

Feds classifying all coronavirus patient deaths as 'COVID-19' deaths, regardless of cause

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By Fox News

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The federal government is classifying the deaths of patients infected with the coronavirus as COVID-19 deaths, regardless of any underlying health issues that could have contributed to the loss of someone's life.

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Dr. Deborah Birx, the response coordinator for the White House coronavirus task force, said the federal government is continuing to count the suspected COVID-19 deaths, despite other nations doing the opposite.

"There are other countries that if you had a pre-existing condition, and let's say the virus caused you to go to the ICU [intensive care unit] and then have a heart or kidney problem," she said during a Tuesday news briefing at the White House. "Some countries are recording that as a heart issue or a kidney issue and not a COVID-19 death.

"The intent is ... if someone dies with COVID-19, we are counting that," she added.

Asked whether the numbers could skew data the government is trying to collect, Birx said that would mostly apply more to rural areas where testing isn't being implemented on a wide scale.

"I'm pretty confident that in New York City and New Jersey and places that have these large outbreaks and COVID-only hospitals. ... I can tell you they are testing," she said.

Dr. Michael Baden, a Fox News contributor, said it's reasonable to include the death of someone infected with the virus, who also had other health issues, in the COVID-19 body count.

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"In the normal course, autopsies would then determine whether the person died of the effects of the COVID virus, whether the person had a brain tumor or brain hemorrhage, for example, that might be unrelated to it and what the relative significance of both the infection and the pre-existing disease is," Baden told Fox News.

However, the number of autopsies being performed could be low due to the danger of infection, he said.

"Then you will include in those numbers some people who did have a pre-existing condition that would have caused death anyway, but that's probably a small number," Baden said.

The United States had 398,185 confirmed COVID-19 cases as of Tuesday night, including more than 12,000 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University.

President Trump spent Monday trying to assure Americans that the US and health facilities are prepared for a possible surge in cases in the coming weeks.

“Progress has been made before the surge,” Trump said during the White House coronavirus briefing, where he said hospitals will be stockpiled with much-needed equipment. “The next week, week and a half is when the big surge is going to come.”