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**HOME POLITICS**

## **Dr. Anthony Fauci says large protests taking place across the country are 'a perfect set-up' for spreading COVID-19**



National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Dr. Anthony Fauci speaks during a coronavirus response meeting in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington, April 29, 2020.

[Carlos Barria/Reuters](#)

- **Dr. Anthony Fauci said that many of the protests against racism and police brutality taking place across the country, involving congregation of large crowds, raises the risk for transmission of COVID-19.**
- **Fauci told DC-radio station WTOP on Friday that "it is a perfect set-up for the spread of the virus in the sense of creating these blips that might turn into some surges."**

- **Fauci emphasized that while protesters have a constitutional right to demonstrate, people gathering closely together, chanting, and possibly not wearing masks increases the likelihood of more outbreaks.**
  - **"It's a delicate balance, because the reasons for demonstrating are valid," he said. "And yet, the demonstration itself puts one at an additional risk."**
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Dr. Anthony Fauci, the head of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases, [said in a Friday interview on D.C.-based radio station WTOP](#) he is concerned that the widespread protests taking place across the country could raise the risk of new COVID-19 outbreaks as the country seeks to re-open.

"Every time I hear about or see the congregation of large crowds at a time and geographic area where there is active infection transmission, it is a perfect set-up for the spread of the virus in the sense of creating these blips that might turn into some surges," Fauci said. "So I get very concerned."

Fauci emphasized that while demonstrators have both a constitutional right and a good reason to protest, he noted that people gathering in close proximity, shouting and chanting, and possibly being exposed to tear gas or pepper spray – crowd-controlling irritants that make people cough, sneeze, and rub their eyes – [increases the risk of transmitting the virus](#).

"There certainly is a risk, I would say that with confidence, when you see the congregation of crowds," he said, "particularly in a situation where you have a lot of confusion and a little bit of chaos, people running back and forth, taking their masks off, being close in proximity, that does pose a risk."

Fauci, who has frequently spoken out [about the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on black communities](#), acknowledged the tricky trade-off many protesters are weighing between taking advantage of a constitutional right to demonstrate and possibly heightening the risk of creating new outbreaks.

"It is a difficult situation," Fauci said. "We have the right to peaceably demonstrate, and the demonstrators are exercising that right...it's important to exercise your constitutional rights to be able to demonstrate, but it's a delicate balance, because the reasons for demonstrating are valid. And yet, the demonstration itself puts one at an additional risk."

Fauci said that public health officials like himself should caution protesters to wear a mask and keep it on at all times if they do go out to protest.

In addition to the COVID-19 crisis hitting black communities especially hard, other health experts have highlighted that police violence disproportionately affecting communities of color is, in and of itself, [a public health crisis](#), as Insider's Canela López recently reported.

"One in every 1,000 Black men and boys can expect to be killed by police in this country," Harvard Medical School epidemiologist [Dr. Maia Majumder told Vox](#). "To me, this clearly illustrates why police brutality is a public health problem; anything that causes mortality at such a scale is a public health problem."

"People have asked 'what do the protests mean for COVID-19 transmission?'," [epidemiologist Helen Jenkins recently wrote on Twitter](#). "My thoughts: The issue of violence against black people & the wider issue of systemic racism is big enough and endemic enough that it needs to be addressed now & I whole-heartedly support the protesters."