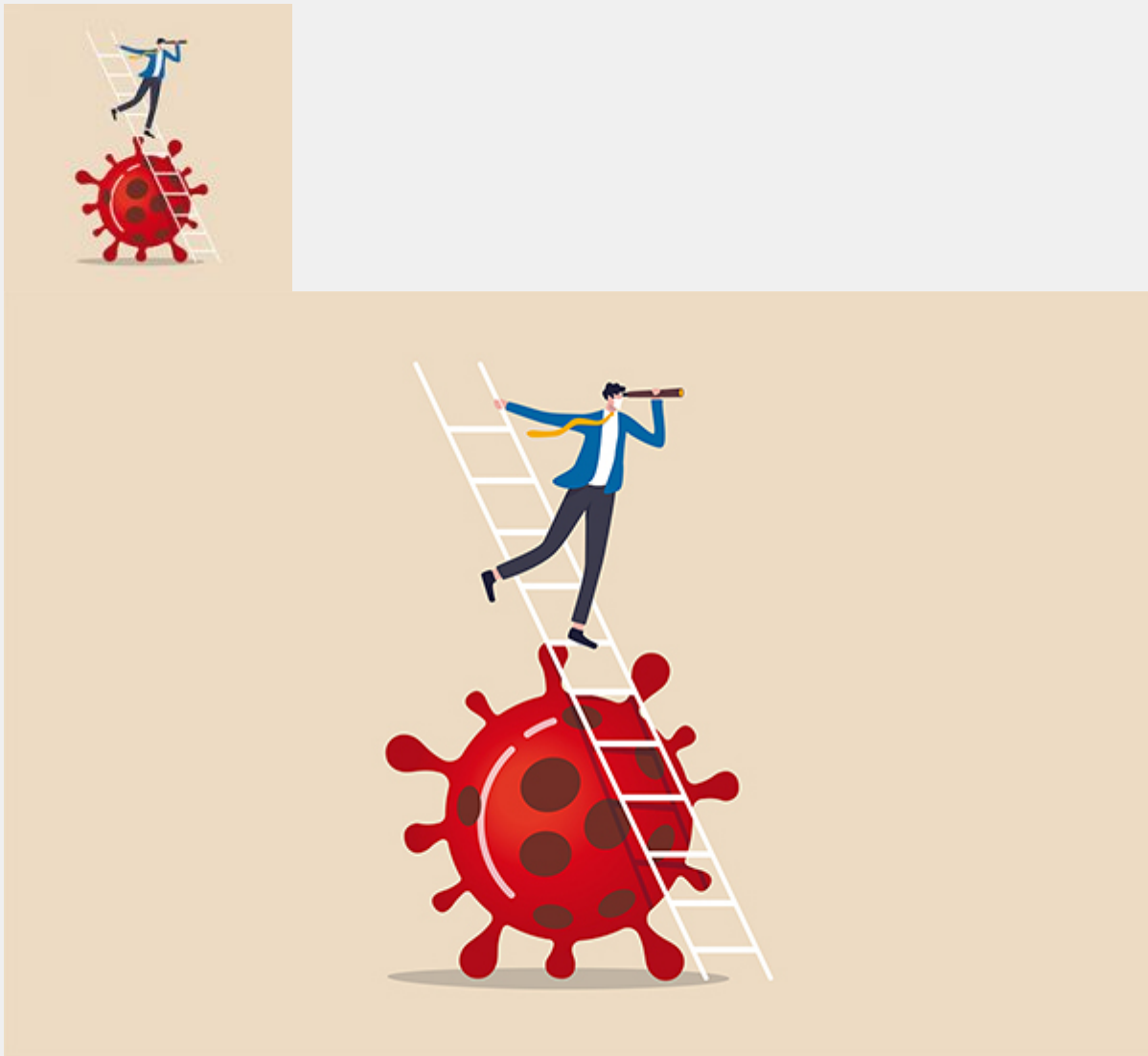


Is Covid over—or is there a looming apocalypse?



Covid recently hit a milestone for me personally. My hair cutter has had a long-standing policy of mandatory masking in her salon. It's a reasonable accommodation to her preferences, despite the fact that I've long stopped wearing a mask in my office, have taken plane trips several times without masking, and I no longer recommend it except for my most frail and vulnerable patients.

Things came to a head a few months back when I witnessed an ugly scene transpiring in the salon. A guy came in for his haircut, was unmasked, and was politely asked to put one on. He refused, became belligerent, and then engaged in some nasty cross-talk with another (masked) customer. It was suggested that maybe this wasn't the most opportune time for him to get a trim, and he left. Later, I heard his hair cutter call him to inform him he wouldn't be welcome back due to his abusive behavior.

So, I figured, not a hill to die on, I'll oblige the management of the salon when going in, as I did for several subsequent appointments. Then, I got a text from my hair cutter saying she'd have to cancel our next appointment—because she came down with Covid. She expressed frustration that, after all her precautions and boosters, she still had contracted it—no idea how. We rescheduled the appointment, and there

she was a week later, recovered but masked—ostensibly to protect her customers lest she still be shedding virus.

So this week, I showed up for my appointment, and as I went up the elevator, I dutifully fumbled in my pockets for my mask—they're showing up pretty much in every article of clothing I've worn since the pandemic began—but, no luck. OK, I reasoned, they have masks there, and they'll give me one.

The elevator opened on the floor of the salon, and as I turned the corner, an unexpected sight greeted me: My hair cutter, who had been so scrupulous about masking, wasn't wearing one. I walked in maskless, and nothing more was said.

What had changed? My hair cutter had contracted Covid, it was less devastating than she thought, and now she had natural immunity piggy-backed onto her vaccines—hybrid immunity. She enjoyed the same sense of relief that I did when I contracted Covid last winter. It's kind of like doing your first marathon—it induces a lot of apprehension in the contemplation, but afterwards it usually turns out to be not so bad, although statistics reveal that you actually have a chance of dying—albeit minuscule. With the added bonus that your body generates lots of durable antibodies and memory T-cells after a natural Covid infection.

But there are people who are not so blithe about Covid. Twitter has been aptly called “an information warfare platform”. Hence, your intrepid reporter will take one for the team and spare you the ordeal of a slog through the fetid sewers of Twitter, where I sometimes venture, but only after donning my psychic hazmat suit.

There, Covidians lurk. These are bitter-enders who are fighting the pandemic war in much the way that lone Japanese holdouts were found hiding in the jungles of isolated Pacific islands—decades after their garrisons surrendered.

They write peculiar things, and are alarmed that everyone else seems to be lowering their guard against the virus. They comb the scientific literature to find evidence of the most dire potential long-term consequences of Covid infections. Indeed, some who contract the virus develop Long Covid, but it goes beyond that; these true-believers are convinced that *everyone* who has come down with Covid—the majority of the world's population by now—will succumb to progressive heart damage, dementia, diabetes or accelerated aging.

They exude a pervasive sense of doom. Their Twitter account badges are often accessorized with emojis of syringes and masked faces. #CovidIsNotOver is a favorite hashtag. Often I wonder if theirs are not parody accounts. Here, a sampling:

- “Some perspective for those who still don't get it: If I were forced to be infected by either HIV or COVID, I would choose HIV without hesitation . . . COVID can cause many chronic diseases, data suggests that telomere damage ages the body by about 5 years, and it causes damage to the immune system. HIV mostly just damages the immune system and is easily treated. Finally, we don't know what else COVID might cause over time.”
- “A COVID wave of BQ infections [latest variant] that started in New York has already reached California . . . It's about to engulf the rest of the nation, experts say(!)”
- “There is a lot of virus circulating right now. Without proper testing, without transparent data, it's hard to understand how dangerous it is. Not only should we be avoiding infection once, we should be avoiding reinfections as best as we can.”
- “The government is abandoning our children to a harmful virus by prohibiting

mask mandates. There are no detrimental effects of masking on the mental health, development and education of children in schools, but it is well understood that Covid can have dire health consequences.”

- “If someone asks me why I’m masking, I say that I’m supporting someone vulnerable. That’s why I wear masks, to support everyone who is vulnerable. Which is everyone.”
- “Seems no one in our government is asking why America’s greatest competitor, China, is taking Covid absolutely serious to prevent infection... even after nearly 3 full years of data on lowered life expectancy, long Covid, and increased risks of diabetes, heart attack, and stroke.”
- “Disinfo reporters have completely stopped covering covid bc they want to falsely believe the pandemic is over, meanwhile powerful corporate forces are working behind the scenes to mislead the public into accepting unprecedented death/disability. All w/ zero pushback from the press”
- “So my wife and I disagree in sending the kids to school in person. I have a full time job and #LongCovid and she’s a homemaker so if she refuses the kids have to be in person in school. I’m considering divorce now because it’s got to a point where infection is almost a certainty.”
- “If we’re going to pretend Covid isn’t harmful then we really should start promoting smoking, alcohol, drugs, and eating junk food in the schools. At least then the kids could have more fun while we lead them to their doom.”
- “We never stopped masking—and often the only ones wearing them in the very few places we go. Plan to keep on wearing them for the long haul, however long it may be (really the way things are going, it will be forever).”

They enjoy a large following on social media, with many people expressing approval with “likes”.

All of this notwithstanding a **prediction** from the University of Washington that Covid deaths will be *8-fold lower* this winter than during last year’s seasonal surge.

On the other end of the alarmist spectrum—logically enough because our social media discourse is polarized and doesn’t permit nuance—there are a lot of posts that highlight an alleged mysterious wave of sudden, premature deaths, which are attributed not to the insidious effects of Covid, *but to the mRNA vaccines* that the Covid hard-liners can’t get enough of.

To be sure, Long Covid *is* a real and debilitating problem, and we recognize by now the vaccine *can* produce serious side effects. And yes, Covid is still with us, although in a much attenuated form, and most of us have some degree of immunity to it. And let’s acknowledge that there remains an outside chance that, although a majority recover uneventfully from a mild respiratory infection due to Covid, some of us will experience hitherto unrecognized long-term sequelae of Covid—to our hearts, brains, or metabolisms.

But the alternative is to live in fear, which is also a debilitating medical condition. And I’m concerned that all too many of us have succumbed to a sort of deeply inculcated germ phobia—a form of Covid PTSD—intentionally induced by a sensationalistic media at the behest of government and Big Pharma interests whose goal is control and coercion.

I believe it’s time for us to emerge from hiding, resume our normal lives, and realistically face the usual hazards of life without undue obsession over Covid,

while at the same time pragmatically investigating ways to lessen the burden of invariable new infections and addressing the sufferers of Long Covid—for which *Intelligent Medicine* answers are certain to emerge.

But I probably won't convince many of the die-hards who remain locked in a never-ending death-match with Covid.

See also: "Maybe it's time to talk LESS about COVID"