

# Under coronavirus immigration measures, U.S. is expelling border-crossers to Mexico

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Under a new policy spurred by the new coronavirus crisis, Customs and Border Patrol agents are sending undocumented immigrants back into Mexico at a fast clip. *Photo credit: Callie Richmond for The Texas Tribune*

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Migrants who cross into the United States illegally are being expelled to Mexico in an average of 96 minutes under emergency coronavirus measures now in force across the U.S. southern border, according to three U.S. officials with knowledge of the latest government statistics.

The pandemic has allowed the U.S. Border Patrol to implement the kind of rapid-fire deportation system President Donald Trump has long extolled as his preferred approach to immigration enforcement.

Under the new rules, U.S. agents are processing migrants from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras “in the field” before they are able to set foot inside a U.S. Border Patrol station. The migrants are then whisked back to the border and sent into Mexico.

The migrants are not given medical exams while in U.S. custody, which is one of the reasons agents are able to send them back to Mexico so quickly, according to one Customs and Border Protection official who, like the others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe the process because they were not authorized to discuss it publicly.

“The goal is to minimize the exposure to the alien, agent and our country,” the CBP official said.

The flow of unauthorized border crossings has plunged since the emergency measures were implemented March 21, down from more than 1,000 per day to fewer than 600 on Sunday, the latest statistics show.

Mexican nationals account for about 60% of those taken into custody, and migrants from Central America’s “Northern Triangle” nations account for about 26%, which means Border Patrol agents are sending more than 85% of the migrants they detain right back to Mexico.

CBP did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The Mexican government will not accept migrants from other nations, under the terms of an agreement that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Mexican Foreign Secretary Marcelo Ebrard worked out this month.

Mexico said it would accept returns from the United States on a “case by case” basis and that the process would involve medical screenings. But as a practical matter, U.S. officials said Mexican authorities are accepting nearly all of the migrants from those four nations who are subject to “expulsion” from the United States.

Migrants who have U.S. arrest warrants or serious criminal records and those

who cannot be summarily expelled are being booked and detained in U.S. facilities using standard practices, U.S. officials said. But they say the goal of the emergency model is to reduce the number of detainees in U.S. custody and minimize the risk of spreading infections across border stations and throughout immigration jails.

The emergency measures did not initially apply to unaccompanied minors taken into custody after crossing the border without a parent. But U.S. authorities said some underage migrants also are eligible for expedited deportation to their home countries.

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Source:

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