

Don't inject disinfectant: Blunt pushback on Trump musing

24 April 2020, by Deb Riechmann and Kevin Freking



The last package of Lysol disinfectant wipes sits on a shelf at the Piggly Wiggly on North Avenue in Athens, Ga., Friday, March 13, 2020. The public has been buying up hand sanitizer, toilet paper, cleaning supplies, and even food in reaction to the spread of coronavirus but the management of Piggly Wiggly says items will be restocked every Sunday and Wednesday. (Joshua L. Jones/Athens Banner-Herald via AP)

President Donald Trump's comment that disinfectants perhaps could be injected or ingested to fight COVID-19 received heavy pushback from health and other officials Friday and even prompted the maker of Lysol to warn its product should never be used internally.

"As a global leader in health and hygiene products, we must be clear that under no circumstance should our disinfectant products be administered into the human body (through injection, ingestion or any other route)," said the statement from Reckitt Benckiser, parent company of the maker of Lysol and Dettol.

The White House claimed Trump's comment was misrepresented, but the government also leapt in

to caution the nation.

The Surgeon General's office tweeted Friday: "A reminder to all Americans- PLEASE always talk to your health provider first before administering any treatment/ medication to yourself or a loved one. Your safety is paramount, and doctors and nurses are have years of training to recommend what's safe and effective."

Trump noted Thursday that researchers were looking at the effects of disinfectants on the virus and wondered aloud if they could be injected into people, saying the virus "does a tremendous number on the lungs, so it would be interesting to check that."

The White House accused the media of taking Trump's comments out of context.

"President Trump has repeatedly said that Americans should consult with medical doctors regarding coronavirus treatment, a point that he emphasized again during yesterday's briefing," White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said in a statement. "Leave it to the media to irresponsibly take President Trump out of context and run with negative headlines."

Trump has acknowledged several times that he's "not a doctor," but has previously suggested various ideas for fighting the novel coronavirus. Earlier, he repeatedly promoting the drug hydroxychloroquine, saying such drugs could be a potential "game changer" in the fight against the virus.

On Friday, the Food and Drug Administration warned that people should not take chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19 outside of a hospital or formal clinical trial, citing reports of "serious heart rhythm problems."



President Donald Trump speaks about the coronavirus in the James Brady Press Briefing Room of the White House, Thursday, April 23, 2020, in Washington. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon)

Trump's comments on disinfectants came after William Bryan, who leads the Science and Technology Directorate at the Department of Homeland Security, spoke at the Thursday briefing about how researchers are testing the effect of disinfectants on virus-laden saliva and respiratory fluids in the laboratory. They kill the virus very quickly, he said.

"And is there a way we can do something like that, by injection inside or almost a cleaning," Trump said. "Because you see it gets in the lungs and it does a tremendous number on the lungs. So it would be interesting to check that. So, that, you're going to have to use medical doctors with. But it sounds—it sounds interesting to me."

Bryan said injections weren't part of the disinfectant research.

The president has often talked up prospects for new therapies and has offered rosy timelines for the development of a vaccine as he encourages states to move to reopen their economies.

On Thursday, the White House also pitched "emerging" research on the benefits of sunlight and humidity in diminishing the threat of the virus.

Past studies have not found good evidence that the warmer temperatures and higher humidity of spring and summer will help tamp down the spread of the virus.

But Bryan said at a White House briefing Thursday that there are "emerging results" from new research that suggest solar light has a powerful effect in killing the virus on surfaces and in the air. He said scientists have seen a similar effect from higher temperatures and humidity. A biocontainment lab in Maryland has been conducting testing on the virus since February, Bryan said.

"The virus is dying at a much more rapid pace just from exposure to higher temperatures and just from exposure to humidity," Bryan said.

Trump was asked if it was dangerous to make people think they would be safe by going outside in the heat, considering that so many people have died in Florida.



President Donald Trump speaks about the coronavirus in the James Brady Press Briefing Room of the White House, Thursday, April 23, 2020, in Washington. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon)

"I hope people enjoy the sun. And if it has an impact, that's great," Trump replied, adding, "It's just a suggestion from a brilliant lab by a very, very smart, perhaps brilliant man."

"I'm here to present ideas, because we want ideas to get rid of this thing. And if heat is good, and if sunlight is good, that's a great thing as far as I'm concerned," the president said.

Bryan stressed that the emerging results of the light and heat studies do not replace social distancing recommendations.

Earlier in the month, scientific advisers told the White House there's no good evidence yet that the heat and humidity of summer will rein in the virus without continued public health measures.

Researchers convened by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine analyzed studies done so far to test virus survival under different laboratory conditions as well as tracking where and how COVID-19 has spread so far.

"Given that countries currently in 'summer' climates, such as Australia and Iran, are experiencing rapid virus spread, a decrease in cases with increases in humidity and temperature elsewhere should not be assumed," the researchers wrote earlier in April in response to questions from the White House Office of Science and Technology.

In addition, the report cited the global lack of immunity to the new virus and concluded, "If there is an effect of temperature and humidity on transmission, it may not be as apparent as with other respiratory viruses for which there is at least some preexisting partial immunity."

The report noted that during 10 previous flu pandemics, regardless of what season they started, all had a peak second wave about six months after the virus first emerged.

In March, Dr. Michael Ryan, the World Health Organization's emergencies chief, said, "We have to assume that the virus will continue to have the capacity to spread, and it's a false hope to say yes, it will just disappear in the summertime like influenza."

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APA citation: Don't inject disinfectant: Blunt pushback on Trump musing (2020, April 24) retrieved 16 August 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-04-dont-disinfectants-lysol-trump-idea.html>

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