



**CORONAVIRUS**

# Outbreak means (mis)information overload: How to cope

By **BARBARA ORTUTAY AND DAVID KLEPPER**  
*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The coronavirus pandemic is leading to information overload for many people, often making it difficult to separate fact from fiction and rumor from deliberate efforts to mislead.

Already, text messages predicting a nationwide lockdown have circulated, along with social media posts telling people one way to get tested for the virus is by donating blood or warning that mosquitoes can carry it. All are untrue. Such falsehoods can endanger public health, sow confusion and prevent important information from

reaching people during a crisis. The Associated Press has debunked many such claims, including one about bananas supposedly preventing people from catching the virus and another on “Harry Potter” actor Daniel Radcliffe testing positive.

COVID-19, the illness caused by the virus, has stricken thousands across the globe but usually presents only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For older adults and people with other health problems, it can cause complications or sometimes death. Most people recover.

Here are some things you can do to separate fact from misinformation:

**Look for the source**

We are more likely to believe things our friends tell us — that’s human nature. It’s why rumors spread and why misinformation travels on social media. It’s also why the chain text message warning of a nationwide lockdown worked so well: Everyone heard it from a friend of a friend who “knows someone.” Be wary of important-sounding information that is not coming from a clear, authoritative source, such as local government agencies and health departments, or national and international public health institutes, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organiza-

tion. Posts may also claim that a politician said or did something. You can check that information through legitimate news outlets or the candidates’ own verified social media accounts.

**CDC and WHO**

The top public health institutes in the United States and other countries, along with the WHO, are some of the most trusted sources of information about the outbreak. They provide the latest statistics, advisories and guides on everything from sanitizing your home to managing stress.

Dr. Jessica Justman, an infectious disease expert at Columbia University, said

the sheer amount of information online about the coronavirus pandemic can quickly become overwhelming. That’s one reason she encourages people to check the websites of the CDC and the WHO.

“It’s not just misinformation, it’s also a lack of good information,” Justman said. “There’s so much information out there that many people are just saying ‘I can’t read it, it makes me too anxious.’”

“Go straight to the source,” she said. “The CDC has been putting out great information.”

**Don’t believe everything**

Bad actors and trolls look-

ing to exploit people’s fears around coronavirus are using a variety of techniques to sow confusion. False news articles are just a small part of this.

Photos and videos can be edited and altered, and real images can be presented out of context.

Americans have a duty not to add to an already anxious time by spreading misinformation that could alarm others — or put them at risk, said Dr. Ruth Parker, a physician at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta and an expert on health literacy.

“It’s a scary time,” Parker said. “We don’t want to add fuel to the fire. Good information won’t cure us, but it will help to calm us.”

## Loss of smell, taste, might signal coronavirus infection

By **MALCOLM RITTER**  
*AP Science Writer*

NEW YORK — A loss of smell or taste might be an early sign of infection with the pandemic virus, say medical experts who cite reports from several countries.

It might even serve as a useful screening tool, they say.

The idea of a virus infection reducing sense of smell is not new. Respiratory viral infection is a common cause of loss of smell, because inflammation can interfere with airflow and the ability to detect odors. The sense of smell usually returns when the infection resolves, but in a small percentage of cases, smell loss can persist after other symptoms disappear. In some cases, it is permanent.

Now, there’s “good evidence” from South Korea, China and Italy for loss or impairment of smell in infected people, says a joint statement from the presidents of the British Rhinological Society and of ENT UK, a British group that represents ear, nose and throat doctors.

In South Korea, some 30% of people who tested positive for the virus have cited loss of smell as their major complaint in otherwise mild cases, they wrote.

So that might be useful as a way to spot infected people without other symptoms — fever, coughing and shortness of breath — of the new coronavirus, they wrote.

A similar proposal was published Sunday by the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery. It noted “rapidly accumulating” anecdotal evidence from around the world that the pandemic virus can cause not only loss of smell but also a diminished sense of taste. So the appearance of those symptoms in people without another explanation should alert doctors to the possibility of a COVID-19 infection, the group said.

Maria Van Kerkhove, an outbreak expert at the World Health Organization, told reporters Monday that the U.N. health agency is looking into the question of whether the loss of smell or taste are a defining feature of the disease.

## Tensions rise as virus aid stalls in Washington

By **LISA MASCARO, ANDREW TAYLOR AND JONATHAN LEMIRE**  
*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Tensions flared Monday as Washington strained to respond to the worsening coronavirus outbreak, with Congress arguing over a nearly \$2 trillion economic rescue package and an impatient President Donald Trump musing openly about letting the 15-day shutdown expire.

As the U.S. braces for an onslaught of sick Americans, and millions are forced indoors to avert a spike that risks overwhelming hospitals, the most ambitious federal intervention in modern times is testing whether Washington can swiftly halt the pandemic on the home front. By evening, it appeared there would be no further votes Monday, and talks would push into the night.

“It’s time to get with the program, time to pass historic relief,” said an angry Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell as he opened the chamber after a nonstop weekend session that failed to produce a deal. “This is a



AP Photo/Andrew Harnik  
**Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell walks to the Senate Chamber on Capitol Hill in Washington on Monday as the Senate is working to pass a coronavirus relief bill.**

national emergency.” Fuming, McConnell warned Democrats — pointedly House Speaker Nancy Pelosi — to quit stalling on “political games,” as he described Democratic efforts to steer more of the aid toward public health and workers.

Trump, who has largely been hands off from the negotiations, weighed in late Monday from the White House briefing room, declaring that Congress should vote “for the Senate bill as written,” dismissing any Democratic proposal.

“It must go quickly,”

Trump said. “This is not the time for political agendas.”

The president also sounded a note of frustration about the unprecedented modern-day effort to halt the virus’s march by essentially shutting down public activities in ways that now threaten the U.S. economy.

Even though Trump’s administration recommended Americans curtail activities starting a week ago, the president said: “We cannot let the cure be worse than the problem itself. At the end of the 15-day period, we will make a decision as to which

way we want to go.” “Let’s go to work,” he said. “This country was not built to be shut down. This is not a county that was built for this.”

Trump said that he may soon allow parts of the nation’s economy, in regions less badly hit by the virus, to begin reopening, contradicting the advice of medical and public health experts across the country, if not the globe, to hunker down even more firmly.

Pelosi assailed Trump’s idea and fluctuating response to the crisis.

“He’s a notion-monger, just tossing out things that have no relationship to a well coordinated, science-based, government-wide response to this,” Pelosi said on a health care conference call. “Thank God for the governors who are taking the lead in their state. Thank God for some of the people in the administration who speak truth to power.”

The White House team, led by Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, worked on Capitol Hill for a fourth straight day of talks as negotiators narrowed on a bipartisan accord.

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 |   |   |   | 4 | 1 |   |   |   |
|   | 4 | 6 |   | 9 |   |   |   |   |
| 9 |   | 1 |   | 6 |   | 8 | 3 | 4 |
| 7 |   | 5 |   | 4 | 3 |   | 1 |   |
|   |   | 4 |   | 8 |   | 3 |   |   |
|   | 1 |   | 6 | 5 |   | 4 |   | 9 |
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