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Lessons Learned from the Pandemic

good hygiene prevents the spread of diseases other than just Covid

I have been trying to steer clear of writing about Coronavirus; but it seems some of the lessons that ought to have been learned are being quickly forgotten. Too many have been ignoring the restrictions: flocking in numbers to beaches and parks when it has been made clear that this is inadvisable. Others, for whatever reason, have massed in the streets for rallies and protests. Certainly people have a right to opinions and free speech, but not at the cost of community safety. Then there are those who refuse to wear face masks if told to; while a small minority persist in denying the actual existence of Covid; or claim it to be a government conspiracy. I think a reminder is necessary.

When the presence of Covid was first acknowledged, the hope was that it would pass in a short space of time. Little was known about its spread, and there was an assumption that it was similar to the flu virus; which, of course, was less devastating once vaccines were available to combat the major strains. Now we have a number of anti-Covid vaccines to keep those who have been injected relatively safe. Although there have been a few cases of serious side-effects, on a percentage basis they are reasonably acceptable. One would assume that when most of the population have eventually been vaccinated, life as we knew it could begin again after a fashion. People would be able to go out unrestricted and socialise simply because they had received the jab of immunity. That was the expectation. Unfortunately, it is, I believe, a flawed conception that is breeding complacency.

During 2020 the advice was to be very mindful of hygiene. People had to apply an effective strength of hand-sanitiser, disinfect areas around the home that might carry the virus, wear masks, and obey the rules of social distancing. This was intended to prevent the spread of Covid; but in Australia at least, it was discovered that these practices also reduced the cases of influenza and the common cold. It put us in the enviable position of being one of the few countries that had stopped Coronavirus in its tracks enabling a return to a semblance of normality; and the population as a whole was probably healthier and maybe marginally wealthier in the process. So, is it still necessary to continue sanitising and disinfecting? Anyone who has been vaccinated is safe and doesn't need to bother, surely? That, I'm afraid, is wishful thinking as well as pretty self-centred. The wake-up call, unfortunately, came to us in Oz in 2021 when an outbreak of the Delta strain in New South Wales began to spiral out of control and placed not only that State in jeopardy, but also the whole of the country.

Even those vaccinated may experience some symptoms of infection; and whether they do or not, they can still carry and spread the virus, perhaps unknowingly. Specific cases in Western Australia seem to confirm that it can be transmitted by touching an infected person or surface; and the greatest worry is that it is also suspected of being an airborne disease. Air-conditioners can pass it throughout rooms and corridors. It also means that anyone in close proximity to a carrier is at risk of contracting Covid simply by breathing in another's expired air. The same applies to viruses like colds and flu; and along with Coronavirus, these debilitating illnesses are seemingly here to stay.

I can't stress strongly enough that complacency will be our downfall. Believing the vaccination is a fix-all will undoubtedly result in a relaxation of hygiene procedures – maybe it already has. To prevent the resurgence of mass infection, we must continue using hand-sanitiser, disinfecting the home, and wearing masks if requested to do so by the authorities. This is not bowing to Big Brother – it is commonsense. I like to think that most of us are endowed with it and will agree that taking a little extra time to do the right thing before venturing out isn't hard. It is, after all, the responsible way to keep ourselves and our communities safe.

All for one, and one for all – under the current circumstances, that wise and altruistic motto truly does apply, don't you think?

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