

A citizen's thoughts about COVID-19

I study epidemiology in Canada. Outbreaks of severe acute respiratory syndrome-related coronavirus and influenza A virus subtype H1N1 occurred during my early childhood, but I have no recollection of those times. The ongoing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak is the first global public health outbreak that I am really experiencing.

From my studies, I understand some of the scientific metrics of COVID-19. A case fatality rate of 0.25–3% (as of March 13, 2020) makes COVID-19 more severe than a typical influenza,¹ and it can be transmitted between individuals even during the latent phase.² These numbers are very scary to me.

On March 11, 2020, WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic,³ confirming my worst fears. The next day, my university cancelled its in-person classes. I quickly left home for the grocery store, to stock up in preparation for staying home, and saw many people out and about, similarly stocking up. Toilet paper quickly disappeared off the shelves, cleaning supplies were being purchased as fast as store workers could restock the shelves, and non-perishable foods were being purchased by the shopping cart.

If I was not scared before from the statistics and the WHO's declaration, now I certainly am. I too found myself buying high quantities of supplies, strongly driven by fear from my surroundings. I even travelled to and from the grocery store in an Uber, in an attempt to minimise any possible exposure from using public transport.

When I returned home, my computer screen was full of content about the increasing number of cases of COVID-19, the isolating impact on society, the ravishing of the financial markets, and states of emergencies declared by different organisations and sovereignties. How could one not be scared? In my own home, supposedly safe and isolated from the outside

pandemic, I was become increasingly scared.

At the same time, I recognise that government officials and scientists alike are diligently labouring to understand and act accordingly. I am appreciative of all their hard work. For me, it has been comforting to know and see these individuals step forward and share their progress and optimism around this situation.

Knowledge dissemination is especially crucial during this time, not only to share progress and hopefully expedite it, but also to ease many people around the world who are gripped by fear and are awaiting any positive or hopeful news.

I am scared, but I can be less scared with increased communication.

I declare no competing interests.

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- 1 Wilson N, Kvalsvig A, Telfar Barnard L, Baker MG. Case-fatality estimates for COVID-19 calculated by using a lag time for fatality. *Emerg Infect Dis* 2020; published online March 13. DOI:10.3201/eid2606.200320.
- 2 Hoehl S, Rabenau H, Berger A, et al. Evidence of SARS-CoV-2 infection in returning travelers from Wuhan, China. *N Engl J Med* 2020; published online Feb 18. DOI:10.1056/NEJMc2001899.
- 3 WHO. Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19—11 March 2020. March 11, 2020. <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19—11-march-2020> (accessed March 23, 2020).



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