

May 3, 2022

This is the way the COVID ends ... not with a bang but a whimper

A federal judge in Florida struck down the mask mandate for airliners and people in airports. Fliers “ripped off their masks” in mid-flight. The number of daily deaths by most counts has fallen below five hundred, about where they were in June 2020 and in June 2021. After over one million deaths in the United States, has COVID ended?

- We are more vaccinated, and the vaccines seem to be working in preventing deaths, and reducing the severity of the disease, among those vaccinated. Large segments of the population have had initial vaccinations, and many have had a first, and then a second, booster.
- Businesses are trying to bring their workers back to the offices, although on a far more limited scale than pre-pandemic.
- Sports venues seem to be better attended, and some restaurants as well. Reading the trade publications suggests that in-theater cinema is searching for new models to market their films. People have not really flocked back to the movies.
- Many have changed their behaviors. Your blogger plus partner are wearing masks in large groups. Many continue to avoid crowded theaters and crowded offices. Proof of vaccination and/or negative test is still required to enter many venues.

This is a health economics blog. Initial efforts to fight the disease involved reducing in-person production and consumption activities, to avoid the spread. The analyses are still trickling in, but most feel that in the United States several hundred thousand lives were saved. Similar measures have recently returned in China (see below)

These benefits have come at the considerable cost of reduced production, reduced consumption (at the beginning), and disruption to our education system. Most students are back in some more normal educational setting, although there have been millions of student-years of lost education, and a major reduction of in-person education, particularly, but not exclusively, at the college level.

Have the costs incurred to fight the pandemic exceeded the benefits? Your blogger believes not, but he and other sober analysts are waiting for more sober analyses.

Can we declare the pandemic over? It is not over in China where Shanghai has been locked down for weeks, and where Beijing faces potential lockdowns as well. Cases are spiking in Europe and Australia. Several billion people may have achieved some level of natural immunity by getting mild (or

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severe) forms of the disease, but most have not been vaccinated. Another pandemic is no further than a transoceanic flight or a loaded cruise ship from an infected location. This, after all, was how it reached the United States in 2020.

Is the pandemic over in the United States simply because people are tired of it? Given the phases apparent over the past two years, it is essential to see what happens in Fall 2022, when it gets cold again. In both 2020, and 2021, COVID-19 cases rose in the fall and spiked in the following winters. It is sobering (that word again!) to remember that over 100,000 Americans died in January 2021, and 70,000 more in January 2022.

Or ... has it has largely ended. To paraphrase T.S. Eliot in [*The Hollow Men*](#) (1925):

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