

Flyer Facts

Mask Bloc St. Louis

[Last Updated: March 1, 2024]

Below, please find sources to support and expand on the information included on our informational flyer! The resources we've included here do not represent *all* of the information available on these topics. Far from it. What we have listed here are just a few helpful links that support the information we're providing, and to give you a head-start on learning more about COVID, its impact on our bodies, and how we can protect ourselves and others.

[1]:

Flyer Fact: *"COVID has caused **over a million deaths** in the US alone, and continues to kill thousands of people in the US every week."*

Sources and Discussion:

The Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center (<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/united-states>) recorded the number COVID deaths in the US at 1,123,836 until March 10th, 2023, when they stopped counting because a number of states stopped reporting their case and death numbers. As of March 1, 2024, the CDC counts the number of deaths due to COVID at 1,181,607 (<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#datatracker-home>).

This viewpoint piece from researchers at Boston University, University of Minnesota, and University of California San Francisco discusses some of the reasons why death rates from COVID represent undercounts:

<https://www.bu.edu/sph/news/articles/2023/covid-19-deaths-in-the-us-continue-to-be-undercounted-research-shows-despite-claims-of-overcounts/>

The "Provisional Death Counts for COVID-19" from the CDC can be found here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/index.htm>. It is important to note, as the link above attests, that these numbers represent an undercount. It is also important to remember that these numbers represent deaths from *acute* infection only and do not include deaths from long COVID or post-COVID complications. Indeed, the burden of Long COVID in the United States is currently (July 2024) similar to that of heart disease and cancer:

<https://medicine.wustl.edu/news/covid-can-cause-new-health-problems-3-years-after-infection/>.

[2]

Flyer Fact: *"COVID is NOT just a respiratory (lung) infection. It damages not just your lungs, but also your heart, your arteries, your brain, your immune system, and more. Because of the damage COVID causes to your body, issues like trouble breathing, pain, blood clots that can lead to strokes, and more can happen long after you "get over" the initial infection."*

Sources and Discussion:

This clear and short interview with Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly in *The Sick Times* explains recent research that shows how every covid increases the risk of long-term damage in nearly every major system in the body, even if someone is vaccinated and even if the early symptoms are mild. He also talks about how other viruses, like the flu, can hurt us, too. The interview includes links to the studies themselves, if you want to learn more: <https://thesicktimes.org/2023/12/19/qa-ziyad-al-aly-on-why-long-covid-has-a-higher-burden-than-long-flu-future-research-and-more/>

Dr. Al-Aly also published this clear and short discussion of the impact COVID has on our brains on February 28th, 2024: <https://theconversation.com/mounting-research-shows-that-covid-19-leaves-its-mark-on-the-brain-including-with-significant-drops-in-iq-scores-224216>. These recent studies support what scientists at Riken, Japan's premiere scientific institute, warned about in December, 2023 when they used scientific modeling to predict a possible "heart disease pandemic" as a result of COVID.

Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly is the Director of the Clinical Epidemiology Center at Washington University in St. Louis and the Chief of the Research and Education Service at the VA Saint Louis Health Care System. He recently testified in front of the US Senate's hearing on Long Covid. You can watch a video of the hearing, and read transcripts from the three patient witnesses and four research witnesses here: <https://www.help.senate.gov/hearings/addressing-long-covid-advancing-research-and-improving-patient-care>

This recent article in Bloomberg also discusses the sharp rise in heart disease death that has taken place since the start of the pandemic. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-02-26/covid-made-heart-disease-deadlier-puzzling-scientists>.

The article is behind a paywall, but please reach out to us and we will be happy to provide a free PDF. This Q&A with the author of the article, Jason Gale, is open access, and includes useful facts such as:

- "The best way to avoid Covid's effects is to not catch SARS-CoV-2. That's difficult since the virus is so infectious and prevalent in society, and people are no longer taking 2020-level precautions - like mask-wearing - to prevent transmission." –Jason Gale, Senior Editor
- "It's been known for decades, if not centuries, that infections can cause long-term illness. Still relatively little is known about infection-associated chronic diseases, including long Covid. In many cases, it's not known what's driving the disease. And

sadly, there's nothing approved or scientifically proven to prevent or treat it.” –Jason Gale, Senior Editor

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/live-blog/2024-02-27/covid-19-and-heart-problems?embedded-checkout=true>

Finally, this hour-long research update on Long Covid from University of California San Francisco includes Dr. Akiko Iwasaki, Dr. Michael Peluso, and Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly, who discuss their recent findings on the long-term damage associated with covid infections and re-infections. It is from December, 2023.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMt6ZV-hHSE>

See Flyer Fact #3 below to learn more about what we know regarding how COVID damages the immune system.

[3]

Flyer Fact: “Catching COVID causes you to be **more likely to catch other diseases**, including strep, RSV, flu, pneumonia, measles, and fungal infections.”

Sources and Discussion:

This article from *The Conversation* in 2022 discusses the ways that catching COVID may interfere with your immune system:

<https://theconversation.com/ive-had-covid-and-am-constantly-getting-colds-did-covid-harm-my-immune-system-am-i-now-at-risk-of-other-infectious-diseases-188899>

We're still learning about this, but the Memorial Sloan Kettering Library makes it pretty clear: “...while the acute infection may be one reason to not want to keep getting infected with SARS-CoV-2 over and over again, the idea that it can increasingly cause damage to the immune system should be a significant reason. Throughout the pandemic, scientific evidence has mounted that even mild COVID infections may be doing something to our immune systems, as well as our collective immunity.”

(<https://libguides.mskcc.org/covidimpacts/immune>, last updated February 29th, 2024).

The idea that COVID might hurt our immune systems—rather than strengthening them—might be confusing, especially if you grew up being told that you needed to “strengthen” your immune system by getting sick. This idea is called the “hygiene hypothesis,” a hypothesis that started to grow in the 1980s. While it seems to be true about some bacteria, it is not true about viruses. On the contrary, viral infections hurt us, they do not make us stronger. You can read more about this in this helpful Q&A from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health:

<https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2022/is-the-hygiene-hypothesis-true>

[4]

Flyer Fact: *“The virus that causes **COVID** is constantly evolving, and there are dozens of active strains at any time. This means that being vaccinated or having had COVID recently does not fully protect you from catching COVID again.”*

Sources and Discussion: The American Medical Association discusses reinfections with multiple variants here:

<https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/what-doctors-wish-patients-knew-about-covid-19-reinfection>.

[5]

Flyer Fact: *“COVID is still a **global pandemic**. While the public health emergency declarations are over, the World Health Organization (WHO) still classifies COVID-19 as a pandemic; it is all over the world and continues to be a major health threat.”*

Sources and Discussion: The WHO’s overview on the Covid-19 emergency reads:

“On 5 May 2023, more than three years into the pandemic, the WHO Emergency Committee on COVID-19 recommended to the Director-General, who accepted the recommendation, that given the disease was by now well established and ongoing, it no longer fit the definition of a PHEIC. This does not mean that the pandemic itself is over, but the global emergency it caused is – for now.” <https://www.who.int/europe/emergencies/situations/covid-19>

[6]

Flyer Fact: Regarding masks and respirators:

Sources and Discussion:

There are lots of different types of masks. The best mask for you is one that seals on your face, so all the air you breathe goes through the mask, and not around the edges of the mask.

- Cloth masks were used early in the pandemic when other masks were hard to get. Most cloth masks do very little to protect you, since they are only one layer of material that is not designed to filter viruses.
- Surgical masks are OK at keeping your germs away from the people in front of you, but don’t protect you very much if you’re wearing them, because so much unfiltered air can get in around the edges

- KF94, KN95, and N95 masks are designed to protect you from viruses and more while you wear them. They have multiple layers of material that not only filter the air, but also are specifically designed to trap things like viruses within the layers.
- KF94 and KN95 masks usually have ear loops.
 - KF94s and KN95s are not approved by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).
 - The earloops of these respirators typically produce a looser seal on the wearer's face, letting more air in around the edges of the mask, and therefore lowering the respirator's effectiveness.
- N95s
 - N95s all have head straps and come in a number of different styles and shapes.
 - N95 respirators offer the highest level of protection against airborne viruses out of the masks and respirators described here
 - In the United States, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) regulates N95 respirators, along with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). That means that genuine N95 respirators have undergone a rigorous testing process to certify that they work as they are designed to work.
 - The FDA notes that "People with chronic respiratory, cardiac, or other medical conditions that make breathing difficult should check with their health care provider before using an N95 respirator because the N95 respirator can make it more difficult for the wearer to breathe."
(<https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/personal-protective-equipment-infection-control/n95-respirators-surgical-masks-face-masks-and-barrier-face-coverings#s5>)
 - It is certainly worth asking your doctor about wearing an N95 if you are in doubt, however, since people with chronic respiratory and cardiac conditions are also almost certainly at high risk for severe outcomes from COVID and should protect themselves!
 - In general, N95s are safe for most wearers and represent a significant layer of protection against becoming infected with COVID and other viruses.
 - Luis Seija, MD, discusses the importance of getting used to wearing N95s when they are new to you: "The biggest thing when it comes to breathing is there's probably a sense of anxiety or suffocating that comes with it," said Dr. Seija,

"And that's a totally natural reaction, particularly for people who are not used to it... But we're heading towards the direction where this is our new normal, so the most important consideration about wearing a respirator is how does it fit? Is it comfortable for you?" Dr. Seija said as he modeled a mask that caused his ears to stick out. "This is too small for me and it's too tight. "I can use this if I need to, but it's not going to be the right fit for me, and it is going to affect how I breathe." (AMA link below, "What Doctors Wish Patients Knew About Wearing N95s")

We can provide you with a lot of specific information on masks and respirators, but for a quick overview, see this article from the American Medical Association:

<https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/what-doctors-wish-patients-knew-about-wearing-n95-masks>