reopen. Health experts and officials are worried about the strain the epidemic is placing on India's over-stretched and under-funded hospital system.

MASERU (Reuters) -- Lesotho's Prime Minister Thomas Thabane bowed to pressure to resign on Tuesday, three months after police named him and his current wife as suspects in the murder of his former wife in a case that has transfixed the southern African nation. Thabane's departure marks the end of one of Lesotho's longest political careers, one marked by exile, intrigue, tensions with the military and a political crisis that deepened when police named him as a murder suspect in February. His own All Basotho Convention (ABC) party, opposition figures and South African mediators had all been pressing Thabane to resign over the murder case. Gummen shot dead his previous wife, Lipolelo, on June 14, 2017, two days before he took office. Maesiah has been formally charged with the murder. Though named as a suspect, Thabane has not been charged. They both deny any involvement.

PRAGUE (Reuters) -- The Czech Republic reported its biggest daily rise in new coronavirus cases in four weeks, climbing by 111 to an overall total to 8,594 as of Tuesday morning. The health ministry also reported two new deaths, putting the toll from the virus at 299 in the central European country. The rise is partly due to an outbreak reported by state-owned coal miner OKD at its Dalkov mine near the eastern town of Karvina, close to the Polish border, Czech Radio reported. The radio said 53 cases had been confirmed among 860 miners tested by Monday evening. The government has been eager to reopen the economy in recent weeks by getting most shops up and running along with cinemas, theatres and outdoor pubs and dining places, and lifting some restrictions on cross-border travel.

SANTIAGO (AFP) -- Around half of Chile's 50-member senate and four ministers have been placed in quarantine after coming into contact with at least three colleagues infected with the novel coronavirus, officials said, as jobless protesters in a poor area of Santiago clashed with police to demand food aid. Finance Minister Ignacio Briones and Chief of Staff Felipe Ward both wrote on Twitter that they had tested negative for the virus but were in quarantine until a second test is conducted. The ministers of the interior and social development are also in isolation. At the end of last week, around 20 legislators began isolation after meeting with Pizarro and another infected senator. Last Wednesday, Chile recorded a 60 percent spike in daily coronavirus cases despite a month and a half of preventative measures, including a selective lockdown.

PARIS (Reuters) -- Rwandan genocide fugitive Felicien Kabuga was due to appear before a Paris court on Tuesday, three days after French police swooped on his hideout in a Paris suburb, ending a 26-year manhunt. The 84-year-old is accused of funding militias that massacred around 800,000 people. He was indicted in 1997 on seven criminal counts including genocide, all in relation to the 1994 Rwanda genocide. At Tuesday's hearing, which is procedural, the court was to set out the legal process before passing the case to investigative judges who will decide whether to hand Kabuga to a UN court handling alleged crimes against humanity. At least one France-based genocide victim support group said it was considering legal action to unearh how Kabuga was able to go underground in France and what help he had received.