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Inside C2

Wednesday, November 24 2021

Driver to face homicide charges for deaths at Wisconsin Christmas parade

WAUKESHA, Wis., Nov 22 (Reuters) - The man accused of deliberately driving his car into a crowded Milwaukee-area Christmas parade over the weekend, killing five people and injuring dozens of others, was suspected in an earlier domestic disturbance, police said on Monday.

The suspect, Darrell Brooks, 39, was arrested near the scene of Sunday's vehicular attack in Waukesha, Wisconsin, and faces five counts of first-degree homicide, Waukesha Police Chief Daniel Thompson said.
In addition to the five people killed - ranging in age from 52 to 81 - another 48 were injured, including six children who remained hospitalized in critical condition on Monday, authorities said.

Among the victims were members of a parade group calling themselves the "Dancing Grannies," according to a statement posted on Facebook on Monday.
Thompson said the motive for the attack was still a mystery but that it was clear the suspect had acted intentionally.

"He drove right through the barricades and the officers," Thompson told a briefing, adding the authorities had ruled out terrorism as a motive. Sue Opper, the Waukesha County district attorney, said the suspect was believed to have acted alone.

Police were not pursuing Brooks when he plowed into the parade, but one officer fired shots to try to stop the sports utility vehicle, the police chief said.

"Minutes after the incident occurred, I responded to the scene," Thompson said. "And what I saw out of chaos and tragedy was heroes -- first responders in the community coming together and working together on triaging victims."

The FBI was assisting local police in their investigation.

Brooks has a criminal history and was recently released on $1,000 bail, an amount the Milwaukee County District Attorney's Office called "inappropriately low in light of the nature of the recent charges" against him. Brooks was charged on Nov. 5 with obstructing an officer, battery, reckless endangerment, disorderly conduct and felony bail jumping.

Around the time of Sunday's carnage, police also had received a complaint of a domestic disturbance involving Brooks and a knife but were unable to respond because they were preoccupied with the parade, Thompson said.

Chairs are left abandonded on Main Street the morning after a car plowed through a holiday parade in Waukesha, Wisconsin, U.S., November 22, 2021. REUTERS/Cheney Orr

"Was there an initial complaint of a knife being involved? Yes," he said. "Do we know if there actually was one there? We don't."

The chief said investigators had no information suggesting Brooks, a resident of Milwaukee, knew anyone in the parade.

A police officer walks in the street after a car plowed through a crowd at a holiday parade in Waukesha, Wisconsin, U.S., in this still image obtained from a November 21, 2021 social media video. Jordan Woynilko/Handout via REUTERS
Chairs are left abandonded on Main Street the morning after a car plowed through a holiday parade in Waukesha, Wisconsin, U.S., November 22, 2021. REUTERS/Cheney Orr
Darrell Brooks poses for a booking photograph at the Milwaukee County Jail in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, U.S. November 3, 2021. Milwaukee County Sheriff's Office/Handout via REUTERS
Chairs are left abandonded on Main Street the morning after a car plowed through a holiday parade in Waukesha, Wisconsin, U.S., November 22, 2021. REUTERS/Cheney Orr

'STILL TOTALLY SHOCKED'

Police identified the five dead as Virginia Sorenson, 79; LeAnna Owen, 71; Tamara Durand, 52; Jane Kulich, 52; and Wilhelm Hospel, 81.

On the morning after Sunday's carnage, a pink hat, a lone shoe and candy lay strewn across the main thoroughfare in Waukesha. Dozens of orange evidence circles were painted on the street and most shops were closed in the city's downtown district. A woman tied a bouquet of flowers to a street post as police officers blocked intersections along the main road.

"It was terrifying," Waukesha resident Brian Hoffman, 33, who was present as the vehicle rammed through parade attendees, recalled as he sat on a stoop near the scene on Monday. "I saw children who were run over. ... I am still totally shocked."

Video of the incident posted on social media showed a red SUV racing alongside the parade route and then into the procession, appearing to run over more than a dozen people before bystanders ran from sidewalks to help.

The Children's Wisconsin hospital officials said at a briefing they treated 18 children, including six who remained in critical condition and three in serious condition on Monday.

The rest were in fair condition or released. The hospital made no mention of any fatalities.
A message posted on Monday by the Milwaukee Dancing Grannies Facebook page paid tribute to those who lost their lives as "the glue ... (that) held us together."
"Those who died were extremely passionate Grannies. Their eyes gleamed.....[with the] joy of being a Grannie," read the message.
"Our hearts are heavy at this most difficult time."

Waukesha schools were closed onMonday, and additional counselors were to be made available for students, the school district superintendent said. Waukesha authorities said a fund for the affected families had been set up.

U.S. President Joe Biden said his administration was monitoring the situation in Waukesha "very closely."
"The entire community is struggling, struggling to cope with these horrific acts of violence," Biden told reporters on Monday.

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

LOCAL NEWS

China outbound tourism set to jump more than 25% this year - state media

BEIJING, Nov 22 (Reuters) - Chinese outbound tourism numbers are set to jump by more than 25% this year from 2020 but remain "basically at a standstill" compared to pre-pandemic levels, state broadcaster CCTV reported on Monday, citing official projections.

The dramatic drop in travellers from China, the world's most populous nation, since the rapid spread of coronavirus early last year, has left a $255 billion annual spending hole in the global tourism market.
A total of 25.62 million Chinese tourist trips overseas are expected to be made in 2021, CCTV said, citing an annual report on outbound tourism from the China Tourism Academy, part of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

That is up from 20.334 million in 2020, which was itself an 86.9% plunge from a year earlier as the coronavirus outbreak led to severe restrictions on global travel.
rojection, which includes trips to special administrative regions of China such as the gambling hub of Macau, will still be well below annual numbers of over 100 million before the pandemic hit, CCTV noted.

Macau, a former Portuguese colony, has become a "bright spot" for outbound tourism from mainland China due to effective virus prevention and control measures, CCTV said.

The pace of recovery in 2022 will depend on how other destinations handle tourism, it added.

China's National Immigration Administration said this month it would continue to guide citizens not to go abroad for non-urgent and non-essential reasons.
China's state planner, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), has put out several statements since Tuesday night that it was studying ways to guide prices back to a "reasonable range" and to crack down on "excessive profits" at coal firms. read more

On Friday, the NDRC said it held a meeting with large state-run companies including oil refiner Sinopec, aluminium giant Chinalco and steelmaker China Baowu on "rational" energy usage by industry on Thursday and said they should take the lead in energy-saving and carbon reduction.

People walk along Nanjing Pedestrian Road, a main shopping area, during the Labour Day holiday, following the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Shanghai, China May 5, 2021. REUTERS/Aly Song/File Photo

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Editor's Choice

A woman wearing a burqa sits in the trunk of a taxi in Chawok market in Kabul, Afghanistan. The sticker reads "for God sake stop fighting". REUTERS/ Zohra Bensemra

Fishermen bring in their catch from a lake in front of a power plant of the State Development and Investment Corporation (SDIC) outside Tianjin, China. REUTERS/Thomas Peter

A satellite image in infrared color shows smoke rising as lava flows while the Cumbre Vieja volcano continues to erupt on the Canary Island of La Palma, Spain. Maxar Technologies/via REUTERS

People protest against coronavirus measures as police forces stand guard, near the European Commission in Brussels, Belgium, November 21. REUTERS/Johanna Geron

Migrants wait to disembark from a boat towed by a Spanish coast guard vessel, in the port of Arguineguin, on the island of Gran Canaria, Spain. REUTERS/ Borja Suarez

The sky goes orange behind the Washington Monument and the Smithsonian Castle as a couple pose for a sunset selfie in Washington. REUTERS/ Kevin Lamarque

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

BUSINESS

COVID-19 In The U.S. Update

CDC Panel Endorses COVID-19 Vaccine Boosters For All Adults

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

A key outside advisory group to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has endorsed the use of COVID-19 booster shots for all adults, a one-size-fits-all approach designed to simplify eligibility.

If CDC Director Rochelle Walensky signs off on the broader use, as expected, the extra shots will be available immediately to all adults, as long as they are six months past the final dose of a Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, or two months after a Johnson & Johnson dose.

The recommendation from the panel comes just hours after the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized both Pfizer and Moderna's booster shots for everyone over the age of 18.

Pfizer applied to the FDA earlier this month for an expansion of the emergency authorization for its booster shot to make it available to anyone 18 or older. Moderna announced just this week that it too had asked the FDA to allow its booster to be given to all adults.

Boosters for everyone has always been the Biden administration's goal, but until now federal health authorities have stopped short of such a policy, and instead recommended boosters for only specific populations — those over age 65, anyone at high risk because of work or where they live, or those with an underlying medical condition.

The primary COVID-19 vaccination continues to provide good protection against severe disease and death, even as effectiveness against milder infection has waned. But cases have been steadily rising across the country, and authorities have said they want to stave off another winter surge.

The current recommendations, while fairly broad, have caused confusion. While people over the age of 65 are most at risk from waning vaccine immunity, fewer than 40 percent of them have received a booster, according to CDC data.

"The current guidelines, though well-intentioned and thoughtful, generate an obstacle to uptake of boosters. In pursuit of precision, they create confusion," Nirav Shah, president of Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, told the panel.

The panel did not make a distinction in their recommendation between the two types of mRNA vaccines, despite the potential for increased risk of myocarditis — a type of heart inflammation — in young men after receiving Moderna's vaccine.

CDC officials told the panel it's too early to draw conclusions on the risk of myocarditis after the third dose of mRNA vaccines, because teens and younger adults haven't yet been boosted in large enough numbers.

Several other countries have discouraged use of the Moderna vaccine in people younger than 30 because of that risk.

Gottlieb Says He Expects The CDC Will Consider 'Fully Vaccinated' As Including Boosters

Former Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Scott Gottlieb

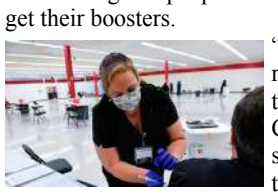
Former Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Scott Gottlieb said on Sunday that he expects the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to consider Americans "fully vaccinated" when they receive a booster shot, adding that recommendations to change it would likely not happen this year.

"Should the CDC say you need a booster to be considered fully vaccinated?" "Face the Nation" moderator Margaret Brennan asked Gottlieb on CBS.

"I think at some point they're going to, but not this year," Gottlieb answered.

"I think eventually this will be considered the three-dose vaccine, but I would be hard pressed to believe CDC is going to make that recommendation any time soon, in part because of this debate about whether or not younger people who are less risk should be receiving that third dose in states where governors are looking to do this, and I think some local communities will do it," he added.

Gottlieb was also asked about CDC saying last week that all American adults could get a booster shot while specifically recommending that people over the age of 50 get their boosters.



"I think the reluctant nature by which CDC has been stepping into this debate reflects a broader ambivalence or a broader debate happening in a public health community about whether the vaccines should be used as tools to protect people from bad outcomes from COVID, or whether they should be used as tools to try to end the pandemic and control transmission," Gottlieb said.

CDC Director Rochelle Walensky late last week signed off on a recommendation from a CDC advisory panel to broaden eligibility of the COVID-19 booster to all American adults. The advisory panel had also recommended that those over the age of 50 should get their booster shot.

Fauci Hopes COVID-19 Booster Increases Durability To Not Need It Regularly

President Biden's chief medical adviser Anthony Fauci said on Sunday that he hopes COVID-19 boosters will increase vaccine durability so that "you will not necessarily need it" every six months or year.

"We would hope - and this is something that we're looking at very carefully - that that third shot with the mRNA not only boosts you way up but increases the durability so that you will not necessarily need it every six months or a year," Fauci said during "This Week" on ABC.

President Biden's chief medical adviser Anthony Fauci

"We're hoping it pushes it out more. If it doesn't, and the data show we do need it more often, then we'll do it," he added.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Rochelle Walensky signed off on a CDC advisory panel's recommendation to increase eligibility for booster shots to all American adults. The decision means that all adults who are at least six months out since receiving their second shot of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines are now able to get their third shot of the COVID-19 vaccine.

"Booster shots have demonstrated the ability to safely increase people's protection against infection and severe outcomes and are an important public health tool to strengthen our defenses against the virus as we enter the winter holidays. Based on the compelling evidence, all adults over 18 should now have equitable access to a COVID-19 booster dose," Walensky said in a statement regarding the news.

The decision comes only weeks after children as young as 5 years old became eligible to get COVID-19 vaccine, much to the relief of parents and health officials seeking to have their kids inoculated in time for holiday gatherings.

Despite widespread vaccine availability, however, it has not stopped the U.S. from passing the grim milestone last week of recording more COVID-19 deaths in 2021 than last year. (Courtesy thehill.com)

OSHA Suspends Enforcement Of COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate For Businesses

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is suspending enforcement of the Biden administration's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for large private businesses after a federal appeals court upheld a stay on it last week.

OSHA said in a statement published on its website Friday night that while it is confident in its power to protect workers amid the pandemic, it is suspending activities related to the mandate, citing the pending litigation.

"The court ordered that OSHA 'take no steps to implement or enforce' the ETS [Emergency Temporary Standard] 'until further court order.' While OSHA remains confident in its authority to protect workers in emergencies, OSHA has suspended activities related to the implementation and enforcement of the ETS pending future developments in the litigation," OSHA said.

President Biden announced in September that the administration was rolling out a new rule that would require all private employers with 100 or more employees to mandate vaccines or weekly testing for all personnel, a guideline that has the potential to impact nearly 80 million workers. Earlier this month the administration set Jan. 4 as the deadline for qualifying private employers to start mandating the vaccine or requiring weekly testing. The rule was developed by OSHA.

In a 22-page ruling last week, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals wrote that the administration's COVID-19 vaccine and testing mandate was "fatally flawed" and ordered that OSHA not enforce the requirement "pending adequate judicial review" of a motion for a permanent injunction.

The court said OSHA should "take no steps to implement or enforce the mandate until further court order." (Courtesy thehill.com)

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

COMMUNITY

A Daily Pill To Treat COVID-19 Could Be Just Months Away, Scientists Say

Results of trials on a daily pill to treat COVID-19 could be available within months.(Image/Unsplash/Halacious)

Key Point

- ***At least three antivirals for COVID are in clinical trials.***
- ***An early trial of 202 participants last Spring showed that molnupiravir rapidly reduced the levels of infectious virus.***
- ***Antivirals are already essential treatments for viral infections, including hepatitis C and HIV.***
- ***The drugs work by interfering with the virus's ability to replicate in human cells***

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

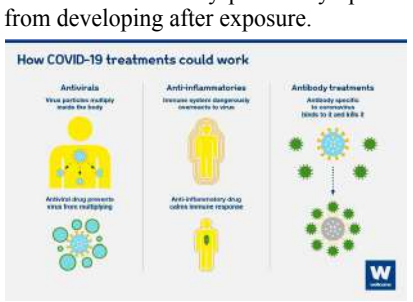
Within a day of testing positive for Covid-19 in June, Miranda Kelly was sick enough to be scared. At 44, with diabetes and high blood pressure, Kelly, a certified nursing assistant, was having trouble breathing, symptoms serious enough to send her to the emergency room. When her husband, Joe, 46, fell ill with the virus, too, she really got worried, especially about their five teenagers at home: "I thought, 'I hope to God we don't wind up on ventilators. We have children. Who's going to raise these kids?"

But the Kellys, who live in Seattle, had agreed just after their diagnoses to join a clinical trial at the nearby Fred Hutch cancer research center that's part of an international effort to test an antiviral treatment on the unvaccinated that could halt Covid early in its course.

By the next day, the couple were taking four pills, twice a day. Though they weren't told whether they had received an active medication or placebo, within a week, they said, their symptoms were better. Within two weeks, they had recovered.

"I don't know if we got the treatment, but I kind of feel like we did," Miranda Kelly said. "To have all these underlying conditions, I felt like the recovery was very quick."

The Kellys have a role in developing what could be the world's next chance to thwart Covid: a short-term regimen of daily pills that can fight the virus early after diagnosis and conceivably prevent symptoms from developing after exposure.



"Oral antivirals have the potential to not only curtail the duration of one's Covid-19 syndrome, but also have the potential to limit transmission to people in your household if you are sick," said Timothy Sheahan, a virologist at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill who has helped pioneer these therapies.

Antivirals are already essential treatments for other viral infections, including hepatitis C and HIV. One of the best known is Tamiflu, the widely prescribed pill that can shorten the duration of influenza and reduce the risk of hospitalization if given quickly. The medications, developed to treat and prevent viral infections in people and animals, work differently depending on the type. But they can be engineered to boost the immune system to fight infection, block receptors so viruses can't enter healthy cells, or lower the amount of active virus in the body.

At least three promising antivirals for Covid are being tested in clinical trials, with results expected as soon as late fall or winter, said Carl Dieffenbach, director of the Division of AIDS at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, who is overseeing antiviral development.

"I think that we will have answers as to what these pills are capable of within the next several months," Dieffenbach said.

The top contender is a medication from Merck and Ridgeback Biotherapeutics called molnupiravir, Dieffenbach said. This is the product being tested in the Kellys' Seattle trial. Two others include a candidate from Pfizer, known as PF-07321332, and AT-527, an antiviral produced by Roche and Atea Pharmaceuticals.

They work by interfering with the virus's ability to replicate in human cells. In the case of molnupiravir, the enzyme that copies the viral genetic material is forced to make so many mistakes that the virus can't reproduce. That, in turn, reduces the patient's viral load, shortening infection time and preventing the kind of dangerous immune response that can cause serious illness or death. So far, only one antiviral drug, remdesivir, has been approved to treat Covid. But it is given intravenously to patients ill enough to be hospitalized, and is not intended for early, widespread use. By contrast, the top contenders under study can be packaged as pills.

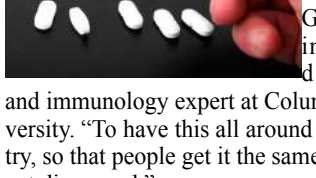
Sheahan, who also performed preclinical work on remdesivir, led an early study in mice that showed that molnupiravir could prevent early disease caused by SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid. The formula was discovered at Emory University and later acquired by Ridgeback and Merck.

Clinical trials have followed, including an early trial of 202 participants last spring that showed that molnupiravir rapidly reduced the levels of infectious virus. Merck chief executive Robert Davis said this month that the company expects data from its larger phase 3 trials in the coming weeks, with the potential to seek emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration "before year-end."

Pfizer launched a combined phase 2 and 3 trial of its product Sept. 1, and Atea officials said they expect results from phase 2 and phase 3 trials later this year.

If the results are positive and emergency use is granted for any product, Dieffenbach said, "distribution could begin quickly."

That would mean millions of Americans soon could have access to a daily orally administered medication, ideally a single pill, that could be taken for five to 10 days at the first confirmation of Covid infection.



"When we get there, that's the idea," said Dr. Daniel Griffin, an infectious diseases and immunology expert at Columbia University. "To have this all around the country, so that people get it the same day they get diagnosed."

Once sidelined for lack of interest, oral antivirals to treat coronavirus infections are now a subject of fierce competition and funding. In June, the Biden administration announced it had agreed to obtain about 1.7 million treatment courses of Merck's molnupiravir, at a cost of $1.2 billion, if the product receives emergency authorization or full approval. The same month, the administration said it would invest $3.2 billion in the Antiviral Program for Pandemics, which aims to develop antivirals for the Covid crisis and beyond, Dieffenbach said.

The pandemic kick-started a long-neglected effort to develop potent antiviral treatments for coronaviruses, said Sheahan. Though the original SARS virus in 2003 gave scientists a scare—followed by Middle East respiratory syndrome, or MERS, in 2012—research efforts slowed when those outbreaks did not persist.

"The commercial drive to develop any products just went down the tubes," said Sheahan.

Widely available antiviral drugs would join the monoclonal antibody therapies already used to treat and prevent serious illness and hospitalizations caused by Covid. The lab-produced monoclonal antibodies, which mimic the body's natural response to infection, were easier to develop but must be given primarily through intravenous infusions. The federal government is covering the cost of most monoclonal products at $2,000 a dose. It's still too early to know how the price of antivirals might compare.

Like the monoclonal antibodies, antiviral pills would be no substitute for vaccination, said Griffin. They would be another tool to fight Covid. "It's nice to have another option," he said.

One challenge in developing antiviral drugs quickly has been recruiting enough participants for the clinical trials, each of which needs to enroll many hundreds of people, said Dr. Elizabeth Duke, a Fred Hutch research associate overseeing its molnupiravir trial. Participants must be unvaccinated and enrolled in the trial within five days of a positive Covid test. Any given day, interns make 100 calls to newly Covid-positive people in the Seattle area—and most say no.

"Just generally speaking, there's a lot of mistrust about the scientific process," Duke said. "And some of the people are saying kind of nasty things to the interns."

If the antiviral pills prove effective, the next challenge will be ramping up a distribution system that can rush them to people as soon as they test positive. Griffin said it will take something akin to the program set up last year by UnitedHealthcare, which sped Tamiflu kits to 200,000 at-risk patients enrolled in the insurer's Medicare Advantage plans. Merck officials predicted the company could produce more than 10 million courses of therapy by the end of the year. Atea and Pfizer have not released similar estimates.

Even more promising? Studies evaluating whether antivirals can prevent infection after exposure.

"Think about that," said Duke, who is also overseeing a prophylactic trial. "You could give it to everyone in a household, or everyone in a school. Then we're talking about a return to, maybe, normal life." (Courtesy weforum.org)