

August 23, 2022

## Endemic Wasn't Supposed to Be this Way

When COVID-19 swept the globe in early 2020, many scientists argued that like all other types of flu, it would eventually become *endemic*. Your blogger had to look it up. According to a National Cancer Institute (<https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/endemic>) definition:

[Endemic] In medicine, describes a disease that is constantly present in a certain geographic area or in a certain group of people. For example, endemic Burkitt lymphoma (a type of non-Hodgkin lymphoma) is seen at constant levels in certain parts of Africa.

In other words, it would be around, and we would get used to it. “Herd immunity” would play a part, in that enough people would have had it to limit the spread and the damage.

Well, thirty months, and with over 589 million Coronavirus Cases and over 6.4 million deaths (1.06 million in the US) (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>), it doesn't seem to be endemic quite yet. Unless endemic's meaning has changed.

YB and his partner flew from Detroit to the “left coast” for his partner's professional convention. The plane was packed, and about half of the passengers were masked. This was an increase in the masking rate over a previous set of flights in mid-June in which YB and his partner both contracted COVID.

August 2022 is the first time that this convention has met in person since 2019. The association's leaders desperately wanted to meet in person, and they severely limited the number of virtual sessions. Here is what “meeting in person” means in August 2022.

- Masked presenters
- Masked attendees
- Requirements that attendees be vaccinated, boosted, and willing to show proof of vaccination.

The result was decidedly mixed. Attendees cannot recognize each other, speak clearly to each other, or hear each other through masks. Attendance is way down from pre-COVID meetings. Hardly a session occurred without one or more would-be presenters “no-showing”. Professional job market matching had been eliminated and recruitment activities will be conducted by virtual means later in the academic year (in fairness, the increasing use of Zoom and Skype had been leading to this for some years, even pre-COVID).

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YB plus partner went on to a wedding later in the trip. Guests had to present negative COVID tests before entering the wedding venue. This wedding had already been postponed by a year or more. Everyone wanted to celebrate, but everyone had to be cautious. It was a joyous affair. It is good to be together again.

This is a health economics blog. In early blogs starting in March 2020, YB used the analytical device of a pandemic as an economic tax, a tax that raises the costs, and reduces economic activities.

It could be that this COVID tax will be permanent in the long-haul. Twenty-one years later we are still paying the “9/11/2001” tax at airports. At a cost of billions of dollars in TSA guards, airport alterations, screening equipment, and lost time, we have prevented another 9/11. “9/11” is now endemic.

COVID seems not yet endemic. We have a way to go.

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