

HEALTH CARE

We must be smart about social distancing, Birx urges

"We've learned a lot about this virus. But we now need to translate that learning into real changed behavior."



Dr. Deborah Birx. | Alex Brandon/AP Photo

By **RISHIKA DUGYALA**

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As the United States approaches the grim milestone of 100,000 deaths and the long Memorial Day weekend brings large crowds, Dr. Deborah Birx said it's "our job to continue to communicate" the importance of social distancing.

On Friday, Birx — the coordinator of the White House coronavirus task force — said people could enjoy the outdoors as long as they remained mindful of protecting one another.

On Sunday, ABC "This Week" co-anchor Martha Raddatz asked her whether that is the right call. The holiday, which signals the start of summer, has put social distancing to the test: Several cities have already seen packed beaches,

"It's our job as public health officials every day to be informing the public of what puts them at risk," Birx said. "We really want to be clear all the time that social distancing is absolutely critical. And if you can't social distance and you're outside, you must wear a mask."

She continued: "We've learned a lot about this virus. But we now need to translate that learning into real changed behavior."

Raddatz countered, "But I guess that's my point, you're not seeing it across the country. You're not seeing it at those beaches."

"And I think that's our job to continue to communicate. And I think we have to communicate through different venues, making sure that our Generation Zs and our Millennials can help us get that message out there," Birx said.

According to [a database from Johns Hopkins University](#), there have been more than 1.6 million cases and 97,000 deaths in the country. The New York Times in its Sunday edition [ran a striking front page](#): No ads, no pictures, no graphics. Just the names and one-line descriptions of 1,000 people lost to Covid-19.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the administration's top infectious disease expert, has said the death count is almost certainly higher and that a second wave is inevitable. President Donald Trump is adamant the country will not close again.

Birx on Sunday said each case and death is very important to understand. Counting the numbers during the early part of an epidemic was challenging, she said, but, “We’ve been very inclusive.” She added that officials are preparing for a second wave, though she can't say whether the country will need to close down. Birx pointed to a need for better, proactive testing.

“You know, we act like we've actually done this before, and besides 1918 and 1919, we’ve not ever closed parts of America. And even then, the whole country wasn't closed,” Birx said speaking of the Spanish Flu pandemic.

“I really am data-driven, so I'm collecting data right now about whether governors and whether states and whether communities are able to open safely.”

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