Minnesota doctor blasts 'ridiculous' CDC coronavirus death count guidelines

Charles Creitz April 9

Video

Dr. Jensen calls out 'ridiculous' CDC guidelines for coronavirus-related deaths

Minnesota State Senator and family physician Dr. Scott Jensen reacts to CDC guidance on declaring COVID-19 deaths.

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Dr. Scott Jensen, a Minnesota family physician who is also a

Republican state senator, told "The Ingraham Angle" Wednesday that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) guidelines for doctors to certify whether a patient has died of coronavirus are "ridiculous" and could be misleading the public.

Host Laura Ingraham read Jensen the guidelines, which say: "In cases where a definite diagnosis of COVID cannot be made but is suspected or likely (e.g. the circumstances are compelling with a reasonable degree of certainty) it is acceptable to report COVID-19 on a death certificate as 'probable' or 'presumed.'"

In response, Jensen told Ingraham the CDC's death certificate manual tells physicians to focus on "precision and specificity," but the coronavirus death certification guidance runs completely counter to that axiom.

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"The idea that we are going to allow people to massage and sort of game the numbers is a real issue because we are going to undermine the [public] trust," he said. "And right now as we see politicians doing things that aren't necessarily motivated on fact and science, their trust in politicians is already wearing thin."

Jensen gave a hypothetical example of a patient who died while suffering from influenza. If the patient was elderly and had symptoms like fever and cough a few days before passing away, the doctor explained, he would have listed "respiratory arrest" as the primary cause of death.

"I’ve never been encouraged to [notate 'influenza']," he said. "I would probably write 'respiratory arrest' to be the top line, and the underlying cause of this disease would be pneumonia ... I might well put emphysema or congestive heart failure, but I would never put influenza down as the underlying cause of death and yet that’s what we are being asked to do here."

Jensen then told Ingraham that under the CDC guidelines, a patient who died after being hit by a bus and tested positive for coronavirus would be listed as having presumed to have died from the virus regardless of whatever damage was caused by the bus.

"That doesn't make any sense," he said.

Jensen also reacted to Dr. Anthony Fauci's response to a question about the potential for the number of coronavirus deaths being "padded," in which the NIAID director described the prevalance of "conspiracy theories" during "challenging" times in public health.

"I would remind him that anytime health care intersects with dollars it gets awkward," Jensen said.

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"Right now Medicare has determined that if you have a COVID-19 admission to the hospital you'll get paid $13,000. If that COVID-19 patient goes on a ventilator, you get $39,000; three times as much. Nobody can tell me, after 35 years in the world of medicine, that sometimes those kinds of things [have] impact on what we do.

"Some physicians really have a bent towards public health and they will put down influenza or whatever because that's their preference," Jensen added. "I try to stay very specific, very precise. If I know I've got pneumonia, that's what's going on the death certificate. I'm not going to add stuff just because it's convenient."