

Latest partisan flashpoint: Gap between rising confirmed coronavirus infections and relatively flat death rate

President Donald Trump has brushed off the coronavirus surge by [emphasizing the lower death rate](#), saying that “99 percent of [COVID-19 cases] are totally harmless.” On [July 7], Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, warned Americans against “[taking] comfort in the lower rate of death” just hours before Trump [tweeted triumphantly](#): “Death Rate from Coronavirus is down tenfold!”

In the [fog of pandemic](#), every statistic tells a story, but no one statistic tells the whole truth. Conservatives seeking refuge in today’s death counts may find, in a matter of days, that deaths are clearly resurging and their narrative is rapidly deteriorating. But liberals, too, should avoid the temptation to flatly reject any remotely positive finding, for fear that it will give succor to the president.

What follows are five possible explanations for the case-death gap. Take them as complementary, rather than competing, theories.

1. Deaths lag cases—and that might explain almost everything.

You can’t have a serious discussion about case and death numbers without noting that people die of diseases after they get sick. It follows that there should be a lag between a surge in cases and a surge in deaths... As this chart from the [COVID Tracking Project](#) shows, the official reporting of a COVID-19 death can lag COVID-19 exposure by up to a month. This suggests that the surge in deaths is coming.

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