

Dr. Fauci says coronavirus antibody tests are 'days or weeks away' and will allow Americans to get back to work if they can prove they've had COVID-19 and recovered from it

Jennifer Smith

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the White House coronavirus expert, has said antibody tests that will determine if a person has had the virus and recovered it will become available on a mass scale in a matter of 'days or weeks'.

Dr Fauci, appearing on Today on NBC on Thursday, said the tests were being developed by private companies that the government had partnered with.

They will be crucial to restarting the economy and may even become a requirement for some people before they can get back to work.

The test will identify if a person has antibodies in their blood which suggests they have successfully recovered from COVID-19 without ever knowing they had it.

However, similar tests being done in Europe have failed to identify a single person who has the antibody.

How long a person can stay immune from the virus is not yet known, and it is also not clear if the tests are sensitive enough to nail down whether or not a person ever had COVID-19.



'We are told by the companies that make [the tests] that [it will be] very soon... they're talking days to weeks, that we'd be able to have a large number of these tests available.'

'They don't tell you if you're infected, they tell you if you have been infected. That answer is very important.

'There may be many people out there that were infected and asymptomatic and didn't know it.

'It is likely, but we need to prove it, once you've been infected... that you are very likely protected against subsequent challenges to the same virus, which means you may have a cohort of people who are actually protected,' he said.

How and where the tests will become available to the general public remains unclear.

In New York - by far the worst hit state in the country - the state department of health has approved its own antibody test that it is now trying to bring to a mass scale.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo said earlier this week it would be crucial to restarting the local economy.

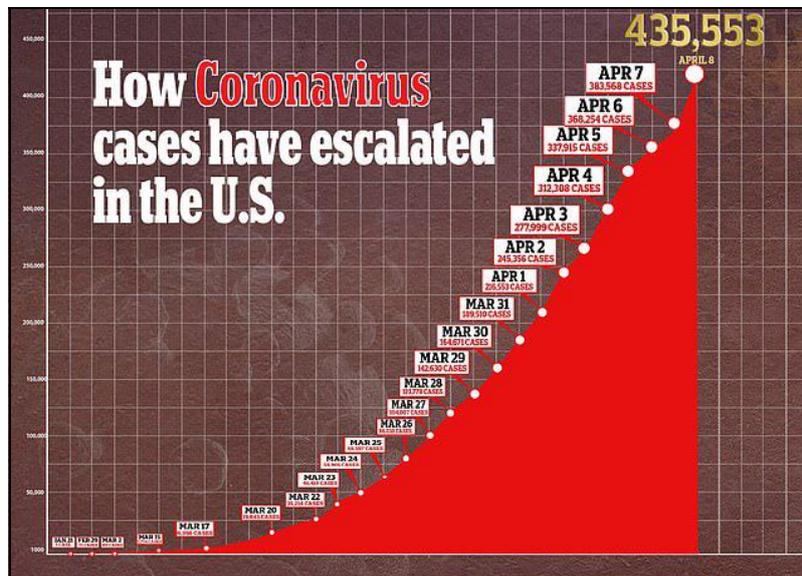
It is unclear where and when those tests will become available but he is also asking private companies to partner with the states of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut to bring them to mass market.

*Dr Fauci also appeared on **CBS This Morning** where he warned that getting back to 'normal' life will be a gradual process.*

Speaking about what we can expect to see come the summer Dr Fauci said: 'You know, it looks like things are going to be improving.

'If you look at the curves that we talk about, we often talk about flattening the curve, and then getting around the corner and coming down. If, in fact, we see that - and it will be differential in different parts of the country.

'I mean, New York City, the terrible ordeal that they've gone through is very different from some of the places in the middle of the country or the mountain regions. So when you say get back to normal, it's not going to be a light switch that you turn on and off. It's going to be differential and gradual depending upon where you are and where the burden of infection is.

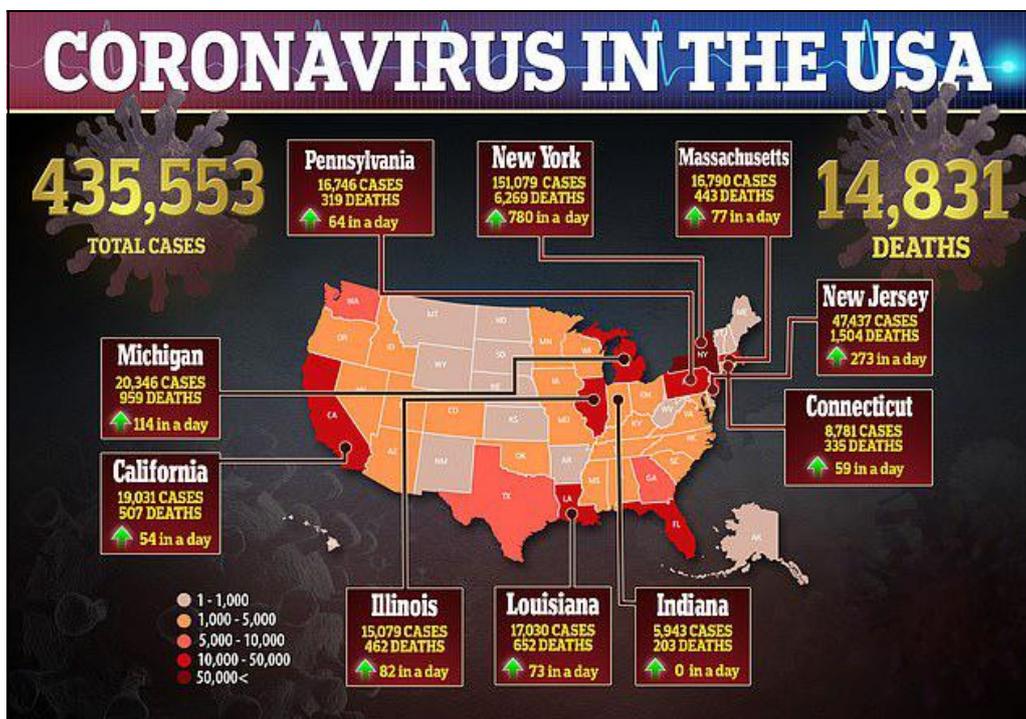


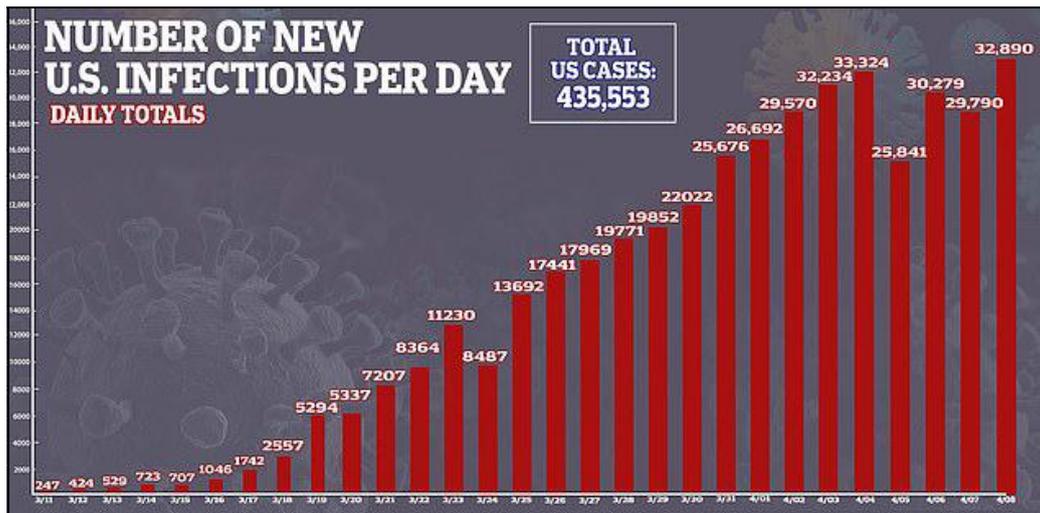
Asked if people can expect to be taking vacation or attending functions come the summer he said: 'It can be in the cards, and I say that with caution because as I said, when we do that, when we pull back and try to open up the country as we often use that terminology, we have to be prepared that when the infection starts to rear their heads again, that we have in place a very aggressive and effective way to identify, isolate, contact, trace, and make sure we don't have those spikes that we've seen now. So the answer to your question is yes, if we do the things that we need to do to prevent the resurgence.'

He added: 'But the bottom line of it all is that we see looking forward, it is very likely that we will progress toward the steps toward normalization as we get to the end of this 30 days. And I think that's going to be a good time to see how quickly can we make that move to try and normalize. But hopefully by the time we get to the summer, we will have taken many steps in that direction.'

Dr. Fauci also told Today that New York City - the epicenter of the crisis - was the first hit because so many cases arrived from northern Italy, likely months ago, before the US even knew it was a threat.

The country had focused its attention on **China**, where the virus originated, and Trump closed the border to all flights from there early but the virus had already spread to Europe and exploded there.





'Europe became the epicenter pretty quickly after China and it really exploded with their cases.

'We cut off travel from China early and we were seeded with relatively few cases from China but quickly, it switched to Europe, particularly northern Italy, given the air traffic from there.

'It's just not surprising that New York was seeded before they really knew what was going on and that's why they're in the very unfortunate situation they're in now,' he said.

New York has now seen more than 6,000 deaths across the state, including at least 4,000 in New York City.

The death toll is expected to keep rising as people who entered the hospital 10 days or several weeks ago fail to recover or come off ventilators, but the rate of hospitalization and ICU admissions is decreasing which suggests the peak has arrived.

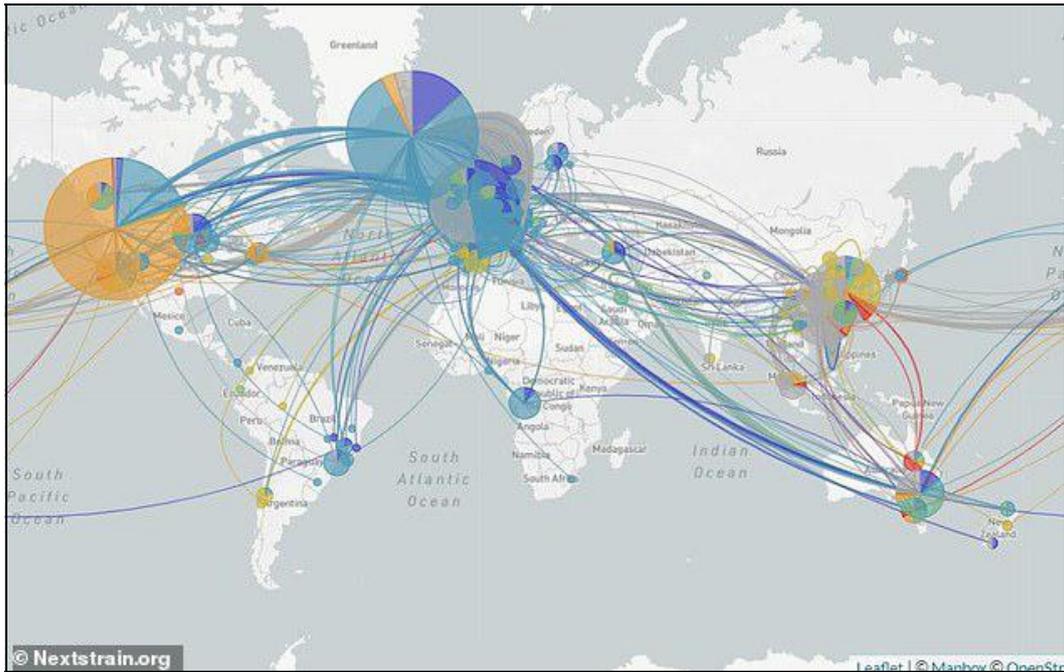
'It's tough to tell. We very well may be there. It's looking like it's going to make a turn, but you know, I am cautiously optimistic. I think that is what's going on,' Fauci said.

Later, he told Today: 'The number of deaths and the cases that we're seeing right now are really validating what we said that this was going to be a very bad week...

'On the other hand, there are some glimmers of hope particularly when you look at the situation in New York.

'So even though we're seeing that increase in deaths... but what feeds that is the number of new cases. Mitigation is starting to have an effect.

'I think that is the case. You want to see several steady days. I'm always very cautious of jumping the gun but I think we're really looking at the beginning of that.'



He added that on a national scale, the data is showing that fewer people than projected are dying from the virus.

The White House initially warned that as many as 200,000 Americans could die from coronavirus, based on projections.

That number has since reduced to 100,000 and is now sitting at around 60,000.

The decrease is 'good news', Fauci said, and is down to the fact that the projections are based on assumptions which are near impossible to get right.

'You get models to try to help you project such as the need for beds, ventilators.. but the models are only as good as the assumptions you put into the model.

'One of the assumptions was the efficacy of the mitigation that New York is doing intensely.

'The data always trumps the model so you take the data and refashion the model,' he said.

He added: 'What we need to do is make sure we don't let up on the physical separation programs.

'We got to make sure we keep our foot on the accelerator.'

Dr. Fauci said he 'hopes' April 30 will be the date the country can start to look at 'gradually' getting back to normal but that it depends on the data. '

'We hope when we get to the extended 30 days, I do hope by the time we get there, we will see the curve in that bending, which we've been talking about now.

'You should not assume that the virus will diminish because of the coming of warm weather,' he went on, adding: 'One should not assume that we'll be rescued by a change in the weather.'

Even when society resumes, Fauci said people should still be vigilant about touching one another - specifically shaking hands.

'I think at least for a while, I think we should refrain from that right now, we need to concentrate on the physical separation,' he said.