

Delta is coming for us

Normally I'd want to be writing about this morning's ride, watching Kevin zoom away from me and attract a dog (a cyclist trying to catch him) while I just watch kind of helplessly for as long as I can see it play out. Which was less than a minute before they were out of sight. And normally I'd want to be writing about how I caught back up on the middle section, as I often do, but failed today because my legs just didn't have it plus I rode the first part, up to the park entrance, a bit too hard. And normally I'd talk about how we gambled on it being pretty nice out and ditched leg warmers and base layers, and felt fine on the 60F degree climb up Kings, but yeah, it got a bit cold heading towards West Old LaHonda, when it dipped to 52. And normally I'd be pretty pleased that we made it back to the start by 9:24, just two minutes off a normal "fast" time for the ride.

But these aren't normal times. We're outside riding our bikes and nothing's really changed, this year to the prior year to the year before that. But once we go inside, we're back to wearing masks. Since the end of March 2020 through today, and continuing for, quite likely, some time to come. We had a very brief respite, a week or two if I recall correctly, during which the 9 bay area counties declared Covid was under control and we could go mask-free if we were vaccinated. And we were vaccinated, and we felt like we had earned the right to resume something closer to normal life. The un-vaccinated could live their separate-but-not-equal lives while those of us with vaccine cards would get to go out to dinner, movies, not wear masks when in stores... the payoff for making the choice to get the vaccine.

And then it all went to pieces. The Delta variant proved to be far more contagious than the "routine" Covid 19 we started with, so much so that even those vaccinated stood a good chance of getting it if in an environment where they'd be exposed to somebody with it. "Breakthrough" viral infection, they called it, making it seem like something unexpected but the reality is that it was known all along that the most-compelling reason to get the vaccine was that it would make actually getting the virus far less dangerous, which has truly been the case. But the naysayers of course pointed to this as a failure, prompting continuing resistance among those who didn't want to be vaccinated.

Where does that leave us. Or me at least. If we stay in the SF Bay Area, we're probably going to be in a pretty good place w/regards keeping Delta at bay. There's no question that masks help reduce transmission of Covid, even the Delta version. But what if we leave? What if we travel to some other place where mask wearing isn't routine, allowing Delta to really take hold? What if we travel someplace where the vaccinated folk think yes, we deserve this, we can go without masks, we can do the bar scene, we can go to the popular (crowded) beaches, we can do our shopping without masks? Travel to resort areas in particular seems like a pretty darned good way to bring a case of Covid back home, assuming lesser standards than what are "enjoyed" locally (here).

The problem is bad enough when you consider just the "entitled" vaccinated folk alone. Add in the un-vaccinated and you have a toxic combination that pretty much ensures a long-term future for the Delta variant.

And what about International travel? If you're trying to get back to the US, you must first pass a Covid-19 test within 72 hours of your flight. There are likely to be a lot of unexpected positives, people who feel just fine, or maybe have a slight cold, and discover they have to quarantine in a hotel for two weeks before they can come home. I was a bit concerned about that last month when my son and I went to France, but we were never in an environment where mask-wearing wasn't the norm, even in the crowds lining the Tour route. Still, I was a bit nervous waiting for the results of the test to come back, especially after the first try (for me) came back "invalid."

From a practical standpoint, you aren't going to see me eating at a restaurant indoors, and I'm even a bit cautious about outdoor settings if things are packed in a bit tighter than I would like. And yet there's a part of me that would like to get the "Delta" variant out of the way, come down with it soon, get over it, and not have to worry about a positive test when I go on vacation with my wife at the end of October.

It's frustrating. I totally get those who believe they've done what's been asked of them, getting vaccinated, and now want to see normalcy return, at least for themselves. But we've still got a huge number of vulnerable kids under 12 who haven't been vaccinated, and they're back in class again, which I have to think is a very good thing. But that puts themselves and everyone else at risk when

we have relaxed standards for masking. Again, not a big deal for the SF Bay Area, but what about elsewhere? One of our staff just got back from visiting family in Ohio, and apparently they don't have Covid 19 there... nobody was wearing a mask but him.

This thing is going to be with us for a very long time. I don't think it had to be; I think we could have largely put Covid to bed if the rest of the country had been as serious about it as we have here.

So yes, I'm very frustrated with the Covid situation. It should never have become so strongly associated with choice & liberty and co-opted as a political platform. We should never have gotten to a place where Twitter is a news source and has the need to censor false information. We should never have had false hope, for a mere couple of weeks, that we'd turned the corner and could go mask-free. We need consistent policies that make sense for the long haul. We need to admit that herd immunity doesn't work when you have dangerous variants like Delta that can quickly crop up, meaning that it is essential that nearly everyone, not just 70%, are vaccinated. There can be no loopholes for personal freedom in this battle, only legitimate medical exemptions when required.

And we need a world view too. We can't look at Africa's current vaccination rate of just 2% without seeing the entire continent as a breeding ground for future variants. We need herculean and costly efforts to deal with this, for both humanitarian and selfish reasons. A better life for you and I begins with helping others, all across the world.