

Trump again calls Tijuana 'heavily infected' with COVID-19. Here are the facts

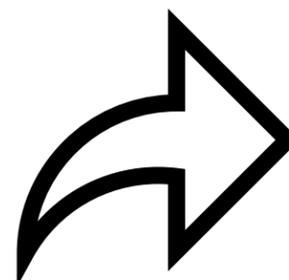
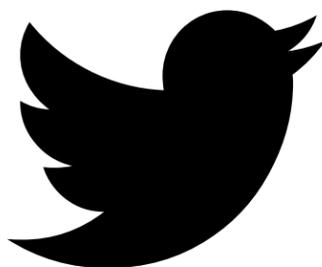
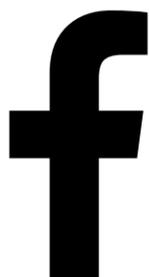


President Donald Trump participates in a ceremony commemorating the 200th mile of border wall at the international border with Mexico in San Luis, Arizona, on Tuesday. (AFP via Getty Images)

Neighboring San Diego County has more documented cases, but also does more testing.

By WENDY FRY

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TIJUANA – President Donald Trump on Tuesday touted the effectiveness and popularity of his border wall, stating that an unnamed “everyone” in San Diego asked him to build it to protect against a “highly-infected” but “wonderful town” on the other side of the border.

Though he did not name Tijuana, a border city with a population of about 1.8 million, the reference was obvious. And it was not the first time this month he’s turned Tijuana into a target of his campaign talking points.

But as of early June, San Diego had more documented COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents. And there is no indication that any San Diego public figures asked for the wall to protect them from the disease.

At a rally in Phoenix on Tuesday evening, Trump told a cheering crowd that California “didn’t want the wall – but they wanted the wall.”

“Why? Because right next to San Diego there’s a wonderful town in Mexico, you know the town, I won’t mention the name, but they’re heavily infected with COVID,” he said.

That is not unlike the comments Trump made about Mexico during his 2016 presidential campaign when he incorrectly insisted that Mexican nationals crossing the border brought a wave of drugs, crime and “tremendous infectious disease” to the United States.

Health experts all along the California frontier have said U.S. citizens who live in Mexico and come north legally through ports of entry in their cars and on foot have contributed to a rise in coronavirus cases in hospitals on the U.S. side of the border.

Americans who work or live in Mexico have fallen ill south of the border, and they then crossed into the United States seeking health care, according to multiple doctors in Imperial Valley, Mexicali, Tijuana, Chula Vista and San Diego.

Tijuana has been hard hit by the coronavirus, to be sure.

Tijuana, with 1.8 million people, has had 2,651 confirmed cases. San Diego County, which has 3.3 million people, has 11,626. San Diego County health officials, however, are conducting COVID-19 tests at a much higher rate than in Tijuana.

Tijuana, and Mexico overall, have suffered a relatively high mortality rate. Contributing factors include decades of underfunding of the federal public health system; lack of available tests; weak social safety nets making it nearly impossible for the city's most vulnerable to stay at home; and pressure from the United States to reopen border factories even as low-wage workers died.

Earlier Tuesday, speaking with federal and local border officials at a border security round-table in Yuma, Trump said “on the other side of San Diego is a tremendously big problem. With COVID and other things.”

The president then described how San Diego politicians called him because “they wanted that wall so badly.”

“Everybody was calling ... I won't embarrass them by saying who called ... but people that didn't want the wall outside wanted the wall,” he said, indicating some San Diego politicians secretly want a wall, but won't say so publicly.

Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher, who represents communities in the southern swath of San Diego County along the border, responded by asking if the president was ill.

“Who did he speak to in San Diego?” she asked. “We don't want his vanity wall.”

San Diego County Supervisor Kristin Gaspar wrote a letter in April to Vice President Mike Pence asking the White House to provide mutual aid to Mexico hospitals, temperature checks at the border and hotel reimbursements to essential hospital workers who live in Mexico but work in the United States.

But, she says, she did not tell Trump she wanted a border wall.

“Certainly not,” said Gaspar, a Republican, when asked if Trump was referring to her. “As you know, he makes this comment a lot but has never disclosed who he is referring to.”

The San Diego City Council has a standing resolution opposing the border wall, and that has not changed.

“Building a wall will do nothing for our families and communities but place a hateful divide between two of the largest cities in Mexico and the United States,” said Council President Georgette Gómez in 2017.

It wasn't the first time Trump had made such claims. Speaking at a June 5 event supporting American fishermen in Maine, the president falsely claimed Tijuana was “the most heavily infected place anywhere in the world.”

Those comments drew ire from both Tijuana’s mayor and the governor of Baja California.

“You’re like the guy peeking over his backyard fence to see what’s going on in his neighbor’s yard instead of worrying about your own house,” said Baja California Governor Jaime Bonilla on social media the next day.

Bonilla noted the United States has more than twice the number of cases and deaths from the coronavirus as any other country in the world.

Mexico ranks 11th worldwide in the number of total cases and 7th for the total number of deaths.

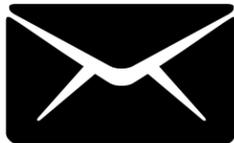
Tijuana Mayor Arturo González said Wednesday it was understandable, but unfortunate, that Trump is focusing on Tijuana again.

“With the United States having the most coronavirus cases in the world, and elections at his doorstep, it is understandable that he has to find something to distract people’s attention during his campaign, and now it’s Tijuana’s turn again,” said González.

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