

## As SARS-COV2 spreads rapidly in our community

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on behalf of

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Everyone, welcome back to a new semester and I wish you a Happy New Year.

As we left for the winter break many were justifiably celebrating the news about vaccines being approved. They believed the pandemic would soon be in the rear-view mirror, that we were then in the beginning of the end. You may recall that I cautioned that I thought that, rather, we were entering the end of the beginning. And that the hardest part of our journey together lay ahead of us.

For those working in our hospitals, there was no winter break. They have faced the greatest trials of the pandemic.

Your vaccine is coming soon but you will also hear of more and more of your friends and colleagues testing SARS-COV2 positive. You may have tested positive yourself over the break or may do so soon. Please remember that almost everyone who becomes infected will have either no symptoms or mild or moderate disease. But a few will be hospitalized, and some of these people will never return home.

If you haven't already been touched by COVID-19, the chances are good you will be soon. There is a very good chance that you don't know this, but members of our Division of Agriculture, Life and Veterinary Sciences, and Cooperative Extension community have succumbed to COVID-19.

We are admonished again to consider anyone you meet to be infected and transmitting the SARS-COV2 virus.

I would like to ask you also to remember that those you know well, or not very well, or simply meet transactionally (e.g., grocery shopping) may have been most painfully impacted by this pandemic. They may be scared today, not only of this disease but by recent political events.

If someone does contact you to warn you that they have found out they have been infected and that you were one of their contacts, blame and other forms of victim shaming are not helpful or constructive, to say the least.

With this in mind, I recommend the following story from yesterday's *Arizona Republic* to you--this is very close to my own story.

With best wishes for the weeks ahead,  
Shane

## **We were cautious. And yet, somehow, my entire household got COVID-19**

*Opinion: I know a lot about how COVID-19 spreads. I took a lot of precautions. And still we managed to get the disease, though I don't know from where.*

[Joanna Allhands](#)  
Arizona Republic

My entire household has COVID-19.

Those are tough words to type, because we've been so careful. I've read dozens of studies, talked to public health experts and written who knows how many columns about [reducing the risk of transmission](#).

Yet somehow, someway, we all tested positive on Dec. 29.

It started the day before. I woke up with sinus pressure and congestion. I told my husband I should probably get a COVID-19 test. An hour later, he went from no symptoms to completely losing his sense of smell.

We immediately signed up the family for tests the next morning. I also contacted my mother-in-law, who had been over outside to visit, telling her to quarantine and get tested.

I got about three hours of sleep that night.

### **Fortunately, we've had mild cases**

COVID-19 affects everyone differently. Even though my husband is diabetic, he's been relatively fine. I was concerned about his blood sugar, but it's been steady. None of us has had difficulty breathing. In fact, you'd never know my 5-year-old is sick.

We've been incredibly fortunate.

My husband and I have lost our senses of smell and taste, with headaches, runny noses and coughs. I have intermittent muscle soreness and fatigue.

But initially, what I felt more than anything was anger and shame. Public health experts have repeatedly admonished healthy, relatively young people like me to avoid COVID-19 – partly because we can spread it to others who are more likely to experience severe illness, but also because there's no way to know how our bodies will react. We can still get seriously ill, and even [mild cases can experience long-term health effects](#).

## **Still, I felt like we had failed**

That's why I haven't eaten in a restaurant since March. I pick up almost everything I buy curbside. I wash my hands regularly for the full 20 seconds. If my family goes anywhere, it's outside – and we wear masks and distance from others everywhere we go.

We've limited our regular contacts to my mother-in-law, and when we see her, it's always outside, with masks on and at least six feet away.

Our life isn't completely without risk. My son is in school, though that has proven to be less of a risk than initially feared, especially for younger students. And my husband regularly sees customers for his job, though he always wears a mask and gloves and distances from them, sanitizing equipment between appointments.

I also know how quickly COVID-19 spreads within households once one person gets it, because few of us are masking and distancing from the seemingly healthy members of our own household.

Still, I had this overwhelming sense that we had failed.

## **Masks help. So does a lot of grace**

Because – be honest – that's the judgment many (including me) make when we learn about someone testing positive for COVID-19. The assumption is that they let down their guard, that they went out without a mask or generally were living as if it were 2019.

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That wasn't us, but I envisioned how many readers would excoriate me for my supposed poor decisions. I hunkered down.

That was a mistake. I didn't appreciate how much I would need friends' support to see myself and others with a lot more grace. I'm not angry now.

I'm sure many also will ask what's the point of staying home and wearing masks when you can still get sick?

Fair point. Mitigating risk isn't the same as eliminating it – and, short of locking ourselves inside for months on end, which comes with its own damage, few of us can completely eliminate it.

Think of each mitigation strategy – wearing a mask, distancing, washing your hands – as another layer of protection. They aren't foolproof, but they can certainly hedge your bets.

So, no. I don't know where we got COVID-19, but I'm glad we took the precautions we did. My mother-in-law, who also is high risk, tested negative and has not developed symptoms, even though she was over when we were likely [contagious but not yet symptomatic](#).

Perhaps with time, more insight will come. But for now, I keep reminding myself of [something I wrote in March](#):

“Just do your best to not needlessly put yourself or others at risk and go to bed each night knowing that is all you can do.”

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**My mask protects you; your mask protects me.** We've controlled infectious diseases without vaccines for thousands of years. **Wearing our masks** means we can have a functioning economy [and](#) concurrently save thousands of lives.

[All UA employees, students and visitors must wear a face covering inside all UA buildings](#), unless alone in a single occupancy office, and in [UA outdoor spaces](#) where continuous physical distancing of at least six feet is difficult or impossible to maintain.

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