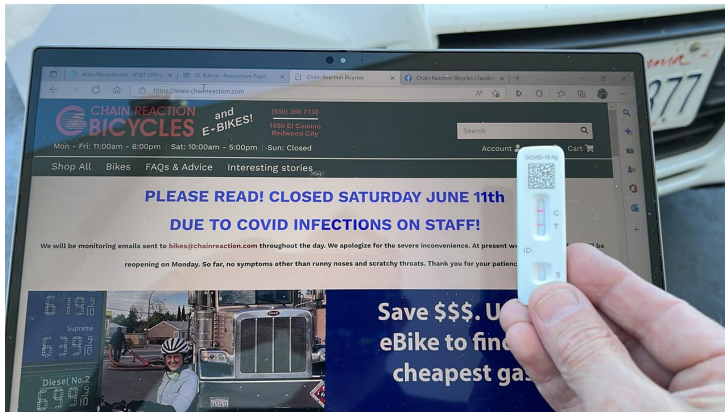


Knew it was coming for me. Still a surprise when it hit. Covid.



That's me, updating our website and phone messages from outside the store, in our parking lot, letting people know we're not going to be open today. We, Chain Reaction Bicycles, got serious about Covid before it was fashionable. We were requiring masks two weeks before the mandate back in 2020, and I even wrote to Gavin Newsome (Governor of California) requesting an immediate mask mandate at that time, to protect front-line worker of all kinds. It was pretty obvious, early on, that Covid was primarily an airborne contagion. We led the way in establishing bicycle sales and repair as an essential industry, allowing us to remain open and serve the needs of both commuters and those who needed to do something for their physical and mental health, since gyms, restaurants and other places people would normally hang out and socialize were closed.

And until today, over two years since Covid became a serious thing (we'll say March 2020 as the start of that), not a single case of Covid on our staff. Thousands of customers coming through our doors, but I was never that concerned because we had a mask policy, that we rigidly enforced. We'd have the occasional idiot who would challenge us, saying masks did nothing, or that our requirements were legally unenforceable. We always stood our ground.

But we really didn't want to be proven right about masks. We didn't want to see how quickly Covid would spread once mask use was no longer a requirement, even though we had a pretty good idea that might happen. We watched the numbers, the county's R-EFF that shows how many people an infected person would spread Covid to. Below 1 means it's shrinking. Above 1 means it's expanding. And watched it move from a low of .84 to 1.28 a few weeks ago. But anecdotal evidence was that Covid was far more widespread than the numbers indicated. I just checked; it currently shows .99. And so, today, I'm the guy saying don't believe the statistics. The same thing the naysayers were saying about the severity and numbers of deaths caused by Covid a year ago.

This morning, I became one of those numbers. I woke up with a scratchy throat that somehow felt just a bit different than the allergies I've been dealing with for several weeks. Something prompted me to take a Covid test, and recommend that my daughter did as well. It didn't take 15 minutes. In less than 2, I had two bright red lines. Becky (my daughter) too. And Kevin. Becky is feeling mildly miserable (which isn't that unusual for her; she gets pretty bad allergies this time of year), Kevin has no symptoms at all. And I'm just kind of cruising along.

The writing was on the wall two days ago, when a customer who works in the OR of a local hospital told me that half of the OR staff was testing positive, and it's been that way for a couple weeks. Obviously they're getting tested every day. The question is, how much undocumented Covid is out there? How many people don't bother taking a test because maybe it's just a cold, and there's a desire to not be sidelined for 5-10 days? I suspect a lot. But I wasn't going to be in denial and put the health of my staff and customers at risk. I knew this day could be coming, was coming. When it hit, this morning, 9:30am I think, it was all about the business, three key people out, what would we do. People had bikes that needed to be picked up. We couldn't be open for business as usual; we couldn't let people in to browse when we only had two or three available to take care of things. So no new sales, a rather big hit to our bottom line on what could be a very busy Saturday. I got to work changing the answering machine message, our Facebook page, our website, and sent out an email.

Steve, Karen and River (a summer employee) are now holding down the fort until our normal 5pm closing time, responding to people at our (locked) door, helping them if they've come to pick up a repair but otherwise letting them know we can't take care of them today. Karen left mid-afternoon because there really wasn't that much to do, and somebody had to go to Kaiser to pick up a lot of Covid test kits.

And I'm at home, wishing I could be at work, definitely feeling like I should be able to help people. It's really frustrating. I can understand denial. I'd love to get out on a ride tomorrow, but assuming I'm still testing positive, that simply wouldn't be ethical. Suppose I crash and need help. I'm going to tell someone thanks, and, by the way, I have Covid? You think, hey, this is really mild, not really something to worry about, can't I go to the grocery store and get supplies? No, you can't. You're stuck isolating yourself from others, and the worse thing is that you find yourself thinking just like the naysayers way back when. This isn't that big a deal. Why is my life put on hold. What if I was on a trip when this hit; would I dare take a test to confirm?

The silver lining is that Kevin and I are in a good place w/regards going to France next month. The Big Fear is coming down with Covid shortly before planned travel. We shouldn't have to worry about that. 30 days away, no chance of a lingering false positive, as some have experienced well after recovery.

Like I said, I knew it was coming. I wasn't really surprised. But you're still thinking, maybe the vaccine will completely protect you, so you don't even experience a mild case. I've been preaching to all who will listen that the primary benefit to the vaccine is to make your body familiar with Covid so you get a mild case instead of an over-reaction (the deadly cytokine storm). I just wasn't thinking of using myself as proof of that.