

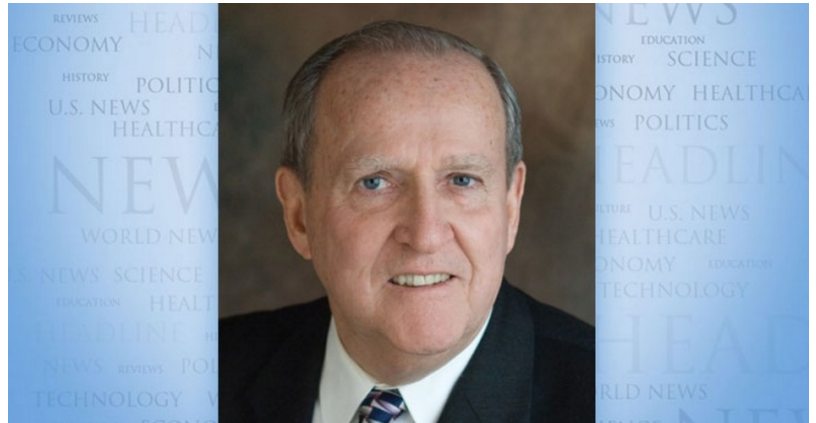


Written by [John F. McManus](#) on March 10, 2020

Questions About Coronavirus Scare

With information supplied by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the *New York Times* reported last Saturday that, in the United States, 283 cases of people had tested positive for the coronavirus. As of the same date and the same source, there have been 14 deaths, all but one in the state of Washington.

During the preceding three weeks, government officials and the mass media have been warning Americans about this new disease and listing various precautions to take in order to keep from being infected. Frightened people have cleaned out stocks of face masks, hand wipes, aerosol sprays, and more from stores, mail order markets, and doctor's offices. Fears have caused some schools and businesses to close their doors; a popular annual festival in Texas was cancelled; and some sporting events have been played in front of empty arenas.



During this same period, the stock market suffered enormous losses, airlines have canceled many flights, and the cruise ship industry has seen fully loaded vessels denied access to ports with the result that vacationers on board are not able to disembark. Without doubt, churches will find fewer congregants as will any other normal gatherings of people. More preventive measures are being considered.

What is occurring cannot yet be described as a panic. But that's exactly where we are heading. There have even been hints of imposing martial law. The mass media, the government, and many medical experts ought to calm down. A look at some statistics compiled in the recent past ought to result in less worry, and fewer — even possibly none — instances of the public's conduct over several recent weeks. So let's take a look at what happened in the previous year when there was no such fright peddling.

We are now in the waning weeks of the 2019-2020 winter season. Medical experts tell that the arrival of spring and the summer that follows should lead to termination of the threat of this new flu-like disease. All of its fright-laden effects will disappear — or at least be minimized — when the sun kills the virus. That surely is good news.

But is the current near panic justified? According to the CDC, our nation experienced an enormous number of casualties from influenza during the last year's winter (2018-2019). The figures supplied by the CDC for last year are: 35.5 million people contracted influenza, 490,600 were hospitalized, and 34,200 died because of this single disease. Comparing those numbers with this year's coronavirus totals of 14 deaths and 283 cases should make anyone wonder what's going on.

There weren't any comparable headlines about influenza's casualties during the the 2018-2019 winter.



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But doesn't a total of 34,200 deaths last year make all of the hype about 14 deaths to date seem a bit overdone? Last winter, there weren't any semi-panicked people gobbling up supplies of preventive potions, equipment, etc. Influenza caused its usual problems as it has year after year. But tens of thousands of deaths attributed to that single disease didn't lead to any huge stock market slide, closed schools and businesses, empty arenas, and more.

Just as it's proper for medical authorities to seek a cure of any disease, there should be effort to put the dangers of the coronavirus in proper perspective. But let's be sensible about how great a threat it really poses. And let's cease reliance on those whose reporting about this new disease has generated near panic.

John F. McManus is president emeritus of [The John Birch Society](#).



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