

The Washington Post  
**OUTLOOK**

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2021 · WASHINGTONPOST.COM/OUTLOOK · SECTION B

EZ BD



# What are we waiting for?

We could reach herd immunity so much faster, says economist **Alex Tabarrok**. Here's how.

Deaths in the United States from covid-19 have been falling, but it would be premature to assume that trend will continue. The recent mutations discovered in Britain, South Africa and Brazil — which have spread to the United States — are more transmissible. “We’re in the eye of the hurricane,” warns Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine. Death rates could increase as we enter a fourth wave that could peak even higher than the first three. We are in a race against the virus to reach V-Day, when we have vaccinated enough people to achieve herd immunity.

Simply waiting for vaccine production to ramp up is inadequate. With thousands of people dying daily, there’s a strong case for stretching the doses we have now. A “first doses first” approach — that is, prioritizing first doses by delaying the second shot from three to four weeks (the period studied in clinical trials) to 12 weeks — would allow more people to get vaccinated quickly, for example. “Fractional” dosing, such as by giving half-doses, would instantly increase the vaccine supply and has been used successfully in previous epidemics. And, of course, we should authorize more vaccines, including Johnson & Johnson’s and AstraZeneca’s (despite one disappointing trial for the latter in South Africa), and the Novavax vaccine. We should take a closer look at Sputnik, the Russian formula, now that it has shown strong results in clinical trials. Finally, to get shots into arms we could ease up on prioritization rules, to streamline the process.

If vaccines weren’t scarce, we might abide by the trial protocols and in every case follow one shot with another a month later. But a pandemic forces trade-offs. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, the two approved for emergency use in the United States, are each estimated to be about 80 to 90 percent effective at stopping symptomatic covid-19 once the first dose has started to take effect, around 10 to 12 days after injection. And they are about 95 percent effective a week after the second dose.

SEE VACCINATIONS ON B4

Geriatrician **Asif Merchant** works in nursing homes. Why are his colleagues skipping the vaccine?

In almost two decades working in nursing homes, I’ve never been through a time as dire as last spring. Facilities like mine, in the greater Boston area, were working with minimal to no protective gear, very little infection-control training, limited laboratory services and constantly changing public health guidelines. Residents with covid-19 deteriorated so quickly that they’d crash right in front of me, before we even got their test results.

Staff members got sick, and others stayed home because they were scared to get sick. While many doctors stopped going into nursing homes out of fear for their own safety, my team of physicians and nurse practitioners felt it was our duty to continue seeing patients every day. The need was so great: Units that usually had one certified nursing assistant for every eight to 10 residents suddenly had one person in charge of 30 to 40; we were also short on nurses. People weren’t getting their meals or personal care on time; they suffered from dehydration, bedsores and social isolation. It was a heartbreaking time. I lost more than 100 patients.

As we learned more about the virus — treatments, proper infection control — conditions improved. Then the vaccine offered our first real hope that this pandemic would eventually end. I got my shots in January, as soon as I could.

But I soon realized that not everyone shared my enthusiasm. About half the staff in the four facilities where I serve as medical director said they would not take the vaccine. This might seem shocking: We work in the medical field, and we saw some of the worst ravages of this disease up close. And yet, despite the misery we’d witnessed, my colleagues were wary of the one intervention that offered a light at the end of the tunnel.

Health authorities across the country have reported widespread vaccine hesitancy among nursing home staff. Uptake among residents is high. But a national survey of certified nursing assistants late last year

SEE NURSING HOMES ON B5

ANN CUTTING FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

## When ‘solving’ an environmental problem only creates more problems



Carlos Lozada

Elon Musk’s recent announcement that he will donate \$100 million to whomever develops the most promising technology to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere is both exciting and depressing.

Exciting because such incentives could galvanize new innovation. Depressing because, well, we’re officially in the billionaires-hoping-for-miracle-tech-fixes stage of the fight against climate change — desperation gussied up as a call to arms.

The quest for technological solutions to problems created by people who were seeking technological solutions to earlier problems is the preoccupation of Elizabeth Kolbert’s riveting and pessimistic new book, “Under a White

Sky.” I would say it flows naturally from her two most recent books, but, as Kolbert might put it, who knows what even counts as natural anymore? Still, if “Field Notes From a Catastrophe” (2006) chronicled the onslaught of climate change and “The Sixth Extinction” (2014) detailed the crushing of biodiversity beneath the human footprint, “Under a White Sky” examines the arduous efforts to stave off all that damage. Except these new efforts, in her telling, often risk making matters worse.

“Solving one set of problems introduces new ones,” Kolbert warns. That is because, rather than reconsider our behavior, we prefer to seek workarounds for the symptoms and consequences of that behavior; new fixes for the ill effects of old fixes, or as

SEE LOZADA ON B2

### INSIDE OUTLOOK

The campaign workers who didn’t get jobs. **B3**

Iowa doesn’t care whether we live or die. **B4**

### INSIDE BOOK WORLD



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Nazis, spies and derring-do in the Middle East. **B6**

The Georgetown professor who became a cop. **B8**

## The Capitol video is clear. But the medium has lost its power to convince.

Recorded evidence was once decisive, says **Lucas Mann**. Now it can’t settle an argument.

The video that House impeachment managers showed of the Jan. 6 insurrection is clear, and it’s horrifying. The images are almost cartoonishly obvious, damning and unequivocal — showing members of the mob breaking through a door into the Capitol; telling the police, “We are listening to Trump, your boss”; prowling for Vice President Mike Pence while wearing tactical gear; and promising to return later with guns. It’s the type of recorded evidence that we’ve long been conditioned to see as the

climax of the courtroom movie, the bombshell that cuts through deceit and even argumentation, because, well, just look at what is clear as day.

The sense of definitiveness that recorded evidence brings is left over from a time before cellphones, when this material was hard to come by, so we thought of it as a special and incontrovertible resource. *Caught on candid camera!* If someone is captured on tape, the “caught” is not meant to be a matter of opinion.

Yet here we encounter the central disconnect of the Trump era: As much as it has been defined by misinformation, it has also been defined by more accessible recorded evidence than any time in history, and one did nothing to stop the other. We can see and hear with exact certainty what has been done wrong,

SEE VIDEO ON B2