



## Science REPORTER

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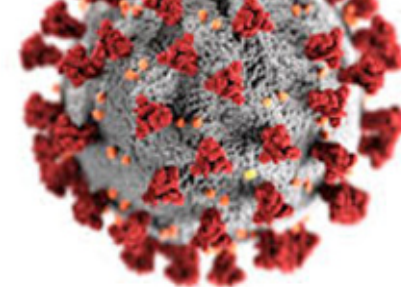
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# Coronavirus Pandemic Innumerable Questions, Few Answers



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**V**ERY few of those living today would have experienced, ever in their lifetime, the trying conditions and circumstances thrown up by the Coronavirus outbreak. With much of the world under lockdown and infections and casualties due to COVID-19 piling up every day (at the last count more than 4.7 million infected and around 3,15,000 dead), the pandemic has completely changed the way we live and work. At the same time, the new virus has thrown up many unusual and intriguing questions...with very few answers.

Of course, some questions and beliefs have been born out of ignorance. There are many such beliefs in prevalence today. Will eating garlic prevent you from coronavirus infection (no it won't, but it helps improve immunity); will drinking bleach or absolute alcohol kill the virus inside your body (no it will not kill the virus, while bleach can cause you serious harm, absolute alcohol could even kill you); can thermal scanners detect coronavirus (no, they can detect fever but not the presence of virus), and many such others.

However, during the course of the pandemic, the intriguing nature of the new virus and an evolving understanding of its sinister workings over time have seen many answers to several questions getting modified or corrected. For instance, while initially it was believed that putting on masks had no benefits whatsoever, at a later point it emerged that masks could considerably check the spread of the virus among populations. Then, there are no clear answers to how long the lockdowns should be implemented. There is also not much clarity on why some places in the world are witnessing high fatalities while others are not.

There are also questions pertaining to immunity – will recovery from the first infection confer lasting immunity? How long would such an immunity sustain? Can one get infected a second time? Although there are reports of recovered COVID-19 patients testing positive again in China, South Korea and Japan questions are being asked about the accuracy of the tests.

Then, there are other equally intriguing questions being asked: How long a run will this virus enjoy? How soon is it expected to go away? Again, very few answers. Of course, much will depend on how soon we can come up with medicines and vaccines or how long it will take for the population to develop herd immunity – this happens when a high percentage of the people in a community become immune to an infectious disease which stops the disease from spreading. This, in turn, happens in two ways: when many people get infected and develop antibodies or when many people are vaccinated against the disease.

Finally, while all of us wish the virus to go away as soon as possible, another question that hangs above our heads is: Will we see more such epidemics? If yes, when will the next epidemic happen? Well, writing in *Time* magazine, Bryan Walsh in his article “The World Is Not Ready for the Next Pandemic” says, during the last 30 years, the number of annual epidemics has nearly tripled (<https://time.com/4766624/next-global-security/>). Several outbreaks of Zika, MERS-CoV, SARS, cholera, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, influenza and Ebola have killed hundreds of thousands of people. This is because the world has become increasingly connected, people are moving around the world at a much faster pace. At the same time, climate change is also increasing temperatures and expanding the habitats of disease-carrying species.

So, the next pandemic is only a matter of time. Perhaps we can choose to be better prepared the next time it strikes.

Hasan Jawaid Khan

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