

June 23, 2022

## Now, It's Personal

Your blogger has been writing on COVID-19 since March 2020. He has looked at others' COVID-related behaviors, and he has evaluated policies toward COVID as a detached observer. On Tuesday, YB and his partner both tested positive for COVID for the first time. They have started quarantining. They started taking Paxlovid® yesterday. COVID-19 has suddenly become very personal to them.

Today's personal excursion into COVID offers a negative and then a positive. The negative relates to exposure to COVID, and the reluctance of the business community to address it. The positive relates to the new-found "nimbleness" of pharmaceutical policies to provide drugs quickly and safely.

*First, the negative.* This is a health economics blog, and the purpose of this post is to evaluate public policies. In the past two weeks, YB plus partner returned by plane from California, and went to a funeral. They wore masks throughout the return trip, and during the funeral proceedings. Almost no one was masked in the airport, on the airplanes, or at the funeral, and YB's partner (masked) sat on the plane next to a crying, sneezing child for three hours.

Yet it is incongruous that the airlines, and airline staff have crowed almost triumphantly that the mask mandate has been overturned and we are free to fly unmasked. If one wants to wear masks, fine, but they will not require it. Imagine if a Florida judge had declared the airline seatbelt mandate unconstitutional. Would the airlines gleefully make the same announcement?

Airports and airplanes gather large numbers of people into the same place, in close proximity. Some may be ill, and others may not have been vaccinated. Travelers may not wish to wear masks ... but they will remain at high risk for infection. YB and partner have plans to travel again this summer and they will travel masked – possibly double-masked.

*The positive?* Getting prescriptions for, and buying, Paxlovid® was easy. YB plus partner called up the provider early in the morning. They were asked to "fax" a picture of the positive test to the provider, and the provider would contact the correct pharmacy. They (YB + partner) did, and they (provider) did. Four hours after the initial call, the prescriptions were ready at Walgreen's. They were provided at zero cash cost.

Surprising? To YB and partner, it was. YB had been prepared to wait a day or two, before the drugs would be available. Many consumers have become accustomed to a gargantuan amount of paperwork in making or filling prescriptions. There was a larger public purpose to getting out COVID-19 treatment quickly to those who need it. YB and partner are grateful.

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For now, the COVID-19 symptoms are manageable. YB is sluggish, and his partner has a fever and a cough. Neither has trouble breathing, and both are sleeping OK. They have joined 320 thousand Oakland County Cases (thus far) and the 2.6 million cases in the State of Michigan.

Now, it's personal.

Allen C. Goodman  
Professor of Economics