

*CBS Mornings*

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[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Ahead; Preparing for “The Big One”]

NATE BURLESON: All right ahead, a new book called *The Big One* argues the next pandemic if it is a matter of time, or if it’s just going to happen. We will talk to the author who knows what he’s talking about in just a bit. Stick around. We’ll be right back.

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8:19:27 a.m.

5 minutes and 37 seconds

TONY DOKOUPIL: Renowned disease detective, Dr. Michael Osterholm has been at the forefront of countering some of the biggest global health threats from COVID-19 and measles to SARS and swine flu, and now he has a fresh book with a fresh warning. The book is called *The Big One: How We Must Prepare for Future Deadly Pandemics*. Osterholm imagines a coronavirus like-virus emerging this time though, more deadly, more contagious. Yes. Dr. Michael Osterholm home joins us now. Doctor, thank you very much for being here.

DR. MICHAEL OSTERHOLM: Thank you.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Preparing for the Next Big Pandemic]

DOKOUPIL: We were saying we’ve interviewed you on Zoom and stuff throughout the pandemic, never seen you in person, so welcome. This is a scary book, because it imagines a very scary scenario in which a lot of people get sick and die. How likely is that scenario?

OSTERHOLM: It’s very likely. For example, one of the premises of this scenario is that the virus is, which is a coronavirus like COVID was actually is as infectious as SARS-CoV2 or COVID was, which was highly infectious, but it didn’t have the ability to kill like the Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome, MERS or SARS did. That was a virus that killed 15 to 35 percent of the people, but was not very infectious. This virus is a combination of the two, highly infectious and can kill and we’ve actually now discovered these very viruses in bats in China in the caves, just in the last six to 12 months. So the possibility of this happening is not some remote maybe, there’s a real likelihood it could happen.

DOKOUPIL: Did we kill the bats?

OSTERHOLM: Bats, ironically, carry a number of infectious diseases that don’t kill them. Everything from rabies to you name it, but so that’s not a good indication. The indication is when the people start dying.

DOKOUPIL: But when we find the — oh, so it hasn't made the jump.

OSTERHOLM: It hasn't made the back yet.

DOKOUPIL: It is in bats!

OSTERHOLM: It hasn't made the jump yet. But today, in this world of eight billion people interacting so closely together on planes, flying around the world, taking down jungles, all these kinds of things, the interaction is so high that it really gives the virus an advantage.

BURLESON: You talk about the lessons that we've learned from COVID and looking back on it, there's things that we can even look back on and second guess now, like wiping down groceries. You mentioned the hygiene theater, the Plexiglas or the six-foot rule. Why were we so focused on the wrong things during COVID?

OSTERHOLM: You know —

ADRIANA DIAZ: Are those wrong?

OSTERHOLM: — well, they were wrong in the sense that there was enough understanding to say, for example, this is an airborne disease. Airborne disease means six feet was irrelevant. It was about what -- how the virus carried in the air. Imagine walking down the street today in New York City, and you smell cigarette smoke, and you realize the person is 35 to 40 feet in front of you, but upwind. That's an aerosol.

BURLESON: That's a great example.

OSTERHOLM: That's how this virus was moving, and we needed to give people that information to say you have to wear a special kind of mask.

BURLESON: Yes.

OSTERHOLM: The one that we call an N95.

BURLESON: N95.

OSTERHOLM: How many people wore chin diapers? How many people wore surgical masks that provided little protection or —

BURLESON: Or nothing at all?

OSTERHOLM: — or nothing at all, and that was the best tool we had at the time. But people, unfortunately, the public health community couldn't get together to understand that. And just to summarize it, the chief scientist at the World Health Organization who in two years into the pandemic, resigned and left. In her departing interview, she said the biggest mistake we made

was not getting it right on the air with what happened with COVID.

ADRIANA DIAZ: So what needs fixing the most to prepare us for what you call The Big One?

OSTERHOLM: Well, you know, when I wrote this book with my co- author, Mark Olshaker, I had no idea we'd be in the place we are today in this country. We're in free fall.

BURLESON: What do you mean by that?

OSTERHOLM: Basically at this point, we have a public health system that's being destroyed overnight, and it's one that, rather than believing in science and all that it has accomplished over the last hundreds of years, we're now talking about magic, smoke and mirrors, and the inability to deal with things now also impacts our ability to plan for the future. For example, the vaccines that we need for future pandemics were just basically taken off the shelf by this administration and said we're not going to fund the mRNA vaccine technology anymore. Things that have no basis in terms of science, at least. And so I'm very worried that we're not prepared for today, let alone for tomorrow.

BURLESON: But this administration says we're streamlining functions, that we're saving taxpayers money. Do you believe that there's any merit to some of the changes?

OSTERHOLM: We always need to be, you know, looking at change and how to get better and how to improve. I mean, that's something all of us here, right in the studio.

BURLESON: Yes.

OSTERHOLM: But the bottom line, message is, from a science standpoint, we know a lot of what we need to do.

BURLESON: Yes.

OSTERHOLM: And we're not doing it, and at this point, we are gutting public health as we know it. The CDC, think of that as your RING cam for health. It's everybody's every day organization that's watching for your health, that's being destroyed. And so, I have a hard time getting into the place of where are we with preparing for the pandemic, which people have to understand is going to happen. We can't even get it prepared for the COVID vaccines for this fall.

DOKOUPIL: Wow!

OSTERHOLM: And so we have a huge challenge on our hands right now, and this book offers the solutions for what we could do long term. I do believe there's a day when we can take pandemics off the table.

DOKOUPIL: Well, I hope people in positions of power read the book, and I hope those bats in

the caves where they have the thing you're talking about, I hope no one pokes them and gets what you're talking about. Dr. Michael Osterholm, good to see you in person.

OSTERHOLM: Thank you.

DOKOUPIL: Thank you for being here. The book is *The Big One*. It will be on a big display in your local bookstore.