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Is it Over?

Today, almost two years into the pandemic, Worldometer® (<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/us/>) showed 969,602 US deaths from COVID-19. About 2,000 people per day are still dying from the disease, so by the end of March the US death toll will be (un)comfortably over one million.

Yet in most places, mask mandates are expiring, vaccination mandates are facing increasingly high hurdles, and most normal activities are occurring somewhat normally. We still need to show proof of vaccination to go to the theater and to the opera. Your Blogger's university still requires the Campus Daily Screener to come on campus. Still, the university would like for professors to teach in person, and employers, according to journalists' reports, are longing for people to come back to work at the "workplace", like the good old days. This is happening around the world. Has the pandemic ended?

It would seem not. There are millions of unvaccinated people in the United States and billions world-wide. Two close acquaintances and their families who were "max-vaxxed" have come down with COVID-19 in the past month. Then ... there are those 2,000 daily deaths that refuse to go away.

This is a health economics blog, and the economics say that COVID-19 is an "externality". One's right not to get vaccinated, is like one's right to smoke in a crowded restaurant. The market does not price air and aerosol droplets very well. In fact, it provides a price of zero, and elementary economics shows that people overuse goods with "zero prices." The "un-vaxxed" person overuses YB's air, which is why YB + partner still wear masks in public places.

Observers hoped that the pandemic was ending after the awful January 2021 when over 100,000 Americans died. Then came Delta, and then came Omicron. It's not clear which Greek letter will be used next. Over 400,000 Americans have died in the past twelve months from COVID-19.

John Barry's outstanding *The Great Influenza* notes that Australia was spared the Spanish flu until the victorious soldiers came home on boats from World War I. Remember that some of the earliest COVID-19 outbreaks occurred in international ports of entry such as Detroit (from the Far East) and New York (from Europe). As long as infectious people can get on airplanes, or until we reach the elusive herd immunity, the pandemic will continue.

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Reference

Barry, John M. 2020. *The Great Influenza*. Harlow, England: Penguin Books