

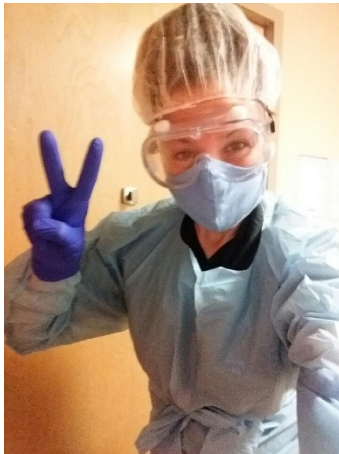
Diaries During Lockdown¹

Why Pay Attention to all these Protocols and Restrictions?

May 31, 2020

Today David is feeling particularly angry at all the protocols, restrictions and tests being imposed by the COVID-19 situation. Why do we have to pay attention to all this?

This morning I woke up angry at and frustrated by all of the annoying protocols, restrictions and tests that I am now facing in my life. They seem so arbitrary. Why six feet of social distancing? Why not seven or five? Why not one Smoot (look it up--a Smoot is a unit of measure set at five feet and seven inches first created as part of a student prank at MIT. Smoots can now be used to calibrate distances on Google Earth). Are all these protocols and restrictions really necessary? Why? Who benefits from all this?



Kate at work in the Saratoga Hospital Emergency Room

Yesterday was a Saturday and I discovered that my youngest daughter was all alone packing up her apartment in Brooklyn. She has been teaching her first grade class remotely from Rhode Island since March when she and her family relocated out of Brooklyn. Yesterday was the day they left the Metro New York City area altogether. Her wife and son stayed behind in Rhode Island and I knew that, as her father, I had to drive down to help. But I was blocked from going by some out-of-region health concern imposed up here at New Fadum Farm. The two younger sisters got together on the phone, ganging up on me to enforce this ruling.

My eldest daughter, Kate, (who did not gang up on me yesterday) is one of my heroes in this whole COVID-19 business. She works in the emergency department of Saratoga Hospital where she has been almost continuously exposed to patients with the COVID-19 virus since March. She is part of the army of first responders and health care workers who put their own safety on the line each day for the good of the community. She had been away from work for several weeks taking care of some of her own (non-COVID-19-related) health issues, so I saw an opportunity to visit with her face-to-face without breaking quarantine rules. We hadn't been together in person since January.

It was great to be with Kate, but the details of our short visit were annoying. I had to deposit the bag of asparagus and farm eggs that I brought on her back porch so that she could pick it up while maintaining

¹ You can access all of the "Diaries During Lockdown" [here](#). "Diaries During Lockdown" is a network of professionally trained mathematical modelers (along with some of their friends and colleagues) who are using the tools of system dynamics and systems thinking to explain many of the complex choices facing individuals, organizations, and governments as we collectively grapple with the COVID19 pandemic. The apparent voice of this story is that of David Andersen, a retired Professor of System Dynamics and Public Policy who lives on New Fadum Farm. This voice is actually the synthesis of a number of different analysts and writers.

a social distance of at least one Smoot (sic) I actually brought a cord to measure out the distance between our chairs so we could sit appropriately far apart for our chat. (I cut the cord seven feet long rather than six, just to be contrary.) Face masks on to talk, off to take a bite of sandwich and then back on again. This drove me a bit nuts. I yearned to give Kate a huge hug of appreciation and love, not peek at her over the rim of a mask. Annoyed and frustrated, I asked myself why on earth we were doing this? Do we really need to “protect” Are we protecting Kate from me? Or are we protecting me from Kate?

We did manage one enjoyable and rewarding activity during the visit -- a long phone call with my brother, Kate’s Uncle Ted. Ted is a septuagenarian with medical complications that would put him at high risk were he to become ill with COVID-19. He is my second great hero in this whole pandemic scene because of his unceasing efforts to figure out how to meet payroll for the forty people who work in his small firm while keeping all his workers safe. Kate and I were glad to visit with him, if only by phone, while he was in tight lockdown in Greenwich, CT.

Next morning a calming walk in the cool sunshine around the perimeter of New Fadum Farm, returned me to my senses. My frame of mind turned away from images of Kate, my wonderful and heroic daughter whom I long to hug, to a more rational and dispassionate view of the pandemic. I thought again about Ali’s model and the global and top-down view it presents. In complex systems, cause and effect can be widely separated in space and time. By being so conscientious yesterday, Kate and I were contributing to the safety of some unknown person(s) at an unknowable time in the future. We weren’t just keeping each other safe, we were also helping to ensure the safety of many, many others.

To give this high-minded but abstract thought a face, I remind myself that Kate and I were helping to keep Uncle Ted safe, maybe directly and maybe indirectly, maybe sooner and maybe later. I wish everyone would think that way.

This Story’s Lessons: *The public health logic that drives seemingly arbitrary protocols, restrictions and testing requirements is designed to insure global health for the whole population moving forward in time. Sometimes we chafe at these limitations and challenge their necessity. Nothing could be more mistaken. These protocols and restrictions enable each of us to keep all of us safe as we seek to contain this pandemic.*

Technical Modeler’s Notes:

1. **Ali’s CORONA1 Model.** You can download and run Ali’s model here: [CORONA1.mdl](#). Please right-click on the file and select “Save link as ...” You will need to download a free version of the simulation software VENSIMPLE to open and run this model.

2. **Professional Presentations.** Ali’s professional briefings with an introduction to his model and its conclusions can be found at [Spread of Corona](#), [Waves of Corona](#) and [Policies to control Corona](#).