

GULF NEWS

What if a second wave of infections hits the US?

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Five months and more than two million Covid-19 cases later, we could be witnessing the crest of a second wave in the US in Texas, Arizona, Florida and California.

Throughout the pandemic, columnists have been cataloguing the prospects of the curve bending in the wrong direction. Will it be weaker? Do we have the data to stop it? If a second wave arrives, there are certainly some things we might want to improve upon.

Fatigue will be the carrier of the second coronavirus wave: The biggest risk for a second wave of coronavirus infections is that people get tired of doing the right thing.

The World Health Organisation says the strength of the virus in the developing world indicates we are globally still in the first wave, rather than past it. Nor does it make sense for all countries to lift restrictions to the same extent

‘Past pandemics show that second waves can be painful: During SARS, Toronto was declared free of local transmission, relaxed precautions and found a single hospital ward at the Centre of a second outbreak a week or so later.’

Containing the virus

Germany showed it’s possible to contain the virus without clamping down too much. That’s an important lesson if there’s a second wave of coronavirus infections.

The Covid-19 experience has taught us that it’s far better to respond quickly and smartly, with the right technology and mass testing and tracing, rather than only relying on the crudest of shutdowns. If there are second waves of the virus, we shouldn’t repeat the mistakes of the first.

Instead of trusting the latest reports, sceptics are picking apart the data from new Covid-19 hot spots like Arizona. Arizona looks to me as though it is in a very parlous place, and all of us should be hoping that the state, with its sizeable elderly population, is able to avert a significant outbreak.

It doesn’t prove to me that a second wave is inevitable, and that the economy can never reopen; but it strongly suggests that there is far more of a chance that Covid-19 does serious damage to life and property than market pricing currently assumes.

Stuart Malcolm, a doctor with the Haight Ashbury Free Clinic, speaks with homeless people about the corona virus (COVID-19) in the Haight Ashbury area of San Francisco California
Image Credit: AFP

Are Americans ready for a second or third wave of the virus? Not unless they have access to the right technology. ‘One recent study suggested that Covid-19 might remain a force to worry about through 2024.

That means some forms of physical distancing will persist, making Americans more dependent on information technology. Yet according to one estimate, 25 million Americans do not have high-speed internet access, and as many as 14 million have no internet access at all.

As of 2019, about 81% of Americans have smartphones, though presumably not all of them have reliable internet service.

No sign of another wave

There’s been no sign of a second wave in many countries, even as citizens have emerged from lockdowns. How optimistic should we be? Areas such as Latin America are still being hit hard.

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Scientists in the UK, where daily case growth has been higher than in neighbouring countries, have expressed concern about curbs being eased too fast. I

t’s pretty unlikely we are anywhere near herd immunity, and if the virus is a seasonal one, a return in the winter months can’t be ruled out.

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