

July 5, 2021

## Normalcy

Tomorrow, almost certainly (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>), we will pass four million deaths world-wide from COVID-19. The United States has had close to 620,000 deaths. South America (a surprise to your blogger) has close to a million. Most people who follow the numbers are aware that Brazil has had over half a million COVID-related deaths, but Peru reports nearly 200,000 deaths, Colombia over 100,000, and Argentina, almost 100,000 deaths. COVID-19 has killed lots of people everywhere that it has gone, and most experts believe that far more than four million have died.

This is a health economics blog. Multiply the lost lives by \$5 million per lost life and count the economic impact. It is staggering.

As the nations hobble towards “normalcy”, in this second half of 2021, what will “normal” look like? Let us exam a few things that have changed in the past 15 months, and ask what they will look like in the next 15 months.

Workplaces. Items still have to be made in factories, and foodstuffs harvested in the fields, requiring workers to be “at” the workplace. Following the “work at home” during COVID-19, many workers discovered that they do not want to come into the office five days per week post-COVID, irrespective of any dicta from the employers. While many negotiations continue, central offices will be nowhere as crowded as they were in July 2019 or February 2020.

Schools. As we put COVID-19 (hopefully) into the past, most parents have determined that the sooner K-12 students can be in the physical schools, the better, as have most teachers. Undergraduate and graduate education (for now) seems to be another matter. While the most selective institutions will almost certainly be full, in Fall 2021, having tasted online (and often asynchronous) education in the past year, many students (if preliminary enrollments are an indicator) have opted for online education, in preference to “in-person” class. This had been evolving for the last couple of decades, but it accelerated in the past year. Many universities have seen a substantial change in the mix between online and in-person education, with a major shift from the latter toward the former.

Stores/shopping/entertainment. Shopping malls were in trouble before COVID-19. Restaurants have not regained full capacity. We are inching toward the reopening of theaters. YB and his partner cannot wait to see the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in person, but the thought of sitting next to (almost right on top of) other patrons in a traditional concert hall is ... creepy. YB + partner are still wearing masks in large gatherings.

Travel. People are starting to travel again, although Michigan residents still cannot go to Canada. Air travel is increasing, and people are booking hotels.

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YB + partner will stay away from cruise ships. For the first time in fifteen months, potential travelers can “plan to travel”.

More COVID-19. The Delta variant is coming, and it will kill more people, particularly in places that have not been highly vaccinated. Those who have been vaccinated hope that the vaccines are as good as they have been led to believe.

So ... normalcy? We hope ... cautiously.

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