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Michigan is Spiking Again

From the April 1 **Chicago Tribune**.

In a rural stretch of Michigan along the shore of Lake Huron, coronavirus outbreaks are ripping through churches, schools and restaurants where the virus has infected line cooks and waitresses. For more than a week, ambulances have taken several hourlong trips each day to rush severely ill coronavirus patients to hospitals in Detroit, Saginaw or Port Huron, where beds in intensive care units await.

(<https://www.chicagotribune.com/coronavirus/ct-aud-nw-nyt-michigan-coronavirus-surge-20210401-2abgvcmz5cgvpmakrw55c3sa-story.html>)

Michigan, which carefully closed in April, and has spent the following year carefully reopening, is getting skewered by its fourth wave of COVID-19.

Your blogger is a health economist. Routinely over the past year he has sought to resist being a COVID-19 scold. Here comes the scold.

Suppose someone lights up a cigar in the city park, half a mile from where you are. He (or she) enjoys ... it doesn't bother you. Suppose, instead, that half of the walkers in the city park are smoking smelly panatelas. The air cannot assimilate all of the odor or the smoke. This is pollution! It mucks up the air shed and it makes people sick.

Opening up restaurants, sporting events, concerts, religious services, puts too many COVID-19 polluters in too small a place ... at least for now. Some are carrying or transmitting COVID-19. They will infect others, some of whom will die.

Business leaders (and their Republican allies) have led the opposition to shut-downs. It is in their interest to be open because they lose their (financial) shirts when they are closed. It is not in their interest to recognize the cumulative nature of their actions. Their openings lead to "super-spreader" events, that impact entire communities. This is what we are seeing in Michigan.

Economists often propose taxes to correct "market failures" like pollution. It makes the polluters face the real costs of their pollution. What about a 20% tax on in-restaurant meals, baseball games, and yes, religious services? The restaurants can pass the tax along to their customers. Those who want to eat out will pay it. The others (YB included) will wait.

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