COVID-19 Doesn't Know Race
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By Seki Berg

When there is an unknown, people go searching for answers. This is especially true now, as the coronavirus is spreading like wildfire across the globe.

Currently, I am quarantined at home in Seattle. Residents of Washington State have been advised to "stay home, stay healthy," by Gov. Jay Inslee. Going outside is a gamble; you don't know who may be asymptomatic or what surfaces the virus is living on.

When leaving quarantine, we want to be able to know what type of people may have COVID-19 so we can avoid them. Based on the media, our president and where the virus' roots are, people often associate it with Asians. Since its spread into the United States, COVID-19 has exacerbated racism against Asian Americans.

As an Asian American, it pains me to hear President Trump call coronavirus the "Chinese virus" and claiming that it isn't racist to do so. It may not matter what you call it, – the Chinese virus, the Italian virus – it will do what viruses do, but attributing it to a certain race will cause tension and racism against that race. While COVID-19 may have spread from China to the rest of the world, it doesn't mean only Chinese people can get it or have it. When talking about COVID-19, do not use racial terms to attribute it to a certain race.

There is little data on the number of cases by race, but currently, the United States has the highest number of reported cases. So, why aren't people calling this the American virus?

There is no national data that shows which race has the most cases, but, on March 27, the Illinois Department of Public Health released data showing confirmed cases by race. In Illinois, 39 percent of confirmed cases were White, while only four percent were Asian. If this is a pattern across the United States, then it would be logically inconsistent to call COVID-19 the "Chinese virus."

The virus may have spread from China, but New York City, the current U.S. epicenter of COVID-19, had cases beginning in mid-February brought from travelers in Europe, a new study shows. Doctors at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai conducted this research and concluded that travelers brought the virus from Europe, not Asia.

One day (we hope), things will go back to "normal" and what we are left with will be long-term racial and ethnic stress towards Asians Americans. In the couple months that the virus has spread in the United States, racism towards Asian Americans has grown exponentially.

Every morning, the first thing I do is check my phone. I remember one morning, I was going through my Instagram stories and I saw someone had shared an American University student's post. It was a compilation of Asian American being harassed in their own neighborhoods and cities. An elderly Asian American man was being mocked for crying because he was bullied for being Asian. Two Asian American children had been stabbed in Texas because people thought they were spreading coronavirus. One girl was shouting to the camera, held by an Asian American, "I don't like Asian people because they eat bats." Her friend backed her up and pointed at the camera saying, "She has corona!"

Instances like these are happening in our backyards, and they will continue if racial terms are used when talking about COVID-19. Before the spread of the coronavirus, I didn't think about how being Asian American might impact someone's perception of me. I wasn't scared of going outside because I knew no one would harass me for being Asian, but after seeing posts like the ones shared on Instagram, it makes me nervous to go grocery shopping or for a walk.

There has been a sudden spike of hate towards Asian Americans amidst all this, reminiscent of the hate and discrimination faced by the Muslim, Arab and South Asian communities in America. The San Francisco State University found that there has been a 50 percent rise in news articles related to racism towards Asian Americans and coronavirus between Feb. 9 and March 7.

The number of hate crimes towards Asian Americans will only continue to rise if we maintain the racial terms for COVID-19. I shouldn't be afraid to walk outside because someone might accuse me of having coronavirus. I shouldn't be afraid of being physically or verbally attacked by a neighbor just because of the color of my skin. Again, these situations are happening in your own backyard and they are only going to continue if people call COVID-19 the "Chinese virus." Racism towards Asian Americans will not entirely stop, but if people stop using racial terms when talking about coronavirus, there's a chance us Asian Americans won't be fearful of what is on the other side of our door.