

## FEATURE

# VOA Interview: Fauci Optimistic About COVID Vaccine, Urges Protesters to Wear Masks

By VOA Russian Service

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[VOA's Russian service discusses the pandemic with Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, June 11, 2020.](#)

As U.S. cases of COVID-19 passed two million, VOA's Russian service discussed the pandemic with Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease. Fauci urged those taking part in protests around the country to protect themselves and wear a mask. The wide-ranging interview also touched on states' reopening and efforts to find a vaccine. Below is an edited transcript.

**VOA:** My first question is about the correlation between the ongoing mass protests and the

possibility of a new spike, because it became public that members of the DC National Guard have already tested positive for COVID. From your point of view, are these cases only the beginning of possible mass outbreaks?

**Fauci:** Well, I think we have to be careful because we don't know how it's actually going to turn out. But as I have been saying for some time, gathering in crowds is a risk and gathering in crowds without a mask is an even bigger risk. And when you have demonstrations, even though you can understand the reason and the need to exercise your constitutional right to demonstrate something that you feel strongly about, my recommendation has always been that one has to

be really careful to avoid crowded places. If you do do it, which I don't recommend you do, but if you do, you make sure you wear a mask and keep a mask on all the time.

But in answer to your question, obviously there is a risk when people congregate in a very crowded way, particularly if they're shouting or chanting. There is a risk that there will be spread of infection leading to a surge of new infections. And that's one of the things we're keeping an eye out on. And it was very disturbing to see that some of the actual National Guard who were there actually were infected, which means that there's the possibility, maybe a likelihood that they would have infected other people or were infected from other people.

**VOA:** But it appears that the vast majority of protesters are actually wearing masks. That is the good news. But there is still controversial information about the efficiency of masks and moreover, what kind of mask is better for protection. What is your recommendation concerning this issue?

**Fauci:** I think one can say that wearing a mask is always better than not wearing a mask. It may not be 100 percent protective, but it certainly affords some degree of protection from you, from getting infected from someone else. And if you are infected, even if you're without symptoms, it would protect someone else from getting infected. Your normal cloth covering would be fine. Surgical masks are fine. There's no need to get an N-95 mask. We should save that for the health care providers who need it because they put themselves in constant risk by taking care of active patients.

**VOA:** Another issue is about the states which have started reopening. In 19 states there are new outbreaks after Memorial Day. From your point of view, does that mean that and are we starting reopening too sharply? Maybe we have to slow down a little bit?

**Fauci:** Well, I think you have to be careful not to categorize the entire United States in a unique

dimensional way. It's a very big country and different states, regions, cities, towns and counties have different levels of infectious activity. If you are in a county or an area that has very little infection, you can feel comfortable in going and trying to normalize and diminish mitigation. If you happen to be in an area where there is still very active infection, it would not be wise to try and rapidly get to decreasing the mitigation. So I think you can't say one size fits all. You have to look at where in the United States you are. If you're in a high impact area, you've got to really be careful. If you're in a low infection area you could be a little bit more brisk in returning to normal.

**VOA:** And the same can be said about the school reopening as well?

**Fauci:** Absolutely, it's exactly the same. There are some counties and regions in this country where it would be okay to open schools. There are others where you might not want to open them at all. And there are others. We want to do something in between, like maybe open them, but modify the schedule, morning classes for some, afternoon classes for others, things like that.

**VOA:** Talking about the possibility of the second wave, the chances are unclear. But still people are scared of its possibility. What is your prediction? And if it happens how can we be more prepared for it?

**Fauci:** Well, it's impossible to predict with any degree of certainty what's going to happen. The one thing we do know will happen is that there will be infections in the fall and in the winter. We know that because this virus is so transmissible, it's not going to spontaneously disappear from the planet. We'll have it whether or not we have a second wave in the fall. We're totally dependent upon our ability and our effectiveness to be able to identify, isolate and contact trace these new cases. If we do that effectively, we can prevent a second wave. It is not inevitable that we're going to have a second wave. We can prevent it if we do the right thing.

**VOA:** But to track new cases, we need testing kits, correct? And is there really a testing kits shortage now? And again, can people who don't have symptoms be easily tested?

**Fauci:** Well, I know that's why it makes contact tracing very difficult. It's not impossible, but it's difficult to do particularly when you have situations where people are spreading infection, but they're not symptomatic.

**VOA:** Everybody is hoping for the vaccine. And I've read that you are optimistic about the vaccine that is being produced by Moderna company. So what are the grounds of such optimism? And are there any others which look promising in your opinion?

**Fauci:** Yes, I am cautiously optimistic that we will have a vaccine within a reasonable period of time, not only from Moderna, but from other companies too. They're not the only company. We are involved in collaboration with several other companies. The reason I'm optimistic is that in the early trials in humans and in animals, the results have been favorable. In other words, it protects animals in the experimental stage and in the Phase 1 trial in humans, the vaccine was able to produce a response that was predictive that you might be protective against the virus. Although you never can guarantee that you will have a safe and effective vaccine. And that would be foolish to guarantee that because no one can guarantee that. But we are cautiously optimistic that we're going in the right direction.

**VOA:** Talking about optimism, do you mean that some of people who were tested, they showed the neutralizing antibodies?

**Fauci:** Right. Correct. And we looked at the Phase 1 study. At a moderate dose, individuals were able to mount not only just a plain antibody response, but an antibody response that was neutralizing. Namely it blocks the ability of the virus to replicate. That's a very good sign when you're looking at what kind of response a vaccine induces.

**VOA:** The third and the final stage of the Moderna vaccine trial might start in July. And at the same time, the production of the doses will begin before the final results of the trial are available. And as you noted, "it is developing at risk". Why was such a decision made?

**Fauci:** So the risk is only to the money. It's not a risk to safety and it's not a risk of compromising the scientific integrity of the study. This is such an emergent and important situation that we the federal government is willing to take the financial risk in order to expedite the process and get us to a vaccine, months and months earlier than we normally would. So we feel it's worth that risk if it turns out the vaccine works. If it turns out the vaccine doesn't work, then we've lost money. But in such an emergency situation, we would rather take the risk in order to gain time.

**VOA:** And how many doses are planning to produce?

**Fauci:** Well, I think each vaccine candidate would like to produce at least two to three hundred million doses. And some of the companies are aiming at being able ultimately, not right away, but ultimately to produce about a billion doses.

**VOA:** Oh, that is that is great. Sounds very, very great.

**Fauci:** Some of the companies are projecting that they will be able to do that. Each individual company makes a different projection, but some of them are saying that within a year or so they would be able to get a billion. Not right away. I don't think they're going to do it right away. But ultimately they'll do it.

**VOA:** And what about durability? So when will we be able to talk about how long the effect of this vaccine lasts?

**Fauci:** We don't know right now. We'll have to wait and see. Hopefully it'll be long enough to provide a reasonable amount of protection. If it turns out the durability is less than we like we could always give a booster shot.

**VOA:** But you don't have any prediction for the year.

**Fauci:** We'll have to wait and see. Yes.

**VOA:** How would a successful vaccine be distributed to the public? We'll be able just to go to the drug store for instance, and buy it like we can do now with a flu vaccine, for instance.

**Fauci:** I think most people will get it if we get a successful vaccine, either through their doctor's office, through pharmacies or through other distribution centers. Same with the new vaccine with influenza.

**VOA:** If among all the vaccines that are developing now, two will be on the final stage, is there a possibility that two of them will exist?

**Fauci:** I am hoping that it will be even more than two. I hope it will be maybe three vaccines or even more. There's no reason to believe you only could have one vaccine. I think there are a number of candidates that look favorable enough that I would be not surprised at all if we had more than one and maybe as many as three or four. So as many as possible. Yes. Yes.

**VOA:** I have to ask about The World Health Organization and its statement about asymptomatic patients. I know that's got a lot for media coverage. What is your opinion? Do you believe that asymptomatic patients can transmit the infection as well as symptomatic?

**Fauci:** They can. The data is clear that, you know about 25 to 30, 50 percent of people who are infected are asymptomatic. We know that asymptomatic individuals can transmit it. We do not know what the extent of that is, but we know that it is not rare. And that was what the controversy from the WHO statement said that it's a very rare event. We don't know exactly what the percentage is, but there is enough evidence to indicate that it could be an important part of the transmission.

**VOA:** And my last question is more general. Some people believe that the world will never be the same. And do you think there is a chance and moreover, hope that we will be able to get back to our normal life?

**Fauci:** I believe so. I believe that our experience with this devastating outbreak will make us be much more aware of the ability of respiratory infections to spread easily. So I think that there will be a scare, but I think that gradually it may take a couple of years, but gradually we will get back to normal so that maybe someday you and I could have an interview in person.

**VOA:** Oh, it would be great.

**Fauci:** This will end for sure. And we will be able to get back to normal. So what do you need to do is you need to stay safe, take care of yourself and when you go out. wear a mask. Don't go in crowds. You've got to be careful. Even though we're opening up, we still have a level of infection that we've got to pay attention to.