

July 11, 2020

## COVID-19 is a Tax, and a Big One

In his first blog, on March 16, your blogger (YB) talked about how diseases and epidemics serve as taxes. This week he had an episode that indicated exactly how this taxation worked.

In early June, YB made a routine appointment with his ophthalmologist (eye doctor) for a routine examination. YB is well over 65 and it is wise to check for cataracts, glaucoma, and general eye health. Besides, his current pairs of eyeglasses are so scratched that they need replacing. The appointment was made for July 14, and duly noted on various calendars.

This past Tuesday, YB got a phone call from the doctor's office:

**Office:** Dr. Goodman, can we reschedule your eye appointment from July 14 to August 3?

**YB:** Sure – let me wipe my shaving cream off the phone (calendar/alarm clock/Sudoku puzzle), and put the new date on my calendar. Can I ask why it is being rescheduled?

**Office:** Once we reopened in early June, we were using our usual schedules. We've discovered that with enhanced cleaning measures, it is taking us more time to see patients. We can't see as many in a day, and we have had to reschedule.

This, readers, is a tax increase. Increased taxes lead to decreased quantity and also lead to increased prices. The question of health care prices is better left to another post, but the decreased quantities are real and substantial.

Now about schools. No serious educator is talking about "school as usual" this academic year (which in many places will start in early August). Spacing students is like spacing eye doctor patients. If they meet in school buildings (that were never built with something like this in mind) smaller groups of students will be meeting for fewer days each week, in rooms that will have to be made cleaner every day than they were the day they were built. Make no mistake. This is a tax increase. Increased taxes lead to decreased quantity and also lead to increased prices (sound familiar?)

The COVID-19 pandemic has levied enormous taxes on the US population. We could avoid some of the taxes by flattening the curve, especially in the places that thought they were immune to it. Taxes land on people who can't avoid them ... also on people who won't avoid them.

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