

CORONAVIRUS: IT'S NOT THE END OF THE WORLD

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If there was ever a song for the current times, it would be REM's "it's the end of the world as we know it — and I feel fine". Coronavirus is the proverbial only show in town. It is staggering to see how people respond to what is essentially a cold-like illness.

Relax with a mask

Now, let's be straight. Some people will get a more severe illness, and some have died — although, mainly those over 80 and with pre-existing medical conditions. In that respect, it is similar to the annual influenza season. To give some perspective so far, this norther influenza in the US. The figures would be similar, and possibly greater, in Europe and far greater in China.

This happens each and every year. At the time of writing, there have been 182,818 cases of COVID-19 across the whole world. Two-thirds of these and more than 80% of fatalities have been in three countries: China, Italy and Iran. Australia has 452 cases and five fatalities. Italy is not the typical example. It is an outlier. Japan and South Korea have few fatalities. Taiwan has managed the situation best, but you won't hear this from the WHO!

It is certain the virus will spread and there will be more cases.

While this is a new strain, the family of coronavirus is not new. We have all had a cold at some point in our lives, and we get better.

The vast majority of cases are mild. Witness Richard Wilkins, Idris Elba and Peter Dutton.

The mortality rate is grossly inflated as it based on confirmed cases. We know that colds are contagious. In fact, they are more contagious than the flu.

There may be hundreds, if not thousands, of subclinical cases not identified for each confirmed case. The term 'viral spread' did not originate from the internet — it originated from viruses!

However, we also know that one person in a house can have it and others do not succumb. Not everyone who comes into contact with a virus will get ill.

So why all the panic about this virus? There are many answers to this.

Being new gives it novelty value.

The constant media coverage of every case (imagine if there were news reports of every case of flu in winter) keeps it in the public eye.

This is made worse by governments and officials talking out of both sides of their mouth. On the one side, it is keep calm and don't panic. At the same time, it is lock yourself away if you cough twice.

The biggest issue is the refusal of those in authority to be honest with the public.

The fact is, we don't know everything.

It is also a fact that this virus cannot and will not be contained. We will need to take all the usual measures that we do to best avoid catching viruses.

This includes washing hands, and coughing into a tissue or our elbow. It includes staying home if genuinely ill. Don't visit elderly relatives if you are unwell. It also includes doing what we can to support our own immune systems.

Have you heard anyone in authority say that getting adequate sleep, eating a nutritious diet with good amounts of vitamins and minerals (and perhaps supplementing with vitamin C, zinc and vitamin D) all help immune function?

Have they said that regular exercise and managing stress also support the immune system?

Of course not. That would be far too useful and simple. None of the above guarantees that you can never get ill.

Supporting the immune system simply makes it less likely you get ill and more likely you will recover quickly if you do.

Before ending, I have to comment on the stupidity of stockpiling toilet paper.

Coronavirus does not cause diarrhoea. If you wanted to stockpile anything, facial tissues would at least make sense.

Not that there is any need, because cold illnesses last a week on average.

The real damage from coronavirus will not be the mild illnesses or even that a small number will succumb to it rather than the regular flu.

The real damage will come from panic and overreaction with its impact on the economy. This is already taking shape on the stock market. It will be significant and longer lasting.

There is no need to stockpile. This makes the situation worse. There may be a case for battering the hatches financially until the proverbial storm passes and the market realises the world is still turning.

Previous generations lived through world wars. We may have to watch Netflix for 14 days.

As a society, we have lost any form of resilience. When this settles, hopefully the perpetually outraged will have more perspective.

Ultimately, coronavirus will go the way of every other doomsday prediction.

Until then, keep living your life, support your immune system and perhaps see the funny side of human behaviour.

And listen to REM.