

Simchat Again!

Your blogger went to a wedding this past weekend and danced the *hora*. In the Jewish culture, a happy event is a *simcha* (hard *ch*), with the plural being *simchat* (again hard *ch*). There have not been a lot of in-person *simchat* in the past eighteen months since the onset of COVID-19. Are things getting better? Have we turned the corner?

Well, it depends. In the past week, the aggregate number of US COVID-19 deaths per day has climbed back well over 1,000 (https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends_dailydeaths). This is the highest since early March 2021. Similarly, total cases are approaching their March 2021 values. People are still getting sick and dying from COVID-19.

This is a health economics blog, and YB has overused the “disease as a tax” argument since he started writing in March 2020. Taxes make activities more expensive, and people adapt their behavior to avoid (or at least to pay fewer) taxes. A “prohibitive” tax would make an activity SO expensive that someone would choose not to do it. YB + partner did make the trip, but the trip illustrates how the taxes have piled up since the pandemic start.

1. This wedding was postponed at least once from 2020 (and maybe more times that were unknown to YB).
2. All of the guests had to present vaccination status, and children under age 12 were tested for COVID-19.
3. The flight was fully masked. YB supports this, but it has made an already uncomfortable experience (as it happens, he was flying on 9/11) even more so.
4. Hotel services are stretched. YB + partner were informed that no one from the hotel would enter the room during our stay, so they used same towels and bed linen for the weekend (this is admittedly petty).
5. Food was served family-style to avoid contact (again, admittedly petty) with (and danger to) wait staff.
6. A compact rental car cost over \$200 for two days, the result of rental car companies depleting their fleets over the COVID-19 pandemic.

Without question, it was joyful to celebrate again with family members. The pandemic limitations on celebrations of “hatchings, matchings, and dispatchings” (births, weddings, funerals) have taken a major toll on events that characterize almost all groups and religions. People have started to flock again to athletic events, and, a little less again, to restaurants and theaters. Concerts are starting up again, with smaller crowds and bigger distances. In-person attendance at many Universities, including where YB teaches, is much lower than Fall 2019, the last full pre-pandemic term.

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So, it is appropriate to celebrate the *simchat*, and to try to get back to the way things used to be. For now, however, these activities are carrying significant taxes, and we are all paying them.

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