

# I'm almost starting to think this whole pandemic really is a conspiracy

Our continuing oppressive response to a virus that almost every human survives is making less and less sense

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We've had pandemics before during my lifetime. I cast my mind back to the 2009 swine flu outbreak. There was an initial flurry of panic; of media scaremongering, and yes, some deaths. But scientists quickly classified the foreign-imported pathogen as a new strain of flu and got to work making a vaccine. Life went on as normal.

Covid-19 was obviously proving to be a lot more virulent than swine flu, but even early on it was clear that the virus was sparing the vast majority of the population. Those I knew who caught it either suffered symptoms similar to a mild cold, or none at all. Bemused, as the Government set about building Nightingale hospitals that would hardly be used and Britain's vibrant cities turned into ghost towns, I kept thinking to myself, 'when are they going to tell us what's really going on?'

I was waiting for a revelation that never came. Months went by and millions of tests were performed, revealing with increasing certainty that here was a virus with a very low death rate indeed. Exact approximations vary but the survival rate for Covid-19 is thought to be somewhere above 99 per cent, and maybe as high as 99.8 per cent.

The average age of someone who dies from coronavirus is 82.4, which, by the way, is nearly identical to the average life expectancy in Britain (81.1). Surely it is people in this segment of society we should be focusing on protecting, I thought, as schools closed and businesses went bust up and down the country.

It looked vaguely promising in July when restaurants, hotels and shops reopened, and when most of Europe opened its borders to international travel, but this break from the tyranny of lockdown was short-lived.

Between mid-June and mid-September – even as we socialised, holidayed, and swapped germs to our heart's content – influenza and pneumonia contributed to more weekly deaths than Covid-19.

Sweden, one of the only countries on Earth that refused to lock down, had by this point proved beyond reasonable doubt that its tactic had broadly worked; even with such little intervention, the nation had not collapsed into the sort of apocalyptic health crisis predicted by the likes of Neil Ferguson.

Confoundingly, the British government continues to paint a picture of a virus that scares its citizens into an ongoing state of paranoid submission. Its chief scientific advisors almost appear to take relish in spouting doomsday predictions that never materialize (50,000 daily cases by mid-October, warned Sir Patrick Vallance and Professor Chris Whitty last month – the real number was less than half that).

This dogged fixation on case numbers would make sense, of course, if we knew that lots of cases led to lots of deaths. They don't. In the first week of October, there were 91,013 cases of coronavirus reported in England and Wales, and 343 Covid-related deaths. That same week a total of 9,954 people died from

various causes. Of those, just 4.4 per cent of the death certificates mentioned Covid-19.

Our policy on international travel is just as nonsensical, even to the layman. Let's put aside the evidence that hardly any coronavirus cases are even being traced back to foreign travel, but are overwhelmingly being transmitted within households. And that given Covid-19 has already settled itself in every country on the planet, this manic opening and closing of drawbridges is surely futile.

The UK, not entirely irrationally, decides which countries we can visit quarantine-free based on that country's rate of cases per 100,000 citizens over seven days. You might assume then, that, if anything, we'd be placing quarantine restrictions on nations where their case rate is higher than ours.

Not so. Most of the countries now off-limits have rates that are lower – among them Spain, Iceland, Portugal and most recently Italy. Ironically, one of the only nations the FCDO still deems safe enough to visit restriction-free is none other than Sweden.

Eight months on, my burning question remains unanswered. What is really going on? About 50 million people die each year worldwide. Some deaths are preventable, others not. Over the course of 2020, this pandemic has claimed 1.1 million lives; most of whom were elderly or already ill. Heart disease kills 17 million annually; cancer 9.6 million. Respiratory diseases, including bronchitis, pneumonia and emphysema take 2.5 million lives a year.

Why then, are we still playing this ridiculously destructive game with healthy peoples' lives – a risky experiment that, as is starting to emerge, will very likely kill more people than it saves in the long run?

My father, an ardent lockdown sceptic, reckons it has all turned into some sort of multi-national, anti-capitalist power grab. “Christianity,” he points out, based on “nonsensical” stories of a virgin birth, and a death-defying saviour, “successfully dominated the predominant part of the civilised world for the best part of two millennia. It was a power system, and its power trumped logic.”

I don't believe there are darker forces at play here – surely Hanlon's Razor explains it? – but I do continue to puzzle over the motives of our world leaders as we stare down the barrel of yet more financially-ruinous lockdowns. This week I was a guest on Escape from Lockdown, a podcast that features interviews with the hardiest of sceptics. Its host Alex, who has discussed this very question with many prominent scientists, sociologists and politicians, says their theories vary.

Good old fashioned peer pressure seems to play a big part (Boris Johnson initially stood firm on refusing to join the rest of Europe's unprecedented, untested lockdown hypothesis, but ultimately fell), and it's not the first time in history that vast numbers of otherwise sane people have succumbed to a case of mass hysteria.

Occum's Razor would suggest that most politicians are merely too stubborn to concede they were wrong in their approach to this pandemic. Not just slightly, but catastrophically wrong. "Governments are continuing with these lockdowns because their scientific advisors



are so emotionally invested in their initial projections,” Alex reckons.

But it’s not just our leaders. The prospect, for most citizens, that we’ve wasted nearly a year of our lives for no good reason is just too bitter a pill to swallow. Most of us are happier telling ourselves that it was all warranted, and for the greater good.

Either that, or the conspiracy loonies are right: Elon Musk (or is it Bill Gates?) is at the helm of a global plot to turn us all into an army of morose, segregated, muzzled, drone-patrolled test subjects in an alternate reality (purpose as yet unknown) under which free speech is curtailed, curfews dictate our every movement, and bonking is illegal with those outside our designated tribe.

Which, upon reflection, doesn’t sound too many lightyears away from our current warped reality.