
Cure it with bleach? Trump sets off a public health scramble

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Public health officials and private companies have been [frantically trying to tell the public not to ingest or inject disinfectants](#) after President Trump, during his daily news conference on Thursday, suggested that an “injection inside” the human body with a disinfectant such as bleach or isopropyl alcohol could help combat the virus.

His comments (a clip of the video is [embedded in this article](#)) prompted an outcry from health officials, doctors and lawmakers. The maker of Lysol warned that “under no circumstance should our disinfectant products be administered into the human body (through injection, ingestion or any other route).”

Mr. Trump took no questions from reporters — a highly unusual move — at today’s daily White House virus briefing, which was one of the shortest yet. But asked earlier about the comments, the president said he wasn’t serious. “I was asking a question sarcastically to reporters like you just to see what would happen,” Mr. Trump told reporters in the Oval Office.

In fact, the president’s statement was made unprompted to William N. Bryan, the head of science at the Department of Homeland Security, following a presentation about the effectiveness of bleach and other disinfectants, as well as ultraviolet light, in killing the coronavirus on surfaces.

Bleach and disinfectants are extremely toxic if swallowed or deeply inhaled. A recent [uptick in calls to poison centers](#) suggests that even before the president’s comments, people were misusing disinfectants as they cleaned their homes.

Not a first. The president has advanced other ideas during the crisis that medical experts say could be dangerous to public health. For weeks, the president promoted the malaria drugs hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine as a “game changer” — in conflict with the advice of some top health officials and despite a lack of evidence that they work against the coronavirus.

Today the F.D.A. [issued a warning](#) that the drugs could cause dangerous abnormalities in heart rhythm in coronavirus patients and “in some cases death.” The F.D.A. said the drugs should be used only in clinical trials or under supervision in hospitals.

A possible bright spot. New evidence suggests that ultraviolet light can indeed slow the virus, but only by degrading its life span on surfaces (not within the human body, as Mr. Trump also suggested on Thursday).

Researchers at the University of Connecticut found that [ultraviolet rays could help lower Covid-19 rates](#), though not enough to wipe out the virus entirely. The study projected that the disease would decrease in the summer, and then return in the fall, though the researchers said that uncertainty around the study's projected outcomes "remains high."